
Judges 20

Judges 20:1–48

Benjamin is Defeated in a Civil War

Outline of Chapter 20:

- vv. 1–3a **The tribes gather against Benjamin**
- vv. 3b–7 **The young man tells the tribes what happened with he and his mistress**
- vv. 8–11 **The response of the other tribes of Israel**
- vv. 12–17 **The tribes demand the guilty parties of Benjamin and muster for war when refused**
- vv. 18–21 **The people of Israel lose the first battle against Benjamin**
- vv. 23–25 **The sons of Israel lose the second battle against Benjamin**
- vv. 26–28 **The sons of Israel go before God again through Phinehas**
- vv. 29–35 **Summary of the third victorious battle against Benjamin**
- vv. 36–43 **Second eyewitness account of the battle**
- vv. 44–48 **Final stats and disposition of Benjamin**

Special Charts:

- v. 22 **Why Was Judah Defeated?**
- v. 42 **Parallels Between Joshua 8 and Judges 20**

Introduction: Judges 20 is simply a continuation of the narrative began in Judges 19. It is likely the same editor, but it appears to be a different original author. The Levite of Judges 19 probably wrote Judges 19, which sounds very personal to him; but he will appear briefly in Judges 20. However, it appears as though at least one military man recorded some of the events found in this chapter (vv. 36–48). This chapter—particularly the latter portion—will be filled with military terms, military strategy and tactics, as well as a healthy respect for the soldiers of Benjamin, despite the fact that their cause was wrong. Recall that these men had just recently been at war with the Canaanites so, therefore, their skills in battle had been honed. They were like the World War I or World War II generations of the United States. My educated guess is that Phinehas wrote the first portion of this chapter, although it is not clear at what point he became involved; and that the ending was written by a military man who was actually involved in the campaign. We do not have any verses added to this chapter by an editor as we find in the previous three or the following one (e.g., Judges 17:6–21:25). This would indicate that Samuel (or, whoever) received this as a literary unit, or perceived it as a continuation of Judges 19 (which it is), and therefore, it did not require a verse to place it into history.

It is in this chapter that Israel breaks out into a civil war. The other eleven tribes of Israel are horrified at what had occurred in Gibeah and they went to the tribe of Benjamin to have the perpetrators of this crime handed over to them for punishment. Surprisingly enough, the tribe of Benjamin would not hand over these men, nor did they offer to prosecute them internally. The other tribes have no choice but to go to war against Benjamin.

In the Hebrew, we often have an incident which is laid out, and then the writer goes back and fills in the details. Since we think chronologically, sometimes a Hebrew narrative throws us off the track, as we have the beginning, the middle, then the end of a story; and then we suddenly have the beginning again. In this chapter, I began to rethink that approach to Hebrew literature. We have the same thing here: in vv. 29–35, we have a view of the battle between Israel and the tribe of Benjamin. Then in vv. 36–46, we have a more detailed approach to this battle. I wonder if the author, or the editor did not have two reports of this incident and then copied them back to back. Or, if he knew the general disposition of the battle, which he gave in vv. 29–35, and then quoted the debriefing of one of the soldiers who was a part of the ambush. There appears to be a change of vocabulary and a much greater attention to detail—the kind that only an eyewitness would have.

We have a gnawing question in this chapter as well. The cause of the tribes of Israel against the tribe of Benjamin was just. Many men from the tribe of Benjamin had committed the heinous crime given in Judges 19 and recounted at the beginning of this chapter. The men of Israel will ask for the perpetrators of the crime and Benjamin will refuse, thus becoming a part of the crime, as they are obstructing justice. Israel has no choice but to go to war against Benjamin. However, even after going to God two times, they lose the first two battles. Some believers may ask themselves *why*?

It might be a good idea to orient ourselves to the time frame of these chapters. Phinehas is mentioned in this chapter and we have a Benjamite deliverer in Judges 3. Given that Phinehas dates back to the time of Joshua after the second census—and even if he were only 18 or 20 back in the book of Numbers—he would be well over 110 if these incidents took place after Judges 3. He would probably be in his 50's or 60's if this occurred prior to Judges 3 (obviously, it depends upon how much before Judges 3 this occurs). In any case, we have Israel going from religious apostasy, to moral degeneracy and here, to political anarchy¹.

This chapter also helps us to orient the previous incident, Judges 17–18, in time as well. In v. 1, of this chapter, we have the phrase *from Dan to Beersheba*, which is a reference to the most northern and most southern points of Israel. The tribe of Dan did not occupy a northern point until Judges 17–18; therefore, if this chapter took place around the time of Judges 3, then Judges 17–18 had to take place at the very beginning of the time of the judges. Dan had to be, at the time of Judges 20:1, the acknowledged occupier of a northern piece of real estate. Now, although this is not absolutely certain (as this portion of Judges could have been written hundreds of years after it occurred, and the writer simply adopted a popular saying of his time); it is more likely that such a saying was actually applicable to the time when this incident occurred. That is, not only did *from Dan to Beersheba* include all of Israel, but it properly included all of Israel, as Dan was in the far North at that time.

One of the things which will play a part in this chapter is some very serious textual criticism. When I first wrote this exegetical study, I was barely dry behind the ears and did not take into consideration the textual problems related to the confounding of *Geba* and *Gibeah*. There are at least two instances where *Geba* should read *Gibeah* and another where *Gibeah* should be *Geba*. In the Hebrew, these proper nouns are very, very similar and it would be easy for a copyist to write one when he meant the other, or to look up from his text, find the wrong word, and copy that. In two of these instances, we have manuscript evidence of a possible error. In one instance (Judges 20:31), we will have to infer, apart from any supporting texts, that there is an error made by a copyist. This should not cause you problems as there are many copyist errors throughout the Old Testament. Many of them are easy to catch and the preferred text is easy to logically support. In most cases, the change suggested simply allows the narrative to make more sense. For someone who has not put in the time to examine the geography of the area, or to one who recognizes that there is very little distance between the two cities, replacing *Geba* with *Gibeah* will make little or no difference. And, for those who have a schedule to read their Bibles in one year, such clarifications and corrections mean very little.

[<<Return to Chapter Outline>>](#)

[<<Return to the Chart Index>>](#)

¹ Paraphrased from J. Vernon McGee, *Joshua Judges*, ©1976 by Thru the Bible Books; p. 211.

The Tribes Gather Against Benjamin

Slavishly literal:

Moderately literal:

And so came out all sons of Israel and so were assembled the company as man one for from Dan and as far as Beersheba and a land of the Gilead unto Y^ehowah [at] the Mizpah.

Judges
20:1

So all the sons of Israel came out and the company were assembled as [though] one man unto Y^ehowah at Mizpah; [they came] from Dan to Beersheba as well as [from] the land of Gilead.

So all of the sons of Israel came out and assembled themselves as one before Y^ehowah at Mizpah. They came from Dan to Beersheba and from as far east as Gilead.

The second verb is the feminine singular, Niphal imperfect of *qâhal* (לָקַח) [pronounced *kaw-HAHL*], which means *to assemble*; it is only found in the Niphal and the Hiphil. Strong's #6950 BDB #874. The subject of the verb follows, which is the feminine singular noun *ʿêdâh* (הַדָּוָה) [pronounced *ġā-DAWH*], which means *company, congregation, assembly*. Strong's #5712 BDB #417. As an aside, there is actually one family of Israel which is not represented here, and that is the family of Jabesh in Gilead. That problem will be dealt with in the next chapter (Judges 21:8–9). The phrase *unto Jehovah* implies that the Tent of Meeting was here or they brought the Tent of Meeting with them².

The prepositions are slightly trickier than one would suspect from reading the English. Prior to *Dan*, we have the two prepositions *lâmed* and *mîn*, which BDB calls a *terminus a quo*, which means a *starting point, the earliest possible date, or end from which*.³ We can render the two together as *for from, even from, from*. *Lâmed* = Strong's #none BDB #510; *mîn* = Strong's #4480 BDB #577. Prior to *Beersheba*, we have the *wâw* conjunction and the one preposition *ʿad* (אֲדָ) [pronounced *ġad*] which means *as far as, even to, up to, until*. Strong's #5704 BDB #723. This would be our termination point.

Dan, as we saw two chapters back, moved up north and took a small area where they received little or no opposition. We know of Beersheba from the book of Genesis. Abraham lived in that area with Sarah during the time that his son Isaac was born (Gen. 20:1–2 21:14, 21–34 22:19). Isaac himself also lived in that area for awhile (Gen. 26:1–17, 23–24). Beersheba was originally given to the tribe of Judah, and then redistributed to Simeon (Joshua 15:28 19:2). In any case, what is important for us to realize is that Beersheba is one of the most southern cities of Judah (and therefore, of all of Israel) and it is one of the better known. Therefore, Beersheba is used in the saying which incorporates all of Israel from its most northern extremity to its most southern border. This handy little phrase is found throughout Scripture (I Sam. 3:20 II Sam. 3:10 24:2 II Chron. 30:5).

Now, the phrase, *from Dan to Beersheba*, actually could be construed as to not include those portions of Israel which are east of the Jordan. Therefore, the writer adds *the land of Gilead*, which takes in that eastern portion. Also, this phrase, *from Dan to Beersheba*, first seen here, becomes a popular one to indicate all of Israel. It is also used in I Sam. 3:20 II Sam. 3:10 24:2 I Chron. 21:2 II Chron. 30:5.

It is with this verse and v. 28 that we get oriented to time. The phrase *from Dan to Beersheba* refers to the northern most portion of Israel (Dan) and the southern most portion of Israel (Beersheba). This phrase would make no sense apart from Dan settling into its most northern territory; therefore, Judges 18, where Dan moved northward, had to take place prior to Judges 20. Because Phinehas is mentioned in v. 28, we know that we are one generation out from Joshua's generation. Joshua may still be on the scene (recall that Phinehas played a major part in Joshua 22), but it is likely that he is not. Therefore, it took very little time for the tribe of Benjamin to sink into incredible moral degeneracy.

² Keil and Delitzsch assert that Israel simply stood before God here. Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 322.

³ *Dictionary of Foreign Words in English*; John Ayto; Woodsworth Editions Ltd., Hertfordshire; ©1991, p. 302.

There is a slightly differing alternate view to this time frame suggested by Zodhiates and Barnes both. It is suggested that a later editor pieced the book of Judges together, remaining faithful to the original documents. During his time period, the phrase *from Dan to Beersheba* was commonplace, so, since he had positioned Judges 17–18 in its place, he now could use this phrase, even if the events of Judges 17–18 followed in time the events recorded in Judges 19–21. In other words, the use of this phrase, is dependent upon the author (whom some claim wrote this during the time of Samuel) rather than upon the events which took place. In either case, Judges 19–21 still took place early on in Israel's history.

Recall that *Mizpah* (or, Mizpeh) means *lookout post* or *watchtower* and several cities carry that name (at least six). Given the logistics and troop movement in this chapter, we would expect this to be the Mizpah which is at the border of Benjamin and Ephraim (to the north of Benjamin). It is actually in the territory of Benjamin, but since we are so close to the conquering of the land by Israel, even though the city belongs to Benjamin, that does not mean that they have populated it yet. Mizpah is a good rallying point, and the allied troops would be about three miles north of Gibeah, the city of offense. Now, just because we have the phrase *unto Y^ehovah*, this does not mean that the Tent of Jehovah was located in Mizpah. It simply means that they were doing what the will of God was for them at that time. Being a relatively centralized location, this is a good gathering place for Israel (see I Sam. 7:5 10:17). Israel gathers on several occasions like this (Joshua 22:12 Judges 10:17 20:1, 11 21:9 I Samson. 7:5).

And so presented themselves [unto the] cornerstones of all of the people, all of [the] tribes of Israel in an [organized] assembly of [the] people of the God—400,000 men on foot drawing a sword.

Judges
20:2

And all of the tribes of Israel presented themselves [to] the cornerstones of all of the people in an organized convocation of the people of God—400,000 men on foot drawing a sword.

And all of the tribes of Israel presented themselves to the cornerstones of all of the people as an organized assembly of the people of God—400,000 foot soldiers.

Understanding what generally occurred is fairly easy; but we need to know exactly what this says; therefore, we will go with a couple of translators:

The Emphasized Bible

And the chiefs of all the people—all the tribes of Israel—presented themselves in the convocation of the people of God, —four hundred thousand footmen, that drew the sword.

NASB

And the chiefs [lit., cornerstones] of all the people, *even* of all the tribes of Israel, took their stand in the assembly of the people of God, 400,000 soldiers [lit., men] who drew the sword.

Young's Lit. Translation

And the chiefs of all the people, of all the tribes of Israel, station themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand footmen drawing sword.

This verse actually begins, like most verses, with a wâw consecutive and then a verb, the 3rd person masculine plural, Hithpael imperfect of yâtsa^{bv} (יָצָא) [pronounced *yaw-TSAHB^v*] means *to set oneself or to station oneself, to take a stand*. In the Hithpael, it means *to set oneself [in a place], to take a stand*. Strong's #3320 BDB #426. Often the subject would follow; however, the next noun is the feminine plural of phînâh (פִּנָּה) [pronounced *pin-NAW*], and it means *corner*. It is used figuratively for *a chief, ruler; a man who is a support or a cornerstone of a people*. Strong's #6438 BDB #819. Because this is the feminine plural, it obviously is not the subject of the verb, as it is generally translated. We would like to see it preceded by a preposition, but it is not—it is more or less the object of the verb. Connected to *cornerstones* we have *of all of the people*. Then we have *all of [the] tribes of Israel; tribes* is in the masculine plural, and therefore is the subject of the verb. It is the *tribes* who present themselves before the *cornerstones of all the people*.

This is followed by the bêyth preposition (*in*) and then the masculine singular construct of qâhâl (קָהָל) [pronounced *kaw-HAWL*] means *an organized assembly, a called convocation*; this is not just a crowd of people milling about, but people who were assembled for a reason. Coming out of several years of war, they are very organized and

very responsive to authority. Strong's #6951 BDB #874. This is followed by *of people of the God*. So far, this gives us: **And all of the tribes of Israel presented themselves [to] the cornerstones of all of the people in an organized convocation of the people of God...** This is a great show of unity and organization and standing up for that which is right. The people of Benjamin might have a total lack of moral character, but the other tribes are still on track.

Then we have 400,000 men (which seems to be an awful lot of soldiers—however, I am not in a position yet to question the numbers which we find in the older historical books, although several have). This is followed by the adjective *ragʿlîy* (רַגְלִי) [pronounced *rahg^e-LEE*], which means *on foot, footmen*. Strong's #7273 BDB #920. Therefore, we are speaking of *foot soldiers* here. This is followed by *drawing sword*.

This act of the tribe of Benjamin, even though it was actually performed only by a handful of men, relatively speaking, got the entire army of Israel up in arms.

And so heard sons of Benjamin that had gone up people of Israel [to] Mizpah. Judges 20:3a **And the sons of Benjamin heard that the people of Israel had gone up [to] Mizpah.**

The sons of Benjamin heard that the people of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.

In v. 3, we have two distinct subjects here. First of all, the Benjamites are aware of the soldiers who have gathered at Mizpah, which is within the borders of Benjamin. Even if the numbers represented here are incorrect and even if Mizpah was not populated (which appears to be the case), it would be hard to miss a gathering of soldiers.

[<<Return to Chapter Outline>>](#)

[<<Return to the Chart Index>>](#)

The Young Man Tells the Tribes What Happened with Him and His Mistress

Judges 19:15, 22–29

And so said people of Israel, “Tell how brought to pass the evil the this.” Judges 20:3b **Then, the people of Israel said, “Tell [us] how this morally reprehensible act came to pass.”**

Simultaneously, the people of Israel asked the Levite, “Tell us exactly what occurred in this morally reprehensible act.”

The second topic found in this verse is the people ask to hear what happened from the person who witnessed it. They ask the Levite directly exactly what happened, as, obviously, not all of these men would have heard the story, and fewer of them would have read what he wrote. Those who have heard the story have heard it passed from person to person, and therefore have a distorted version of the story. It is important for them to know what happened from the eyewitness. Now, there was the witness of the old man who had taken them in—the man from the hill country of Ephraim and it would have been worthwhile for these tribes of Israel to make an effort to track him down, as capital crimes should be prosecuted on the testimony of two or three witnesses (Deut. 17:6 19:15). This man also had a young man who was his servant—he should have testified as well. The narrative that we have here does not mean that his servant did not testify; but that seems to be the implication. Furthermore, we have do not have any testimony given which condemns this Levite. This would indicate that, apart from the cut up body of his mistress, that he is the only witness. Finally, carefully note how he words his testimony before these men of Israel. He will leave out all information which would make him look bad.

At the end of this verse, we have the feminine singular noun *râ ʿâh* (רַעָה) [pronounced *raw-GAW*], and, in language, as in all real life, defining just what *evil* is, is difficult and often contradictory. There is the adjective for evil (which could be masculine or feminine), and then, possibly, a masculine noun and a feminine noun. Pretty much all of my sources are in disagreement here, taking several different positions. We will go with BDB on this, and call this use the feminine noun, although distinguishing the substantive use of an adjective from a noun is not always clear cut;

and, even though Strong's groups all three under the same Strong's number. This means *evil, misery, distress, injury, aberration, iniquity, that which is morally reprehensible*. Strong's #7451 BDB #949.

Now, we have the people of Israel about ready to attack and destroy a tribe of their own brothers. They want to get the facts straight—those that know exactly what happened want to hear it one more time. I want you to notice a minor point as you read this quote from the Levite—what he did was reprehensible and pathetic—throwing his mistress out to save his own life. He will avoid the details of what happened which make him look bad and stick with the facts which condemn the people of Gibeah. Don't misunderstand me—he is not misrepresenting the facts to wrongfully condemn the men of Benjamin—he simply leaves out information that condemns him as well.

And so answered the man the Levite, a man of the woman the murdered one, and so he said, "The Gibeah which [is] to Benjamin I came to—I and my mistress—to spend the night.

Judges
20:4

So the Levite, the husband of the murdered woman, answered and said, "I came to Gibeah, which [belongs] to Benjamin—I and my mistress—to spend the night.

So the Levite, the husband of the murdered woman, answered with, "I came to Gibeah of Benjamin, both my mistress and myself, to spend the night.

In describing the woman, we have the feminine singular, Niphal participle of the verb *râtsach* (רָצַח) [pronounced *raw-TSAHKH*] and this word means *murder, slay*. The Niphal is the passive stem and it refers to the one who was murdered. Strong's #7523 BDB #953. The author of this portion of Scripture is making is abundantly clear just who exactly is speaking, as we never know the name of this man or his mistress.

What had occurred prior to all of this was immaterial to these people. The Levite picks up the story where it becomes important. He comes into Gibeah⁴ with his mistress in order to spend the night. He does not mention his young, male servant nor does he mention the old man from Ephraim. Although these men could corroborate his testimony, what they would say would condemn him as well. He threw his mistress out to the degenerate men of Benjamin to save himself. He should be executed as well.

"And so rose up against me leaders of the Gibeah and so surrounded against me the house [at] night. Me they thought to kill and my concubine they afflicted and so she is dead.

Judges
20:5

"Then the leaders of Gibeah rose up against me and surrounded against me the house [that] night. They determined to kill me and they afflicted my mistress and she is dead.

"Suddenly, the leaders of Gibeah surrounded the house that night threatening our lives. They were determined to kill me and they raped and left for dead my mistress.

The normal word for *man* is *îysh* (יִישׁ) [pronounced *eesh*], which means *man*. This is the noun that we find in the previous few verses. Strong's #376 BDB #35. However, in this verse, we have the masculine plural of *ba'âlêy* (בְּאֵלָיִם) [pronounced *bah-uh-LAY* or *bah-guh-LAY*], which means *aristocracy, leaders, baal's, lords, landowners, movers and shakers, supervisors, administrators, citizens, inhabitants*. Strong's #1181 BDB #127. The different use of nouns indicates two things: (1) these are not *men* in the real sense of the word. Just because a person is a bully, that does not make him a *man*. And (2), more importantly, *as per the Levites testimony*, this was not just some splinter group of degenerates—these were the *leaders* of the city. Now, this is **not** what they were called in the previous chapter. In Judges 19, these men were called *b'îyya'al* (בְּיָאֵל) [pronounced *b'leey-YAH-ghal*], which is transliterated *Belial*, but it means *without value, worthless, ruin, good-for-nothing, ungodly, wicked*. Strong's #1100 BDB #116. This is an expression often used to describe the morally depraved—the unbeliever whose degeneracy is pronounced. So again, the testimony of this Levite is slanted very slightly to further condemn Gibeah. You see, this is why God's Word calls for two or three witnesses. Are the men of Gibeah guilty of this heinous crime? Certainly. Should this man be executed as well? Definitely.

⁴ Covered in reasonable detail in Judges 19:12.

What they did was the Qal imperfect of *qûwm* (קוּמ) [pronounced *koom*], which means, *to stand, to rise up*. Strong's #6965 BDB #877. This is followed by the prepositional phrase *against me*. Then what they did was the Qal imperfect of *çâ^bva^bv* (צָבַו) [pronounced *saw^b-VAH^BV*], which means *to turn oneself, to go around, to surround, to encompass*. Strong's #5437 BDB #685. He again follows this with *against me*, and then says that they were around *the house at night*.

He uses the 1st person singular suffix again, at the end of the indication of a direct object, and then uses the 3rd person plural, Piel perfect of the verb *dâmâh* (דָּמָה) [pronounced *daw-MAW*], which means *to be like, to resemble*. In the Piel, it means *to liken, to compare, to imagine, to think, to devise, to consider, to form an idea*. Strong's #1819 BDB #197. What they *thought to do* is explained by the Qal infinitive construct of *hârag* (הָרַג) [pronounced *haw-RAHG*] means *to kill, to slay*. Strong's #2026 BDB #246.

First, the Levite emphasizes how much his own life was in danger. The leaders of the city rose up against him; they surrounded the house against him; then they thought to kill him. All of this is true. The Levite is not exaggerating these aspects of his story, as you will recall from the previous chapter.

Then he tells what was done to his mistress. He uses the 3rd person plural, Piel perfect of *ʿânâh* (עָנָה) [pronounced *gaw-NAWH*], which means *to humble, to be grace oriented, to be humbled, to be afflicted*. In the Piel, this means *to oppress, to depress, to afflict*. The implication here is rape. Strong's #6031 BDB #776.

It might be helpful to again see what did occur in the previous chapter: They [the Levite, his mistress, the old man and the young male servant] were making their hearts merry, and, suddenly, men of the city, men [who were] sons of worthlessness, surrounded the house beating [violently] on the door, and so they said to the man, the master of the house, the old one, saying, "Bring out the man who came into your house and we will know him." And the old man, the master of the house, went out to them, and he said to them, "No, my brothers, do not cause evil [to be done], after this man has come into my house. Do not do this senseless [and vile] act. "Observe, let me bring out, please, my virgin daughter as well as his mistress and then you may rape them and you may do to them the good in your eyes. But to this man, do not do a word of this vile act." And the men were not willing to listen to him and so the man seized his mistress and he brought [her] to them outside [in the street]. They knew her [sexually] and they satisfied their [sexual] thirst in her all night until morning. Then they sent her off in the ascending of the dawn. So the woman came in the facing of the morning and collapsed at the opening of the house of the man, there where her master [was] until the light. And so her master arose in the morning and he opened the doors of the man's house and he went out to depart to the road, and, observe, his woman, his mistress, was laying [at] the entrance of the house with her hands upon the threshold. Then he said to her, "Get up and we will go." However, no one answered. So he placed her on his ass and then the man rose up and he went to his place (Judges 19:22–28). So, it is clear that this Levite, while not out and out lying, has distorted the facts ever so slightly, leaving out personally-incriminating testimony and exaggerating the status of the rapists.

Then he explains what he did:

“And so I took a hold in my mistress and so I cut her in pieces and so I sent her into all [the] country of [the] inheritance of Israel for they did premeditated evil and senseless act in Israel.

Judges
20:6

“So I took a hold of my mistress and then cut her into pieces and sent her to all the country of the inheritance of Israel, because they did premeditated evil and senseless [and vile] act in Israel.

“So I took a hold of my mistress and cut her into pieces and sent her to all of the territories of Israel, for what they did was pre-meditated viciousness and senseless evil.

The first verb is the Qal imperfect of *ʿâchaz* (אָחַז) [pronounced *aw-KHAHZ*]; and it means *to grasp, to take hold of, to take possession of*. This word often means *take a hold of* when followed by the *bêyth* preposition. Strong's #270 BDB #28.

What the men of Gibeah did is called the feminine singular of *zimmâh* (זִמָּה) [pronounced *zim-MAWH*] is very close to the word *zâmam* (זָמַם) [pronounced *zaw-MAM*], which means *pre-meditated evil, well-thought out wickedness, pre-planned harm*. This word would refer to that which is *immoral, degenerate and absolutely wrong, but well-thought out or planned*. Strong's #2154 BDB #273. The second word is the feminine singular noun *n^{eb}vâlâh* (נִבְלָה) [pronounced *n^{eb}vaw-LAW*], which means *senseless deed, vile act, disgraceful thing*. Strong's #5039 BDB #615.

Even though the Levite has nothing to be proud of in his personal actions, still, what the men of Gibeah did was incredibly evil and deserved punishment. It may be that we will find ourselves in a situation where our actions are less than honorable—still, this does not excuse those who commit wrong against us. What the men of Gibeah did was despicable; it was every bit as wrong as the actions committed by the Gentiles that Israel sought to remove from the land.

Recall that I suggested to you why the Levite did what he did. He rightfully wants to see the men of Benjamin punished for this horrid act; on the other hand, he should be executed for placing this woman outside for them to ravage. What he decided to do was to give testimony, which is corroborated by the woman's dead body, which would be the two or three witnesses required by law. He does not want the observations of the young servant or the old man entered into testimony, because that would incriminate him. He is a cleaver man. It is quite unfortunate that the leaders of Israel who hear his story do not probe more than they do. Apparently, after the fact, someone—Phinehas probably—did ask more probing questions and we therefore know the complete story of what occurred in Judges 19.

“Behold, all of you, sons of Israel—give your word and counsel here.” Judges 20:7 **“Listen, all of you [are] sons of Israel—give your opinion and counsel here.”**

“Speak up, all of you, as sons of Israel—Tell your opinion and give your counsel.”

You may recall the ending of Judges 19: Set your heart on it [this], discuss [this] and speak out. Although what the Levite says is similar, it is completely different in terms of vocabulary. The first verb is the Qal imperative of *yâha^{bv}* (יָהַב) [pronounced *yaw-HAWB^v*], which means *to give*. Strong's #3051 BDB #396. The Levite tells them to *give your word*; which means for them to give their opinion on this matter. He adds to this the feminine singular noun *‘êtsâh* (עֵצָה) [pronounced *gay-TZAW*], which means *counsel, purpose*. Strong's #6098 BDB #420.

As you will recall, the Levite carefully told this story in such a way that neither he nor the old man would seem to be in fault for anything that they did. They did nothing to deserve what happened; their behavior, however, was not simply less than honorable—it was deplorable. And what the Benjamites did was horrendously wrong.

This Levite is an intelligent man who knows how to manipulate the truth and how to manipulate people. He does not tell the leaders of Israel what to do—he presents most of the facts of the case, and then asks them to give their opinions. People love to be asked their opinions about things, so the Levite asks for the opinion of the leaders to whom he is speaking for their advice on how to proceed. He already knows what their answer will be.

[<<Return to Chapter Outline>>](#)

[<<Return to the Chart Index>>](#)

The Response of the Other Tribes of Israel

And so arose all of the people as a man one, to say, “We will not go a man to his tent and we will not turn aside a man to his house; Judges 20:8

And all of the people arose as one man, saying, “We will not any one of us [lit., a man] go to his tent and we will not depart, any one of us [lit., a man] to his house;

Then all of the people rose up as if one, and said, “None of us will go to his tent and none of us will return to his house;

You will note that this verse ends abruptly, in the middle of a thought. Like many verses in Scripture, it should have been combined with the next verse in order to give us a full thought. The last verb is the Qal imperfect of *çûwr* (ח) [pronounced *soor*], which means *to turn aside, to depart, to go away*. Strong's #5493 (and #5494) BDB #693. This is preceded by a negative and followed by, literally, *a man to his tent, and we will not depart, a man, to his house*. It is difficult to give a literal rendering of this without obscuring the meaning, so let me show you what others have done:

CEV	The whole army was in agreement, and they said, “None of us will go home...”
<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	No man of us will go to his tent, and no man of us will turn aside to his house.
NASB	“Not one of us will go to his tent, nor will any of us return to his house...”
NIV	“None of us will go home. No, not one of us will return to his house...”
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	‘None of us doth go to his tent, and none of us doth turn aside to his house...’

Now, in reading these translations, you might think that you could accurately render this “No man will go to his tent and no man will turn aside to his house.” However, even though the thought is accurate, the verbs are both in the 1st person plural, whereas *man* is singular. This is simply one of the many verses where the meaning is easy to grasp, even though a literal rendering is impossible. All Israel made a pact not to quit or to return to their homes until they had punished the evil behavior of the Benjamites.

“And now this [is] the word which we will do to Gibeah against her in lot: Judges 20:9 “Now, this [is] the thing that we will do to Gibeah against her in recompense:

“Now, this is what we will do to Gibeah to recompense her for her evil:

This verse begins with *and now* and then we have the demonstrative adjective *zeh* (זֶה) [pronounced *zeh*], which means *here, this*. If this was supposed to be *this word*, the Hebrew would read *the word the this*. However, here we have *this the word*; therefore, the verb *to be* is implied. Strong's #2063, 2088, 2090 BDB #260. The word that follows is masculine singular noun *dâ^bvâr* (דָּבָר) [pronounced *daw^b-VAWR*], which means *word, saying, doctrine, thing*. It is that which proceeds from the mouth and the context determines its exact meaning Strong's #1697 (or #1696) BDB #182.

The last word is the masculine⁵ noun *gôrâl* (גֹּרָל) [pronounced *goh-RAWL*], which means *allocation, lot (or, lots)* (according to the KJV). BDB spends nearly a page on this word, allowing for such translations as *lot, allotment, portion, recompense, retribution*. The other word often rendered *lot* is *chêleq*; the difference between the words is emphasis. *Gôrâl* seems to emphasize their rightful recompense as well as to the system involved in distributing the land; and *chêleq* (Strong's #2506 BDB #324) emphasizes the division of the land. Strong's #1486 BDB #174. Affixed to *gôrâl* is the *bêyth* preposition. It therefore may appear to be uncertain as to whether this refers to *what* will be done to the men of Gibeah in recompense for what they did; or to the system of choosing the tribe to attack Benjamin. However, most translations favor the latter interpretation, as it is more often found (in fact, I believe that every instance of this word in the KJV is rendered *lot* or *lots*). At that time, such a thing was done in those days in order to determine the will of God (Ex. 28:30 Jonah 1:7 Acts 1:26). As we discussed back in Joshua 7:16, we do not know exactly what casting lots entailed and, as I pointed out, there is a reason for that. If the Bible told us exactly how lots were cast to determine what a person should or should not do, then people would spend all of their time casting lots, yet still ignoring the clear direction of Scripture. People have a way of doing this—there are many of those involved in the charismatic movement who come up with the strangest and scariest doctrines, yet point back to some experience they had in order to justify these things, even though they might contradict all given Scripture. If casting lots were explained, then we could add these kinds of people to the mix of crazies that inhabit the Christian world.

⁵ Why on earth does Owen call it feminine?

[<<Return to Chapter Outline>>](#)[<<Return to the Chart Index>>](#)

The Tribes Demand the Guilty Parties of Benjamin and Muster for War When Refused

And so sent rods of Israel men in all rods of Benjamin to say, “What [is] the evil the this which [is] in you?”

Judges
20:12

So the tribes of Israel sent men to all the families of Benjamin, saying, “What [is] this morally reprehensible behavior that [is] among you?”

First, the tribes of Israel sent men to the various families of Benjamin, asking, “What’s up with this morally reprehensible behavior which is rumored among you?”

Lest you be concerned that the rest of Israel acted in appropriately, they approach this, in the beginning, as an aberration in Benjamin—a few men who got out of control. A word which we find used twice in this verse is the masculine plural noun *shê^bveṭ* (שֵׁבֵט) [pronounced *SHAYB-veṭ*], which means *rod, staff, club, scepter* and figuratively for a *tribe, subdivision of a tribe or family*. Strong’s #7626 BDB #986. What Israel does first is approach the tribe of Benjamin to try to work things out peacefully. They send in their delegates to speak to those in authority in Benjamin. They will ask for the men who raped and killed the Levite’s mistress.

The first word which is said is the interrogative *māh* (מה) [pronounced *maw*], which means *what, how*. Strong’s #4100 BDB #552. After *what*, we again have the feminine singular noun *râ^ʿâh* (רָעָה) [pronounced *raw-ḤAW*], which means *evil, misery, distress, injury, aberration, iniquity, that which is morally reprehensible*. Strong’s #7451 BDB #949.

You might wonder that, we have this great gathering of an army, yet all that is done is a few men are sent throughout the cities of Benjamin to inquire about occurred. Recall that this took place almost immediately after the conquering of the land, so that there was this great, well-oiled, military machinery available. It was how Israel, for almost a decade, had dealt with anything. One of the things which kept them going, although it is not mentioned as a matter of motivation, is the degeneracy of the Gentiles who lived in the land before them. They were mostly comfortable with killing huge numbers of peoples on account of their degeneracy. Therefore, when a serious act of degeneracy is reported as occurring in Israel—committed by a tribe of Israel—their natural reaction is military. Now, after almost a decade of war, they realize that they must set up supply lines—that is, the troops cannot be concerned daily with what they will eat or whether or not they will have weapons. A tenth of the army was given this position. While the supply lines are being set up, the army first attempts to ferret out the men responsible for this act of degeneracy.

“And now give the men, sons of Belial who [are] in the Gibeah and we will cause them to die and we will put away evil out from Israel.”

Judges
20:13a

“Therefore, give up the men, the sons of worthlessness who [are] in Gibeah, and we will execute them and we will put away evil out of Israel.”

“Therefore, surrender the sons of bitches in Gibeah—the ones responsible for this moral degeneracy—and we will execute them and thereby remove this degeneracy from Israel.”

Periodically, you wonder about the people who divided Scripture into verses. Here is an ideal passage to be divided into two verses, yet it remains one; whereas, we have had innumerable thoughts split up into separate verses. Therefore, I will so divide it up.

What the army asks the people of Benjamin to do is the Qal imperative of *nāthan* (נָתַן) [pronounced *naw-THAHN*], which means *give, grant, place, put, set*. In the imperative, it means *give up, set out*. Strong’s #5414 BDB #678. Then men here are called *sons of* and then we have the masculine noun *b^olīyya^ʿal* (בִּלְיָאֵל) [pronounced *b^oleey-*

YAH-*gahl*], which is transliterated *Belial*, but it means *without value, worthless, ruin, good-for-nothing, ungodly, wicked*. Rotherham renders this *the Abandoned One*. We might give it the more updated rendering of *sons of bitches*. Strong's #1100 BDB #116.

What they promise to do is the Hiphil imperfect of *mûwth* (מִוֹת) [pronounced *mooth*], which means *to die*. In the Hiphil, this means *to kill, to destroy, to put to death, to execute*. Strong's #4191 BDB #559. The result of this execution would be the Piel imperfect of *bâ'ar* (בָּעַר) [pronounced *baw-YAHR*], which means, in the Qal, *to burn*. In the Piel, the result of burning might be inferred—that is, it is completely *consumed, removed, eaten up*. Strong's #1197 BDB #128. With this is the 3rd person masculine plural suffix, referring to the men who performed this act of degeneracy.

What we have here is a perfectly reasonable request. There is a cancerous element in the tribe of Benjamin which needs to be cut out. They committed an act of flagrant degeneracy against a fellow Israelite. One would think that the tribe of Benjamin would be just as eager to locate and punish the guilty parties.

And would not, sons of⁷ Benjamin, to listen in a voice of their brothers, sons of Israel.

Judges
20:13b

But the sons of Benjamin were not willing to listen to the voice of their brothers, the [other] sons of Israel.

But the sons of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brothers.

The first verb is the Qal perfect of *ʿâvâh* (עָוָה) [pronounced *aw-^BVAWH*] is a verb always found with a negative (except in Job 1:19 39:9). In the Qal perfect, it generally means *would*; in the Qal imperfect it means *consent, yield, willing*. Strong's #14 BDB #2. This indicates that the degeneracy of Benjamin cut deep into this tribe. Therefore, we had two tribes that, early on in their history, left the truth which had been delivered to them. The tribe of Dan did not take the area which had been distributed to them, but, rather, chose an area which involved them killing off a helpless people. Here, the tribe of Benjamin seeks to protect those of its tribe whose degeneracy is out of control. You might be familiar with the mentality of a nation who asks another nation for the freedom of its criminals who are of the first nation; or of gang members who will stand up for one another, no matter how degenerate the other ones are; or family members who will stand up for those of their own family, regardless of the depths they have sunk to. This is what we have here. We have a significant sub-group of the tribe of Benjamin who are degenerate and, because the rest of the tribe of Benjamin has leanings or sympathy for the criminals, they will not give up the criminals as they should. The Law reads: **"The man who acts presumptuously by not listening to the priest who stands there to serve Jehovah your god, nor to the judge, that man will die; in this way, you will purge the evil from Israel."** (Deut. 17:12; see also Deut. 13:5 17:7 19:19–20). Israel was simply obeying the Law of God. In order for Israel not to be judged, Israel had to remove the evil from within. It was required of Israel to judge and punish such immorality. In the New Testament, this is: **Those who are [outside the church], God judges. You remove the evil men** [i.e., specific believers] **from among yourselves** (I Cor. 5:13). When the men of Gibeah chose not to listen to Israel, Israel had no choice but to purge this evil themselves.

And so were gathered sons of Benjamin from out of the cities [in] the Gibeah [area] to go out to the battle with sons of Israel.

Judges
20:14

So the sons of Benjamin from the cities of the Gibeah [area] assembled to go out to war with the sons of Israel.

So the sons of Benjamin from the cities around Gibeah assembled themselves to go out to war against the other Israelites.

The first verb in this verse is the Niphal imperfect of *ʿâçaph* (עָצַף) [pronounced *aw-SAHF*], which means *relocate, transfer, transport, gather, to gather and remove, to remove*. In the Niphal, it means *to be assembled, to be gathered, to assemble, to gather*. Strong's #622 BDB #62. They assembled for the purpose of the Qal infinitive

⁷ *Sons of* is not found written in some codices, but it is read. The verb is masculine plural, which would require *sons of* to be there.

construct of *yâtsâ'* (אָצֵא) [pronounced *yaw-TZAWH*], which means *to go out, to come out, to come forth*. Strong's #3318 BDB #422. What *they assembled to go out to do* is the feminine singular noun *mil^echâmâh* (מִלְחָמָה) [pronounced *mil-khaw-MAW*], which means *battle, war*. Strong's #4421 BDB #536.

It is absolutely amazing just how completely hard-hearted people can be. These Benjamites have a cancer growing in them which needs to be removed, yet they are willing to fight to save it.

And so conscripted out from sons of Benjamin in the day the that from the cities, twenty-six thousand—a man drawing a sword; for alone, out from inhabitants of Gibeah, they conscripted seven hundred—a man chosen.

Judges
20:15

So in that day they drafted 26,000 men out of the sons of Benjamin from the cities; by itself, they drafted 700 chosen men from the inhabitants of Gibeah.

So, also at the time, the sons of Benjamin drafted 26,000 men from their cities; there were 700 chosen men drafted from the city of Gibeah itself.

We will have to look at what other translators have done here:

The Emphasized Bible

And the sons of Benjamin were numbered on that day out of the cities, twenty-six thousand men that drew the sword, —besides of the inhabitants of Gibeah were numbered seven hundred chosen men.

NASB

And from the cities on that day the sons of Benjamin were numbered [or, mustered], 26,000 men who draw the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah who were numbered [or, mustered] 700 choice men.

The Septuagint

And the children of Benjamin from their cities were numbered in that day, 23,000, every man drawing a sword, besides the inhabitants of Gabaa, who were numbered 700 chosen men of all the people, able to use both hands alike;

Young's Lit. Translation

And the sons of Benjamin number themselves on that day; out of the cities *are* twenty and six thousand men drawing sword, apart from the inhabitants of Gibeah, *who* numbered themselves, seven hundred chosen men.

I included the Septuagint so that you can see the differences in the text. Near the end of this chapter, it will become apparent that there were some corruptions in the original text and the Hebrew and the Greek vary from time to time. Sometimes that is due to working from different manuscripts and sometimes it is due to a less than literal translation.

The verb that we see twice in this verse is the Hithpael imperfect of *pâqad* (פָּקַד) [pronounced *paw-KAHD*]. *Pâqad* can be one of the more difficult verbs in the Hebrew, as it is said to mean, in the Qal, *to go to a person, to visit a person, to commit, to charge to the care of, to fall upon, to attack*. Now, let me tell you what you will never hear from any lexicon: the key is personal contact and the context determines whether this should be taken in a positive or a negative sense. The British have a similar term (not a synonym, however): *sort*. A Brit might say, *I need to go sort this out* or *I need to sort him out*. They are straightening out a situation or a person by using personal contact. That is the whole key to the understanding of the various uses of *pâqad*. The Hithpael is the reflexive of the Piel; they do this to themselves and it can be intensified. The Hithpael definition is *to muster*, which is old English word meaning *to compel [to go to war], to conscript, to enlist, to draft*. Since this is in the reflexive, the tribe of Benjamin is doing this to themselves. Strong's #6485 BDB #823.

After the phrase *a man drawing a sword*, we have the lamed preposition (Strong's #none BDB #510) and the masculine singular noun *bad* (בַּד) [pronounced *bahd*] (Strong's #905 BDB #94) which means *alone, by themselves, by oneself*. Together, they mean *in a state of separation, by itself, alone, apart*. Then we have listed how many men were conscripted out of the city of Gibeah itself. Again, the singular of *man* is used, and this time followed by the Qal passive participle of *bâchar* (בָּחַר) [pronounced *baw-KHAHR*] means *to choose*. In the Qal participle, it means *chosen*. Strong's #977 BDB #103. Here we have 26,700 Benjamite men who have be

gathered to go to war against Israel. In Deut. 1:36–37 and 2:22–23, there were 35,400 and the second time they were numbered, this had increased to 45,600 (Deut. 26:41). Again, although I question the large numbers (not the Bible's accuracy, mind you), the numbering is consistent, albeit reduced by a third. Israel has been at war for seven years in the land and there remained Canaanites in the land. We should expect that their numbers be decreased. Furthermore, because they lived side-by-side in many cases with Canaanites (recall in the first chapter of this book that only Judah made a real attempt to continue to Canaanites from their territory), there would have been skirmishes and battles which would have also decimated the population. Finally, a considerable number of men would have been left in the cities by both the tribe of Benjamin and the other tribes in order to maintain the peace there, because they lived among the Canaanites. As we will see in the next chapter, representatives from every family were expected—however, the implication will be that not every adult male family member was required to participate.

One of the things that might concern you is *how the hell were they able to draft so many men with such a lame cause?* The key is that they focused the attention away from the sin that was committed and spoke in terms of *independence, self-determination, freedom*. You certainly know about the so-called *code of honor* among gang members, criminals and prisoners. There is thought to be some noble about not *ratting out* some fellow gang member. All that is happening is there are gang members who want to sin, they want to break the law, they want to do that which is morally reprehensible, and the only way that they can get away with it is to (1) make it seem as though standing up for what is right is wrong and that standing up from wrong is right; (2) that there is some sort of honor in protecting them and covering for their sins; and, (3) they will often try to tie you into the same behavior so that you will see your own culpability as being as great as theirs. The men of Benjamin were able to play this political game as well.

From all the people the this, seven hundred—a man chosen—restricted a hand of his right every one slinging in the stone unto the hair and not miss.

Judges
20:16

From all of these seven hundred chosen men, each one left-handed, slinging with the stone at a hair and he does not miss.

Among these were 700 chosen men who were left-handed; their accuracy in war was such that they could sling a stone at a target the size of a hair and not miss.

Throughout this verse, we have a few words that we don't come across too often, so let's see what others have done with this verse:

NASB	Out of all these people 700 choice men were left-handed; each one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.
Owen's Translation	Among all these seven hundred picked me who were left-handed [lit., restricted as to his right hand], every one slinging a stone at a hair and not miss.
The Septuagint	...all these could sling with stones at a hair, and not miss.
Young's Lit. Translation	...among all this people are seven hundred chosen men, bound of their right hand, each of these slinging with a stone at the hair, and he doth not err.

The meaning is fairly obvious, but let's work through some of the Hebrew. We have *mîn* (*out, from*), plus *kôl* (*every, all of*), then the masculine singular noun *people* (with a definite article), followed by a definite article and the masculine singular noun *zeh* (הַזֶּה) [pronounced *zeh*], which means *here, this*. Strong's #2063, 2088, 2090 BDB #260. *This* is in the singular, to match *people*, also a singular noun. This is followed by *a chosen man*. This helps to explain both mine and Young's clumsy sounding construction.

This is followed by the adjective which is found only twice in Scripture (here and in Judges 3:15), which means *bounded, restricted*; it means, with the words that follow, *restricted as to his right hand* (in other words, he's left-handed). Strong's #334 BDB #32. The words which follow are, literally, *a hand of his right*. The tribe of Benjamin was known for those who were left-handed or ambidextrous (Judges 3:15 | Chron. 12:2).

Then we have *kôl* as well as the masculine singular demonstrative adjective *zeh* again. Literally, it is *each of this*; we might get a little sloppy and go with *each of these, every one of these, all of these*. Then we have the Qal active participle of *qâla* (קָלַה) [pronounced *kaw-LAH*], which means *to sling, to hurl forth, to throw*. Strong's #7049 BDB #887. This is followed by the *bêyth* preposition and the words *the stone*. Then we have the preposition *ʿel* (עַל) [pronounced *el*], which denotes direction and means *in, into, toward, unto, to, regarding*. Strong's #413 BDB #39. This is followed by *the hair*, the *wâw* conjunction, a negative, and the Hiphil imperfect of *châṭâ* (חָטָא) [pronounced *khaw-TAW*], which means *to sin, to miss, to miss the mark, to err*. Strong's #2398 BDB #306. Here is where we have to recognize that we have a common expression here (for the day) and not necessarily some statement of fact. Referring to a child, we might say *he eats like a horse*. This simply means that he eats a lot; it does not mean that they have the same diet or that they eat the same amounts. Here, this does not mean that each and every one of these men could, on any given day, sling a stone at a hair and not miss. It simply means that they were deadly accurate. This also gives us an idea as to what sort of weapons these men often used. The chucked stones at one another using a sling—like David will do against Goliath. This may not seem sophisticated, but you must recognize that these people are not rich nor do they have enough time in the land to develop a weapons industry. Therefore, for many of them, their weapons are a sling and a stone. We will find that to be sufficiently deadly. Furthermore, it is estimated that a stone weighing a pound or more could be thrown with a velocity of 90–100 mph. If you can imagine being hit in the head with a baseball thrown by a professional ball player—except that baseball is a rock—then you have a good idea as to the effectiveness of this weapon.

Aman of Israel they conscripted for alone from Benjamin, four hundred thousand a man drawing a sword—each of this a man of war.

Judges
20:17

They drafted 400,000 men apart from Benjamin—men drawing a sword, each of these a man of war.

Israel, apart from the tribe of Benjamin, drafted 400,000 men, each one drawing a sword, each one a man of war.

Here we have the beginnings for a very interesting situation. Israel has 400,000 men to Benjamin's 26,700 (or, 26,000). Furthermore, the men of Israel are guided by doing that which is right (although they may have called in the military too quickly; still, they approached this problem just as they should have—they asked for the men who committed the crime). It is not unlike performing military exercises near a hostile nation. There is no attack; it is the simple threat of being right there doing military exercises that gets the point across. These men of Israel assembled themselves right smack in the land of Benjamin, and the men of Benjamin could not miss them. The consequences were obvious. They hand over the men or they go to war.

[<<Return to Chapter Outline>>](#)

[<<Return to the Chart Index>>](#)

The People of Israel Lose the First Battle Against Benjamin

And so they arose and so they went up [to] Bethel and so they ask from God and so they said, sons of Israel, "Who will go up for us in the beginning to the battle with sons of Benjamin?" And so said Y^howah, "Judah in the beginning."

Judges
20:18

Then the sons of Israel arose and went up [to] Bethel and they inquired of God and said, "Who will go up for us at the commencement for the battle with the sons of Benjamin?" Y^howah answered, "Judah, at the commencement."

When they arose, the sons of Israel went up to Bethel and inquired of God, "Who will start the battle against the sons of Benjamin?" Jehovah answered them, "Judah will begin the battle against them."

What has occurred was actually unexpected. The Israelites, with 400,000 men, did not really expect to have any opposition from the Benjamites. Now that they realize that they are going to war against their own brothers, they suddenly become seriously concerned.

This verse could be read: **And so they arose and went up to the house of God**; as *Bethel* means *House of God*. Now, apart from Jerusalem, the city we hear most often about in Scripture is Bethel. The cities of Bethel, Jericho and Jerusalem form the vertices of an equilateral triangle, where Bethel is almost due north of Jerusalem and northwest of Jericho. You will recall that this is where Abram and Lot stood when they chose to separate. This was also the city next to Ai when the Israelites began to conquer the land and they got too overconfident. Now, surprisingly enough, Bethel belongs to Benjamin and the Israelites (more than likely, their leaders) go to Bethel to inquire of God. God, although omniscient, presented Himself as being in one place at one time, so, apart from any other passage, we can reasonably determine that the Ark of God must also be located in Bethel at this time, which is immediately following the conquest of the land by Joshua (we will have this confirmed in Judges 20:27). We don't know if it was taken there because of the impending civil war or whether it was located there, for whatever reason, immediately prior to this period of time. However, the Ark clearly traveled with Joshua in war (Joshua 6:12–16 7:6). In the beginning, it spent a good deal of time in Gilgal (Joshua 4:18–19), which was the first place that Israel camped west of the Jordan River. It stayed with the people when then went to Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, for the cursings and the blessings (Joshua 8:33). For much of Israel's history, the Ark will be in Shiloh (which is where the Tent of Meeting was—Joshua 18:1). It appears as though the Tent of Meeting and the Ark will be relocated temporarily to Bethel (Judges 20:27). Bethel is about 15 miles south of Mount Gerizim and Ebal. The Ark will eventually be returned to Shiloh, where it may have been for most of the period of the Judges (Judges 18:31⁸ I Sam. 3:3 4:1–4). Shiloh, by the way, is in Ephraim, and it is midway between the two mountains and Bethel. Now, how it was determined that the Ark would be here or there or why it is moved from point A to point B is not really directly given to us in Scripture (except that it was to lead the Israelites in battle). This fact would have led us to believe that the Ark was carried with these soldiers and that the Tent of Worship as set up in Bethel prior to going into battle. The other option is that this was a reasonable central location of Israel in which to place the Ark. However, so was Shiloh. My educated guess, therefore, would be that a large group of soldiers showed up in Shiloh and ordered the temporary moving of the Ark and the Tent of Meeting to Bethel.

Now Bethel belongs to Benjamin (Joshua 18:13, 22). You may find it ironic, or at least incongruous, that the Ark is found in Bethel, which is in Benjamin, which has suddenly become the most degenerate tribe in all of Israel. Don't be. This is exactly what you should expect. Satan is real and he will concentrate his efforts wherever the truth is. The church, over at least the past forty or fifty years, has been pulverized by Satan. You can't hardly find a single church where God's Word is taught carefully verse-by-verse. What we have instead is an infiltration of charismatics into churches of all denominations, which bring in simultaneously enthusiasm, instability, misinformation, heretical doctrines and demonism. Churches are dying because God's Word is not being taught. Churches are dying because the pastor either evangelizes his own congregation week after week or he jumps from verse to verse justifying his pet doctrines (and I am speaking of *good* churches here; not of those who teach the social gospel or teach heresy or use the Scriptures as a springboard into sermons about other things). When a few very enthusiastic believers enter into the congregation, some of the other believers there assume the problem is that these believers with enthusiasm have something that they need. They don't realize what they are missing is the strength and stability of God's Word; so they pursue this so-called second blessing, which takes them out of action as believers. They might have the enthusiasm, which impresses other believers, but they lose their credibility before unbelievers.

Twice in this verse we have the feminine noun *t^echillâh* (תְּחִלָּה) [pronounced *t^e-khil-LAW*], which means *beginning, first*. Gesenius renders this *in the beginning, i.e., previously*. Young renders this *at the commencement*. Strong's #8462 BDB #321.

The tribes of Israel have gathered, and there are, for all intents and purposes, far too many of them. Therefore, one tribe will be chosen by God to go into battle against Benjamin. However, they don't simply elect such a tribe. They go to God in Bethel and ask who should go into battle. The fact that there was such a righteous outcry, that all of the tribes showed up, and that they go to God, indicates clearly that we are in very early Israel. It is not completely clear how divine guidance is ascertained; however, we might infer that this was done through Phinehas, the high priest who used Urim and Thummim (see Num. 27:21).

⁸ Although Judges 18 reasonably occurred prior to Judges 19–21 (this is an area where scholars differ), the last verse of this chapter simply tells us where the ark was throughout most of Israel's history.

And so they arose sons of Israel, in the morning and so they encamped against the Gibeah.

Judges
20:19

Then the sons of Israel arose and encamped across from Gibeah.

Then the sons of Israel arose and stationed themselves just outside of Gibeah.

We are probably speaking specifically of the men of Judah in this verse, even though they will be called, less specifically, *sons of Israel* in the next several verses. Now, something which will seem unusual is that the events of this battle will parallel the events of a battle back in Joshua 7–8 when Israel attacked and was defeated at Ai.

And so went out men of Israel to the battle with Benjamin and so they arranged [themselves] against them, men of Israel, a battle against the Gibeah.

Judges
20:20

So the men of Israel went out to the battle with Benjamin. The men of Israel arranged themselves against them [in] a battle line against Gibeah.

Finally, the men of Israel went out to battle against the tribe of Benjamin. They first arrayed themselves in a battle line against Gibeah.

We continue with the military vocabulary. The second verb in this verse is the Qal imperfect of *ʿârak*^e (עָרַךְ) [pronounced *aw-RAK*] and the BDB definition is *to set in order, to arrange in order*; Strong's: *to set in a row, to arrange in order*. We could get away with *to prepare* in most instances. We find this word used in several different contexts—it is used in Gen. 14:8 when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and two other areas *set* their men *up* in the valley for battle. This word is used to describe Abraham *arranging* the wood for the fire upon which he will offer his son Isaac. This verb and its substantive cognate are both found together for the first time in Ex. 40:4 where Moses is to see to the arrangement on the table of showbread—he is to arrange the arrangement. Strong's #6186 BDB #789.

Before *against Gibeah*, we have the feminine singular noun *mil'châmâh* (מִלְחָמָה) [pronounced *mil-khaw-MAW*] again. It means *battle, war*. In this verse, it is often rendered *battle line*. Strong's #4421 BDB #536.

We have here both strategy and psychology. War maneuvers are done both for practice and to intimidate the enemy. When the sons of Israel determined to go to war with Benjamin, they first set themselves up in a great battle array before the city of Benjamin, hoping first to establish themselves in some semblance of order, and secondly, to gain the psychological advantage.

And so came out sons of Benjamin out from the Gibeah and so caused to fall in Israel in the day the that 22,000 a man ground-ward.

Judges
20:21

So the sons of Benjamin came out from Gibeah and they caused 22,000 men in Israel to fall to the ground.

Then the sons of Benjamin engaged them in battle and they caused 22,000 men in Israel to fall to the ground.

Given that there were 26,700 Benjamites, this means that almost every Benjamite killed a man. The last verb in this verse is the Hiphil imperfect of *shâchath* (שָׁחַת) [pronounced *shaw-KHAHTH*], which means *to decay, to go to ruin, to corrupt*. In the Hiphil, it means *to cause to fall, to cause to fall into spiritual corruption*. Strong's #7843 BDB #1007. You may wonder how the Israelites succumbed to the Benjamites so easily. Barnes explains: *Gibeah, being on a hill, was difficult to access to an attacking army, and gave great advantage to the defenders, who fought from higher ground, and probably defended a narrow pass, while their companions on the walls could gall the assailants with their slingstones.*⁹ The key will be to get the Benjamites off of their hill to a level playing field.

⁹ Barnes' Notes, Volume 2, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 465.

Now, this is something that you would not have expected. We would have assumed that since the tribe of Benjamin is so degenerate and the others tribes of Israel are not (recall, this is early on in Israel's history), that we would have expected Israel to prevail. Furthermore, these tribes went to God and asked who should go up against Benjamin, and God told them Judah. We would have all expected, under those conditions, for Judah to prevail over Benjamin. We, as believers, are sometimes easily led astray. We believe that all believers should be blessed, that righteousness should prevail and that evil should fall. We believe that when we pray for something, we should get it. We believe when we sincerely and earnestly seek God's will, that whatever happens subsequently should be good. There are people who earnestly and sincerely seek to be baptized in the spirit and ask God to give them the gift of tongues to verify this and they assume, when something happens, it is all of Him. Not so. The righteous do not always prevail in each and every instance. Ultimately? Yes. Will you see it before you die? Not necessarily. However, let me add, if you are a believer and you do that which is wrong, will God let you know? Most definitely—you will be disciplined.

We have entered into a period of time where miracles are rare and the power of God was not so often manifested. We could reasonably assume that at Bethel, what occurred was the high priest, probably Phinehas, put on the Urim and Thummim and that it was indicated—and we do not know exactly how—that Judah was to go first into battle against Benjamin. On Urim and Thummim were twelve stones in the front, each one representing a different tribe of Israel. Most likely, one of them lit up in some way. This is one area where we have a supernatural response from God. However, the result is not what any of us would have expected.

We often want to have some personal application, so let me give you some. The period of time that you live in is not like the days of Moses, or the days that our Lord walked this earth, or the days of the Apostles. The period of time wherein we live is more like this time of the judges. There are few if any supernatural signs from God; and it is highly unlikely that we will ever personally observe them. Furthermore, that which is right and just does not always prevail.

[<<Return to Chapter Outline>>](#)

[<<Return to the Chart Index>>](#)

The Sons of Israel Lose the Second Battle Against Benjamin

Several translations (NRSV, REB, NAB, and the NJB) reverse vv. 22–23, which does make more sense. This does not mean this is how these verses were found originally. It is just closer to the way that we think.

And so went up sons of Israel and wept to faces of Y^howah until the evening. And so they asked at Y^howah, to say, “Do I continue to draw near to the battle with sons of Benjamin, my brother?” And so said Y^howah, “Go up unto them.”

Judges
20:23

And the sons of Israel went up and wept before the face of Y^howah until the evening, and they asked of Y^howah, saying, “Do I continue to draw near to the battle against the sons of Benjamin, my brothers?” And Y^howah said, “Go up against them.”

Then the sons of Israel went up to Bethel and they wept in the presence of Jehovah until that evening, and they continued inquiring of Jehovah, saying, “Do we continue to go into battle against the tribe of Benjamin—men who are our brothers?” And Jehovah answered them, “Go up against Benjamin.”

Now, we are used to thinking in a particular order—we are used to thinking chronologically. Therefore, several translators place v. 23 first and v. 22 second, as this is the order in which these things occurred. However, v. 23 is given by way of explanation as to why the Israelites aligned themselves again in battle against the Benjamites, and, for this reason, is given parenthetically in the KJV. Now, you will note, just in case the children of Israel got their signals crossed, when they asked of Jehovah, they reminded Him that the tribe of Benjamin were their brothers.

There is, on Urim and Thummim, two stones, one on each shoulder, which apparently do something, like light up, when a question is asked. One is for yes and the other is for *no*. God did allow this sort of contact between

Himself and Israel after the more miraculous period of Moses and Joshua had expired. There will come a time when even Urim and Thummim no longer function just as the Ark, at some point in the future, will no longer have supernatural protection.

And so strengthened [themselves] the people, the men of Israel, and so continued to set in order a battle in the place which they set in order there in the day the first. Judges 20:22

So the people—the men of Israel—strengthened themselves and continued to set a battle line in the place where set [it up] on the first day.

So the people, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves, and again set up their battle line where it was the first day.

What the people of Israel did was the Hithpael imperfect of *châzaq* (כָּזַק) [pronounced *khaw-ZAHK*], which means *to be strong, firm, to strengthen*. The Hithpael is the intensive reflexive. They strengthen themselves. Strong's #2388 BDB #304. The next verb is the Hiphil imperfect of *yâcaph* (יָצַף) [pronounced *yaw-SAHPH*], which means *to add, to augment, to continue to do a thing*. It is very often followed by an infinitive to indicate what activity would be continued. Strong's #3254 BDB #414. What follows is the Qal infinitive construct of *ârak* (אַרַךְ) [pronounced *aw-RAK*] again, which means *to set in order, to arrange in order*. Strong's #6186 BDB #789. This verb is repeated, but it is then given in the Qal perfect. With it is the adverb *shâm* (שָׁם) [pronounced *shawm*], which means *there*. With the relative pronoun, it means *where*. Strong's #8033 BDB #1027. The men of Israel encourage one another and they try this again. They set up their men where they were on the first day, arrayed in battle, against the tribe of Benjamin in Gibeah.

Now, one of the questions that you are no doubt asking yourself is, *if God has sanctioned this action on the part of Israel, and if their cause is just, then why were they defeated?* Let me give you a list of reasons.

- Zodhiates suggests that, although God was consulted, the real trust of Israel was in their army and the righteousness of their cause.¹⁰ Several others tend to give similar reasons, including Keil and Delitzsch.
- However, in my opinion, part of the problem was that they gave no thought to strategy and tactics (which will be integral to their eventual defeat of the tribe of Benjamin). Going to a doctor does not preclude prayer nor does it indicate that you are not trusting in God. Going into battle for a righteous cause does not preclude prayer, nor does the employment of strategy and tactics mean that you are not trusting in God. Gibeah was on a hill. You just do not charge up a hill against a fortified city unless you want to take a large number of casualties.
- Israel, because their cause was just, went off half-cocked, assuming that God would supernaturally intercede and give them victory. Does this sound like anyone you know?
- They first met as a group at Mizpah as *one man before Jehovah*. However, it appears as though the Ark and the Tent of God were in Bethel (Judges 20:28 21:2). God apparently honored their assembly by answering their question (*“Who should go up against Benjamin?”*), but He was not with them in battle.
- They do not consult God as to *what* they should do.
- It is not clear that the Israelites ever involve the High Priest until they have been beaten two times.

¹⁰ *The Complete Word Study Old Testament*; Dr. S. Zodhiates; ©1994 AMG Publishers; p. 703.

Now, one of the questions that you are no doubt asking yourself is, *if God has sanctioned this action on the part of Israel, and if their cause is just, then why were they defeated?* Let me give you a list of reasons.

- The Israelites make at least two stupid vows. First they vow not to return home until this matter is settled; then they vow not to give any of their daughters in marriage to any man of Benjamin (Judges 21:1). It is as though someone decided to up the ante in the vow department or perhaps they offered this vow after the loss of the first battle in order to bribe God into helping them.
- Let me give you another explanation: as we have observed, the Levite whose mistress was raped and killed also shares some culpability in this crime. Prior to going off with half of the facts, these men should have investigated this situation further. We know in retrospect that the men of Benjamin certainly deserved death, as did those who would protect them. However, the actions of the Levite, despite the situation, also deserved capital punishment. Could all of the facts been uncovered? Obviously they were, as Judges 19 stands as a testimony to that. Did the leaders of Israel investigate as thoroughly as they should have? Unfortunately, no. Before acting as they did, however honorably, one more day of testimony would be prudent. It is possible that this was a factor in the defeat of Judah in battle.
- A point of interest is that Phinehas, the High Priest, and therefore the one who represents Christ, is absent the first two times that Israel goes before Jehovah. This does not mean that he actually is absent—he just is not mentioned. However, apart from him, Israel goes into the battle and loses. With him, Israel goes into the battle and wins.
- It is also important to realize that, even though our cause might be just, we do not always win every battle and sometimes not every war. Some believers become quite concerned when, for once in their lives, they are right or they are doing something right, and yet the results that they expect are not forthcoming. We don't win every battle and we do not always understand why things turn out exactly the way that they do. You must realize that becoming a believer does not put you into some fairy-tale land on earth.
- There is another possibility: God had allowed the tribe of Benjamin to be victorious over the tribe of Judah. Degeneracy set in big time in the territory of Benjamin, as we have seen. Judah is just south of Benjamin and it is possible that degeneracy had become to set in, in that northern portion of Judah. This may have been God's way of culling out the undesirables from Judah.

[<<Return to Chapter Outline>>](#)

[<<Return to the Chart Index>>](#)

And so came near sons of Israel unto sons of Benjamin in the day the second.

Judges
20:24

And so the sons of Israel came near to the sons of Benjamin on the second day.

So the sons of Israel therefore approached the Benjamites on the second day of battle.

We have two different words for *draw near* in this verse and the previous. In this verse, we have the Qal imperfect of *qāra*^{bv} (קָרַב) [pronounced *kaw-RA^BV*], which means *to come near, to approach, to draw near*. Strong #7126 BDB #897. In the previous verse, we have the Qal infinitive construct of *nāgash* (נָגַשׁ) [pronounced *naw-GASH*], which also means *to come near, to draw near, to approach*. Strong's #5066 BDB #620. If there is a difference in the meaning of these two words, at this time, I don't know what it is.

This verse mentions the second day of battle. This does not mean that these two battles were fought on consecutive days. It simply means that there were two engagements of forces, each lasting most of a day. There was likely some intervening time between the two days.

In a previous verse, I gave you a list of the various reasons why Israel was defeated the first time. You will note that they have not changed a thing. They are going into battle this time just as they did the first time. Therefore, they should expect the same results.

And so went out Benjamin to meet them out from the Gibeah in the day the second and so caused to fall in sons of Israel again 18,000 man ground-ward—all of these drawers of sword.

Judges
20:25

So Benjamin went out to meet them from Gibeah on the second day, and so they caused to fall to the ground from the sons of Israel, 18,000 men—all those who drew the sword.

So, on the second day, Benjamin went out from Gibeah in battle against Israel and they killed 18,000 Israelite soldiers.

In this verse we have the Hiphil imperfect again of *shâchath* (שָׁחַת) [pronounced *shaw-KHAHTH*], which means, in the Hiphil, *to cause to fall*. Strong's #7843 BDB #1007. Again, this is not what we would have first expected. The men of Benjamin are absolutely in the wrong. What they did was absolutely evil. The tribes of Israel responding were righteous and they were doing God's will. However, the tribe of Benjamin prevails here. 40,000 men (if the numbers are correctly translated), soldiers of the tribe of Judah, have died (I am assuming, because no other tribe is mentioned, that these are men of Judah who have died). At this point in time, I am still unable to tackle the numbers of these first seven books of the Bible—I believe that there is something wrong with them, but I don't know what exactly. I believe them to be off by a factor of ten, but I have no reason at this time and no way to justify that. Furthermore, I could be wrong.

In any case, the Benjamites fought from higher ground. From the wording of this verse, they did not remain in the city, but they came out and fought the Israelites, but Benjamin had the advantage as Israel still had to charge up a hill to do battle. And again, the Benjamites killed about one man of Judah each.

[<<Return to Chapter Outline>>](#)

[<<Return to the Chart Index>>](#)

The Sons of Israel Go Before God Again Through Phinehas

And so went up all sons of Israel and all the people and so they come in [to] Bethel and so they weep and so they sat there to faces of Y^howah and so they fast in the day the that until the evening. And so they caused to ascend burnt offerings and peace offerings to faces of Y^howah.

Judges
20:26

Then all the sons of Israel even all the people of Israel went up and they came to Bethel, and they cried and sat there before Y^howah, and they fasted on that day until the evening. Furthermore, they caused to ascend burnt offerings and peace offerings before Y^howah.

Then the sons of Israel and all of the people of Israel returned to Bethel and they cried before Jehovah, sitting there, fasting for the entire day. They also offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before Jehovah.

An item of interest here, but an extremely important issue elsewhere is are we speaking of the city of *Bethel* or are we speaking of *the house of God* here? At this point in time, they are located in the same place, so this is more of an item of interest. What we have in this verse is *Bêyth-ʾêl* (בֵּית־אֵל) [pronounced *bayth-AYHL*], which means *house of God*. According to ZPEB, *El* generally refers to the name of a pagan god, not to the God of Israel. Throughout most of Canaan, Baal supplanted El in the Canaanite pantheon of gods; however, Bethel was an exception to this. Therefore, according to ZPEB, the name of this place is essentially pagan. However, this contradicts what we find in Gen. 28 where Jacob names this city himself. Between the two syllables, we find a *maqqup̄h* (ֶּ) (מַקְּוֶפֶּה) [pronounced *mahk-KAYF*], which looks like an exalted hyphen and is not pronounced. The *maqqup̄h* unites two words for the purpose of pronunciation. The accent is moved to the last syllable of the second

word. This is what we find here and in many other passages, such as Gen. 12:8 28:19 Joshua 18:13, 22. Strong's #1008 BDB #110. This is easily distinguished from *house of God*, which we find in Gen. 28:17, where it is written as bêyth ʿêlôhîym (בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים) [pronounced *bayth-eh-loh-HEEM*]. Bêyth means *house* (Strong's #1004 BDB #108) and you will notice that in both cases it is spelled exactly the same (the vocabulary form has a chîriq in it); however, you will note that we have the plural noun Elohim (Strong's #430 BDB #43) and you will note the missing maqqêph. This is how we know that this should read *Bethel* here, rather than *house of God*, as we find in the KJV and in the NKJV. Surprisingly enough, the KJV and the NKJV distinguish between these two in Gen. 28:17, 19.

For most of you, what has been nice is that there are very few problems with the vocabulary or with the structure of the verses of this chapter. They are fairly easy to understand and fairly straightforward. All of the people of Israel are beside themselves. They do not understand what has happened. They have a righteous cause; they are acting in the framework of God's will; and they have been completely defeated in battle. They do not know what is wrong, and they do what they can to placate God—they fast and they offer Him continued burnt offerings, in hopes that He will vindicate them. People do not spend much time studying the Old Testament, other than some specific passages, because they do not understand what is going on. For those who actually read this passage and give it more than 20 seconds thought, they are nonplused. Why don't the other eleven tribes prevail if they are righteous? And, because we do not study the Old Testament and passages like this, we are continually confused and mixed up in our own lives. We expect, if we are righteous and if we are doing that which is right, then everything will come out to be alright. This chapter tells us that this is not necessarily the case. We are not to go off half-cocked; we are not to go off without a plan and expect supernatural intervention if we screw up. Do you recall Paul's advice to the person who had become a believer? **Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that...Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife** (I Cor. 7:20–21, 27). Some people when they become believers (and even after they have been believers for a long time) go off and do really stupid things. It is as though they think we are supposed to shut our brains down after becoming believers. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are a witness before all mankind and before the angels. Do you think that witness includes doing the stupidest things that we can think of? Do you think that witness includes spaz-time in church (arm-flailing, screaming and screeching, falling down)? Does this witness mean that we should seek to screw up our own lives as thoroughly as possible, and then depend upon God to supernaturally fix everything? I can recall some of the things which I did immediately after salvation, expecting that everything was going to be okay because I was a Christian—I look back and think, what an idiot I was. We are not to go off half-cocked; we are not to put our brains in neutral; we are not to go through life ill-prepared and doing that which was ill-considered. When we do things like that, we embarrass our Lord. And, so there is no misunderstanding—God is not going to step in and supernaturally fix every stupid thing that you do. Some stupid things that you do are life-threatening. Ask these 40,000 men of Judah who died in battle—you'll get to meet most of them in heaven—ask them if charging up that hill without any strategy whatsoever, expecting God to supernaturally intervene—ask them if that was a good well-thought out idea.

And so asked sons of Israel in Y^ohowah and there [the] Ark of a Covenant of the God in the days the those.

Judges
20:27

So the sons of Israel asked of Y^ohowah—in those days, the Ark of the Covenant of God [was] there [in Bethel].

Then the sons of Israel inquired of Jehovah, because in those days, the Ark of the Covenant of God was located in Bethel.

In all of the book of Judges, this is the only place where the Ark of the covenant is mentioned. This would have been early on in the book of Judges that the ark was placed at Bethel, which would have been the spiritual center of Israel. Again, we do not know if the Ark was carried here because Israel was going into battle against Benjamin, or whether it was placed here earlier, this being a centralized point in Israel. We have an outstanding summary of the Ark of the Covenant in Joshua 3:14. However, although in the past, we have mention of the Ark being carried by Israel into battle, this is not indicated in this chapter. This verse tells us that *in those days, the Ark of the*

Covenant of God was located in Bethel. This would seem to indicate that the Ark remained in this place for some time and that being moved to Bethel was not a result of the degeneracy of Benjamin.

Let me point out, without comment yet, that there was a feast to Jehovah held in Shiloh around this time (Judges 21:19) and that the House of God was later located in Shiloh (Judges 18:31, which possibly occurred after this portion of Judges).

And Phinehas ben Eleazar ben Aaron was standing to His faces in the days the those, to say, “Shall I continue again to go out to the battle against sons of Benjamin, my brother? Should I cease?” And so said Y^howah, “Go up for tomorrow I will give them into your hand.”

Judges
20:28

And Phinehas ben Eleazar, the son of Aaron, was standing before His face in those days, saying, “Will I continue again to go out to the battle against the sons of Benjamin, my brothers, [or] should I cease?” And Y^howah said, “Go up, for tomorrow I will give them into your hand.”

In those days, Phinehas ben Eleazar, the son of Aaron, ministered before God. He spoke to God, saying, “Should we continue to go out in battle against these sons of Benjamin or should we cease?” God answered, “Go up against them, for tomorrow, I will give them into your hand.”

Out of nowhere, we have Phinehas mentioned again, whom we have not seen since the end of the book of Joshua. Phinehas was the High Priest, 3rd generation from Aaron, the first High Priest. Phinehas was the son of Eleazar, the second High Priest. We covered him in some detail back in Joshua 22:13. What he was doing before the Ark was the Qal active participle of *ʿamad* (אָמַד) [pronounced *gaw-MAHD*], which means *to take a stand, to stand, to remain, to endure, to withstand*. Strong's #5975 BDB #763. Many translators render this *ministering* in this verse, as this is essentially what was occurring. The tribe of Levi was in charge of moving the ark and assisting the family of Aaron in serving God (Deut. 10:8 18:5). Phinehas could have been the one to write these chapters of Judges, although a portion of this chapter was definitely written by an eyewitness.

The second half of Phinehas's question begins with the hypothetical particle *ʾim* (אִם) [pronounced *eem*], which means *if*. However, it can also be used as an interrogative. Strong's #518 BDB #49. The Israelites did not expect in anyway to suffer their two losses to the Benjamites. Now, although they had been told for the tribe of Judah to go up against Benjamin, the Israelites were not promised victory in the previous two sessions before God. However, this time, God promises them success.

[<<Return to Chapter Outline>>](#)

[<<Return to the Chart Index>>](#)

Summary of the Third Victorious Battle Against Benjamin

And so set Israel ambushers unto the Gibeah round about.

Judges
20:29

And so Israel set [men to] ambush around Gibeah.

Then the Israelites set men up in ambush around Gibeah.

Now, it does not matter that God had promised to place into their hands the Benjamites. This does not mean that they do not follow normal procedure when it comes to going to war. In other words, they practice good sense in battle. What they are going to do is to present the exact same overt battle tactics to the sons of Benjamin as they had before. However, they will use this to lure the sons of Benjamin into an ambush. As we study the next dozen or so verses, recall Joshua's defeat against Ai, and then his victory over Ai. In Joshua 8, we read that Joshua used a very similar strategy against a city which was probably better fortified as well as on a hill. By the way, there are those who see this similarity of strategy and tactics and assume that we are speaking of the same battle, but that there are two different oral traditions. What the Israelites are doing here is employing a strategy which worked

before. There is nothing in Scripture which would dissuade those in the military from using strategy and tactics in war.

And so went up sons of Israel unto sons of Benjamin in the day the third and so placed in array unto the Gibeah as time in time.

Judges
20:30

And the sons of Israel went up against the sons of Benjamin on the third day, and placed [themselves] in battle array against Gibeah as [they had done] formerly.

And the sons of Israel went up into battle against the sons of Benjamin on that third day, setting themselves in battle array before Gibeah as they had done on the previous two days.

At the end of this verse we have two different prepositions and the feminine noun *pâ ʿam* (פַּ ʿַמ) [pronounced *PAW-gahm*] repeated, which means *beat, foot, anvil, occurrence, time*. For the ancients, this is the sound of footsteps or horse clomps or the banging of an anvil. The phrase, *as time in time* or *as time against time* or *as time with time* means *as usual, as formerly, as in times past, as at other times, as in previous times*. Strong's #6471 BDB #821. The strategy is to make things appear to the men of Benjamin exactly as they had on the first two attacks. It should appear as though the men of Judah are particularly dense, as they attempt to attack Benjamin in the same way as they had the previous two times that they were defeated. It never occurs to the tribe of Benjamin that the other tribes of Israel are going to use any strategy or tactics.

And so went out sons of Benjamin to meet the people; they were drawn away out from the city and so they began to strike down from the people—wounded ones—as time in time, in the highways (which, one goes up into Bethel and goes up Gibeah-ward into the open country)— as thirty men of Israel.

Judges
20:31

And the sons of Benjamin went out to meet the people. They were drawn away out [away] from the city and they began to strike down [those] from the people—wounded ones—as [they had done] previously, in the highways (one which goes up into Bethel and one [which] goes up toward Gibeah [possibly Geba] in the open country)—[they had struck down] about thirty men of Israel[.]

The sons of Benjamin were drawn out, away from their city, as they began to strike down some of the men of Israel, wounding them as before in the highways (the one which goes toward Bethel and the other out in the open country which goes toward Gibeah). They had struck down about thirty men of Israel.

We'll just look at two words here. The first is the masculine plural of *châlâl* (חָלַל) [pronounced *chaw-LAWL*], which means *slain, fatally wounded, wounded, pierced*. Strong's #2491 BDB #319. It is unclear whether these thirty were fatalities or just wounded. The second word is the masculine singular of *sâdeh* (שָׂדֵה) [pronounced *saw-DEH*], which means *field, land, open field, open country*. Strong's #7704 BDB #961. The idea here was to lure the men of Benjamin away from their city—in fact, the tactics are identical to Israel's second attack on Ai in Joshua 8. The men of Israel attack the city of Gibeah; they sustain some injuries and those who are injured back off somewhat, as do the others who have attacked, and the tribe of Benjamin, smelling the blood in the water, advance on them, leaving the advantage of their higher position. You may wonder what was Benjamin thinking—this is day three of the attack against the tribe of Benjamin. Their enemies have sustained huge losses (even if there are problems with the statistics given in Scripture, still percentage-wise, the Israelites lost a great many men). However, they are still attacking for the third time. This means that the tribe of Benjamin has to inflict even greater losses if they are ever to achieve peace.

You have noticed that in the translation, I have noted that *Gibeah* might be *Geba*. There is no manuscript evidence for this, even in the Septuagint. However, *Geba* and *Gibeah* have been confounded with one another for a long time. In the **Doctrine of Geba, Gibeon and Gibeah**, (which will not be covered until I Sam. 13:15), I give several examples of the confusion of the names (in most cases there is manuscript evidence for these instances). Here, there is a geographical reason, which is given by Ewing in his contribution to ISBE: *The site now generally accepted*

as that of Gibeah is on Teleil el-Fūl, an artificial mound about 4 miles North of Jerusalem, a short distance east of the high road to Shechem. A little way north of Teleil el-Fūl, the high road bifurcates, one branch turning eastward to Jeba', i.e., Geba (which should be read instead of "Gibeah" in Jgs 20 13); the other continuing northward to Bethel.¹¹ Therefore, assuming that this road of v. 31 is the one to which Ewing alludes (I don't know when he wrote; it could be slightly prior to 1929 or 1956, the two original copyright dates of this encyclopedia), then we may safely assume that *Geba* not *Gibeah* was meant here. Furthermore, since the men of Benjamin are taking their stand in Gibeah, we would expect once they left the city and pursued their brother Israelites, that they would be heading toward another location rather than back toward Gibeah.

And so said sons of Benjamin, "Struck down they to our faces as in the first." And sons of Israel said, "Let us flee and draw them away out from the city unto the highways."

Judges
20:32

Then the sons of Benjamin said, "They have been struck down before our faces as before." And the sons of Israel said, "Let's retreat and draw them away out from the city [and] into the highways."

The sons of Benjamin concluded, "They have been struck down before us just as before." And the sons of Israel had said, "We will retreat and draw them away, out from their city, and into the highways."

We'll take a quick look at a couple of words. The first is the Niphal participle of *nâgaph* (נָגַף) [pronounced *naw-GAHF*] which means *to strike, to strike down, to hit*. The Niphal means *to be struck down, to be smitten, to be hit*. It is the passive stem so the subject receives the action of the verb. Strong's #5062 BDB #619.

The next word we'll cover is the adjective *rîshôwn* (רִשׁוֹן) [pronounced *ree-SHOWN*], which means *first, chief, former, beginning*. With *bêyth*, it means *before, formerly, previously*. Strong's #7223 BDB #911.

The command which went out to the Israelite forces was the Qal imperfect (with a voluntative *hê*) of *nûwç* (נָוַח) [pronounced *noose*], which means *to flee from, to hasten quickly*. Strong's #5127 BDB #630. The Benjamites, even though they participated in the attack on Ai, do not realize that they are falling for the same thing the men of Ai did.

What we have in this verse are various quotes of men spoken throughout the beginning of this battle. The Benjamites agreed that they were defeating their brothers in battle as they had on the previous two days of battle (they did not necessarily fight for three consecutive days; in fact, it is not necessary that each battle even lasted for most of a day). What they Israelites say is not spoken so that the Benjamites can hear—obviously. By whatever signal they devised, they had determined that it was time to put their plan into action. Now, whether one of their generals cried out, *retreat* or whether they just slowly fell back, the injured moving further and further back from battle, we are not told. In any case, the signal had been given to fall back as though in retreat.

And all of a man of Israel rose up from their place and so set [themselves] in array in Baal-tamar and ambushing Israel bursting forth from their place from a meadow of Geba [possibly, Gibeah].

Judges
20:33

And all of the men of Israel arose from their place and set [themselves] in array in Baal-tamar; then ambushing Israel rushing out from their place out of the meadow of Geba.

Then all the men of Israel rose up from where they were hiding and suddenly placed themselves in battle array in Baal-tamar, and those who were waiting in ambush, rushed out from their place, hidden in a meadow in Geba.

Baal-tamar is mentioned only in this passage. We might assume that it is a small city outside of Gibeah. Barnes explains further: *Baal-tamar is only mentioned here. It took its name from some palm-trees that grew there;*

¹¹ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. II; p. 1225.

perhaps the same as the “palm-tree of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel” (iv. 5), the exact locality here indicated, since “the highway” (v. 31) along which the Israelites enticed the Benjamites to pursue them, leads straight to Ramah, which lay only a mile beyond the point where the two ways branch off.¹² What these men of Israel do is the Hiphil participle of *gîyach* (גִּיַח) [pronounced *GEE-ahkh*], which means *to burst forth*.

We will cover Geba when we get to the book of I Samuel. However, in short, this was a Benjamite city which was given over to the Levites (Joshua 18:24–21:17). However, it is possible that this should read *Gibeah*. In the Hebrew, *Gibeah* is *gîb^e‘âh* (גִּבְעָה) [pronounced *gî^bv-GAW*], which means *hill*. Strong’s #1390 BDB #149. Geba, in the Hebrew, is *ge^bva‘* (גִּבְעָה) [pronounced *GEH^b-vahg*], which is transliterated Geba. In the original Hebrew, the only real difference is the *hê* (ה) on the end. Although, it is possible that this is an alternate spelling and/or pronunciation, it is more likely that this refers to some meadows outside of Geba, which is near Gibeah.

What precedes Geba in this verse is the masculine singular construct of a noun that we only find here and appears to be related to *open areas* or to *meadowlands*.¹³ Strong’s #4629 BDB #789. What appears to be the case is that there was a large meadow area of Geba where there were no trees, but apparently there was enough grass or bushes where the army of Israel could hide. In looking out to the meadow, the men of Benjamin could not see the opposing army in wait. Barnes suggests instead that the vowel points be changed (which does not affect the consonants—recall that the vowel points were added many, many centuries later), that we would have the word for *a cavern*, which might be more suitable for an ambush. I don’t buy them all being in a cavern or two, as such a move could be potentially disastrous, depending upon the number of entrances into this cavern. Also, the Israelites would have required a huge cavern in order to pull this ambush off. My thinking is that the word found only here might refer to a grassy meadowland—again, as this exact word occurs only in this verse, it would certainly be a variation of a *meadowland*, allowing for such an interpretation. This reminds me of the movie *The Thin Red Line* where there is a hill with some grass, that, from the vantage point of the opposition soldiers, there is nothing to see but this green grass. However, as they advance on this hill, it becomes clear that this grass is filled with their enemies. We have the same scenario here. In either case, whether this is a cavern or a high grassy meadowland, it should be obvious that there was a lot of cover of some sort to hide a huge number of men.

**And so they came in out opposite Gibeah
10,000 a man chosen from all Israel and the
battle was great and they did not know that
reaching out against them the evil.**

Judges
20:34

**Then they came in out in front of Gibeah,
10,000 chosen men from all Israel. The battle
was vehement and they did not know that the
calamity [or, the evil one] was reaching out
against them.**

**Then the men in hiding suddenly entered into the battle—10,000 hand-picked men taken from all Israel.
And the battle was intense and the Benjamites did not know that calamity was reaching out to destroy
them.**

The first verb is the Qal imperfect of *bôw’* (בּוֹא) [pronounced *boh*], which means *to come in, to come, to go in, to go*. Strong’s #935 BDB #97. What they are coming *into* is the battle. They were hidden off to the side in the field and now they come *in* to the battle. This is followed by two prepositions *mîn* + *neged* (מִן נֶגֶד) [pronounced *NEH-ged*], which means *what is conspicuous* when it is a substantive and, as a preposition, *in front of, in the sight of, opposite to*. With *mîn*, this means *in front of, from before*. Strong’s #5048 BDB #617. Suddenly, they are out in battle out before Gibeah, which would be a metonym for the men of Benjamin.

Now, you will note that Israel is not depending upon vast numbers, but is depending upon this crack force of chosen men to ambush the Benjamites. First of all, the Benjamites have no way of knowing how many men were flanking them. Also, it should be pointed out that even with these two detailed descriptions of the battle (the second description is longer, probably written by an eyewitness, and found in vv. 36–47), it is not completely clear what

¹² Barnes’ Notes, Volume 2, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 466.

¹³ Ewing suggests that this word means *west* in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. II; p. 1225.

happened. My guess is that we have these 10,000 men who flank the tribe of Benjamin which has been drawn out down from their hill; but that there is another force in waiting—perhaps even adjacent in the same field and perhaps even a portion of this 10,000—and they will move directly to Gibeah, which is no longer guarded, and burn it down.

Then the battle is described with the Qal perfect of *kā^bvêd* (כָּבַד) [pronounced *kaw^bv-VADE*], which means *to honor, to glorify, to be great, to be vehement, to be heavy, weighty, burdensome*. It appears to be one of those words which is a true homonym. Strong's #3513 BDB #457.

What the Benjamites did not know is the feminine singular, Qal active participle *nâga^ʿ* (נֹגַעַת) [pronounced *naw-GAHĠ*], which means *to touch, to reach out and touch*. We could render this *reaching out*. Strong's #5060 BDB #619. This is followed by *against them* and then we have the noun which goes with the verb *nâga^ʿ*—*râ^ʿâh* (רָעָה) [pronounced *raw-ĠAW*], which means *evil, misery, distress, injury, aberration, iniquity, that which is morally reprehensible*. Strong's #7451 BDB #949. The tribe of Benjamin recognized that they had been lured from their hill into an ambush; however, they became even more fierce in battle, taking this to be a minor setback. What they were not cognizant of was the fact that their city had been left unguarded. That is, they recognize that they had been ambushed and outmaneuvered, but that did not mean that they would lose the battle. It did not occur to the sons of Benjamin that Israel had two tricks up her sleeve and that the other shoe was about to drop. “They spend their days in prosperity and suddenly, they go down into hell.” (Job 21:13). “But evil will come on you, which you will not know how to charm away; and disaster will fall upon you, for which you cannot atone. And destruction about which you do not know will come upon you suddenly.” (Isa. 47:11).

As I study these two different accounts, it becomes more apparent that the first account is from one who was either in the original attacking force of Israel, or was among those who ambushed the Benjamites. The second account appears to be from a man who was among those in ambush who struck the city of Gibeah.

And so struck down Y^ehowah Benjamin to faces of Israel and so caused to fall sons of Israel in Benjamin in the day the that 25,000 and 100 a man, all these drawing a sword.

Judges
20:35

So Y^ehowah struck down [and defeated] Benjamin before the faces of Israel and the sons of Israel caused to fall in Benjamin on that day 25,100 men drawing the sword.

So Jehovah defeated Benjamin that day before Israel. The sons of Israel annihilated the tribe of Benjamin, which took 25,100 casualties from their soldiers.

There are two verbs here that we will examine briefly: the first is the Qal imperfect of *nâgaph* (נָגַף) [pronounced *naw-GAHF*] which means *to strike, to strike down, to hit*. This word is often used when the subject defeats the object in battle. Strong's #5062 BDB #619. The second verb is the Hiphil imperfect of *shâchath* (שָׁחַת) [pronounced *shaw-KHAHTH*], which means *to decay, to go to ruin, to corrupt*. In the Hiphil, it means to cause themselves to fall into spiritual corruption. In the Hiphil, it means *to cause to fall, to cause to fall into spiritual corruption*. Strong's #7843 BDB #1007.

We do not know exactly what was going on prior to this. It is obvious that the intentions of the other tribes of Israel were noble and there is nothing in this chapter to indicate that there is some kind of a problem with the tribe of Judah. After the passing of Joshua, overt divine intervention occurs less and less often. You will note that even though God promised them victory, the Israelites did not enter into battle lightly and without strategy and tactics.

[<<Return to Chapter Outline>>](#)

[<<Return to the Chart Index>>](#)

Second Eyewitness Account of the Battle

And so saw sons of Benjamin that they were struck down and so they gave the man of Israel ground to Benjamin for they trusted unto the ambushers whom they set against Gibeah.

Judges
20:36

So the sons of Benjamin saw that they [the Israelites] were struck down and so the men of Israel gave ground to Benjamin, for they trusted in the ambushers whom they had set against Gibeah.

Israel made the tribe of Benjamin think that they were winning the battle again, and gave ground to them, knowing that their own men who were lying in wait would take up the slack.

This is the first verse which is not exactly clear, so we will see what others have done with it:

The Emphasized Bible

So the sons of Benjamin saw that they were smitten,—and that the men of Israel had given place to Benjamin, because they trusted to the liers in wait, whom they had set near Gibeah.

NASB

So the sons of Benjamin saw that they were defeated [lit., smitten]. When the men of Israel gave ground to Benjamin because they relied on the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah.

Young's Lit. Translation

And the sons of Benjamin see that they have been smitten—and the men of Israel give place to Benjamin, for they have trusted unto the ambush which they had set against Gibeah.

One of the reasons that we don't always fully understand what is in the Hebrew is that we tend to think chronologically and Hebrew writers did not think chronologically. Vv. 29–35 give us a view of the battle. Then vv. 36–44 give us a closer examination of the pivotal tactic of this battle, and then vv. 45–47 give us the casualty count. When I read something like this, I also think that there is another and more accurate option. The first writer may not have actually been in the battle or he may have been only with the group which retreated or the forces which flanked the soldiers of Benjamin. What we have in the next few verses is what almost appears to be another battle, but it is simply the battle from another vantage point. Here the writer gives the account from the viewpoint of those who attacked and burned down Gibeah. The person who pieced the book of Judges together may have taken two different reports and placed them back-to-back. Phinehas very likely put together the first few and the last few chapters of this book, and the middle of it was inserted at a later date from writings which were extant. In any event, this additional account gives us a lot more detail as well as what appears to be a more technical military vocabulary (you will note that we will stop more frequently to examine the vocabulary and grammar of the next dozen or so verses). An additional point of interest is that these two eyewitness accounts—if that is what they are—parallel the incidents found in Joshua 8; sometime in this chapter, we may stop and lay them out side-by-side (I have so far resisted the urge to quote the parallel verse from the book of Joshua).

What this verse simply says is that Israel gave ground to Benjamin. They acted as though they were losing and they fell back and fell back again, and the tribe of Benjamin advanced against them. All this verse says is that Israel allowed this to happen—that is, they gave ground to the army of Benjamin because they were trusting in the surprise of their own men who were lying in wait. The sons of Benjamin do not suspect a thing at this point in time.

And the ambushers made haste and so they made a vicious attack upon the Gibeah. And so drew out the ambushers and so they struck down all of the city to a mouth of a sword.

Judges
20:37

Then the ambush acted swiftly and they viciously attacked Gibeah. Then the ambush advanced and then struck down all the city with the mouth of the sword.

Then, those who were lying in wait quickly moved out and viciously attacked Gibeah, advancing and then striking down the entire city with the edge of the sword.

The first main verb in this verse is the Hiphil perfect of *chûsh* (חִישׁ) [pronounced *khoosh*], which sounds a little like our *whoosh* and it means *to make haste, to move swiftly, to act quickly*. Strong's #2363 BDB #301. What they did is the Qal imperfect of *pashaṭ* (פָּשַׁט) [pronounced *paw-SHAHT*], which means *to remove one's clothing, to flay*,

to remove the skin; in war, it is used to indicate a vicious attack, along the lines of flaying the skin off an animal. Strong's #6584 BDB #832.

The second verb is the Qal imperfect of *mâshak*^e (מָשַׁח) [pronounced *maw-SHAK*^e], which means, in battle, to advance, to march to. Strong's #4900 BDB #604. V. 36 more or less introduced those who were lying in ambush. This verse gives us an overview of the ambush, and the subsequent verses will cover the ambush in detail from the vantage point of the attack upon Gibeah. This would place this group along with the witness who wrote these verses directly behind the army of Benjamin at the city of Gibeah. If you approach this portion of Scripture from that perspective, what is written will make more sense.

And the signal was to a man of Israel with the ambushers, multiply to their making of a rising of the smoke out from the city.

Judges
20:38

Now the signal between the men of Israel and the ambush: their causing a rising of smoke out of the city.

The signal between the men of Israel and those waiting in ambush was to cause smoke to rise from Gibeah.

We have a problem in this verse which is due to a portion of the Hebrew being obscure, so let's look at a few translations first:

The Emphasized Bible

Now the appointed sign between the men of Israel and the liars in wait had been, —to cause a great cloud of smoke to ascend out of the city.

NASB

Now the appointed sign between the men of Israel and the men in ambush was that they should make a great cloud of smoke rise from the city.

Young's Lit. Translation

And there was the appointed sign to the men of Israel with the ambush—their causing to go up a great volume of smoke from the city.

The noun is the masculine singular of *môw'êd* (מוֹעֵד) [pronounced *moh-ẒADE*], which means a specific time, a pre-determined time, an appointed time, as we find in Gen. 1:14 17:21 18:14 21:2. It is apparently used to refer to a particular sign or signal as well. Strong's #4150 BDB #417.

Then we have, literally, to (or, for) a man of Israel with the ambushers. Although I could not find the justification for it in Gesenius or in BDB, *lâmed* + *ʿîm* (לִּי) [pronounced *geem*], which literally mean to...with; for...with; seem to have the meaning between...and. *Lâmed* = Strong's #non BDB #510. *ʿîm* = Strong's #5973 BDB #767.

The verb which is in question is the Hiphil imperative of *râ^bvâh* (רַבֵּה) [pronounced *raw^b-VAWH*], which means to become much, to become many, to multiply, to increase in population and in whatever else. In the Piel, it means to multiply, to increase, to acquire much. In the Hiphil, it means to cause to become many, to make much, to multiply, to increase, to enlarge, to cause to greatly increase. Strong's #7235 BDB #915. There is no reason for it to be an imperative and Owens suggests that it is a dittography from previous verb (that is, some of the syllables were written a second time in error). The REB also mentions that this is an unintelligible word. It is followed by a *lâmed* and the Hiphil infinitive construct (with a 3rd person masculine singular suffix) of *ʿâlâh* (עָלָה) [pronounced *gaw-LAWH*], which means to go up, to ascend, to rise. Here, in the Qal infinitive construct (in Job 5:26), it would mean a rising of, a coming up of, an ascending of, a climbing of, a springing up, a shooting forth of. In the Hiphil, it means to cause to go up, to lead up, to take up, to bring up. Strong's #5927 BDB #748. We would expect an infinitive to follow a main verb; we would not expect it to be here all by itself. In other words, we really do not know for certain what the text is here.

In terms of what this is saying, that is fairly straightforward—the signal that the ambushers have advanced successfully would be the burning of Gibeah. Apparently, with this many men in action, a very big sign is needed.

In all of the sources which I examined, there does not appear to be a single one which explains the sequence of the battle. Therefore, let me tell you what I think went down, as it is difficult to determine from the two accounts

what occurred when. (1) Some of Israel's crack troops went into hiding in a meadow area where one would not expect an ambush to come from. There appear to be two sets of men hiding. (2) Another group of Israelites attack Gibeah, but are quickly rebuffed and they begin to retreat. (3) The army of Benjamin moves out to quash the Israelites, leaving their city behind. (4) The first group of Israelites in hiding storm the city of Gibeah, no longer guarded, and set it on fire. (5) This is the signal for the second ambush to flank the over-confident Benjamites. (6) Those who are being pursued suddenly come to a stop. (7) The men of Benjamin are consequently trapped. In front of them are the troops that had lured them away from Gibeah; on their flank they are hit with a devastating ambush; and, when they look behind toward their city for refuge, it is on fire with Israelite troops advancing from that direction.

And so will turn a man of Israel in the battle and Benjamin had begun to strike the slain ones in a man of Israel about 30 a man that they said, "Certainly struck down, a striking down this to our faces as the battle the first."

Judges
20:39

Then the men of Israel turned in the battle and [the men of] Benjamin had began to assault the slain from the men of Israel—about 30 men—that they exclaimed, "Certainly they are utterly struck down before us as [was the case] in the first battle."

Then, during the battle, the men of Israel retreated, and the men of Benjamin began to kill about 30 from the men of Israel—those who were offered in sacrifice. Then the men of Benjamin exclaimed, "Certainly, they are completely defeated, just like the first battle."

Again, we will look at some other translations first:

The Emphasized Bible

So when the men of Israel turned in the battle,—and the Benjamites began to smite and slay of the sons of Israel, about thirty men, for they said, Yea! they are smitten before us, as in the first battle.

NASB

Then the men of Israel turned in the battle, and Benjamin began to strike and kill about thirty men of Israel, for they said, "Surely they are defeated before us, as in the first battle."

Young's Lit. Translation

And the men of Israel turn in battle, and Benjamin hath begun to smite the wounded among the the men of Israel, about thirty men, for they said, 'Surely they are utterly smitten before us, as at the first battle;

What we have is a sacrifice of a few for the many in battle. Israel turns and retreats, and the tribe of Benjamin begins to pursue them. We have an interesting phrase that follows this. The tribe of Benjamin first of all does the Hiphil perfect of *châlal* (חָלַל) [pronounced *khaw-LAHL*], which means, in the Hiphil, *to begin*. Strong's #2490 BDB #320. Then we have the Qal infinitive construct of *nâkâh* (נָכַח) [pronounced *naw-KAWH*] which means *smite, assault, hit, strike*. Strong #5221 BDB #645. Who they were assaulting are the masculine plural of *châlâl* (חָלַל) [pronounced *chaw-LAWL*], which means *slain ones, fatally wounded ones, wounded ones, pierced ones*. Strong's #2491 BDB #319. The men of Benjamin are *killing* the *slain ones*. This does not mean that these men are wounded and the sons of Benjamin are finishing the job. This means that this group of men realized that they were on a suicide mission—they were sacrificing their lives for the rest. While they were still alive, going into battle, they were already *dead ones*.

What the men of Benjamin exclaim begins first with the adverb *'akê* (אָכֵ) [pronounced *ahk*], which means *surely*. Strong's #389 BDB #36. This is followed by the Niphil infinitive absolute and then the Niphil participle of *nâgaph* (נָגַף) [pronounced *naw-GAHF*] which means *to strike, to strike down, to hit*. The Niphil means *to be struck down, to be smitten, to be hit*. It is the passive stem so the subject receives the action of the verb. Strong's #5062 BDB #619. A verb is repeated in the Hebrew often to show great emphasis. It is like using the adverb *certainly* twice. This is almost a giddy observation. The tribe of Benjamin realizes that they are defending, for all intents and purposes, some degenerate, creepy men. They are on the side of the unrighteous. They are surprised, to a certain extent, that the battle is going so well. They haven't inflicted too many casualties, but the battle had just begun.

And the signal began to rise from the city, a column of smoke. And so faced Benjamin behind them and, behold, went up a whole of the city the heaven-ward.

Judges
20:40

And the signal—a column of smoke—began to rise from the city. Then [the men of] Benjamin [turned and] faced behind them, and, observe, the entirety of the city went up toward the heaven.

Then the column of smoke, which was the signal to those in retreat, began to rise from the city. The men of Benjamin looked behind and saw their city going up in smoke.

This particular author—I am assuming that what we have here is an eyewitness report appended to the narrative—seems to do more with the language than did the writer of the rest of this chapter. What the men of Benjamin did is an interesting play on words. We first have the Qal imperfect of *pânâh* (פָּאַחַח) [pronounced *paw-NAWH*], which means *to turn, to turn away from, to turn toward, to turn one's face away from, to turn one's face to*. The key to this verb is the face and what the face does. Strong's #6437 BDB #815. The soldiers of Benjamin have been lured away from the city in their attack upon retreating Israel. They obviously did not realize that there was a legion of Israel hidden off to the side and near the city. Where they look is *ʿachar* (אַחֲרָיִם) [pronounced *ah-KHAHR*], which means *behind* when in reference to place. Strong's #310 BDB #29. With this is affixed the 3rd person suffix, so they are facing behind themselves.

For those who have studied the Old Testament with me, this entire story should sound rather familiar. When Israel first moved into the Land of Promise and began to conquer it, they became over confident at one point and attacked the city of Ai. They were defeated, as one of the men of Israel had kept items from a previous battle which had been dedicated to God. The spiritual lesson is that they were fighting this battle out of fellowship, in the flesh. They returned against Ai, with one group feigning retreat. Behind Ai were hidden more Israelites who, once all of the men had been drawn out of the city, burned the city to the ground. **Now Joshua arose early in the morning and gathered the people, and he went up with the elders of Israel before the people to Ai. Then all the people of war who were with him went up and drew near and they arrived in front of the city and camped on the north side of Ai. Now there was a valley between him and Ai. And he took about 5000 men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city. So they stationed the people, all the army that was on the north side of the city, and its rear guard on the west side of the city, and Joshua spent that night in the midst of the valley. And it came to pass when the king of Ai observed this, that the men of the city quickly arose and went out to meet Israel in battle, he and all his people at the appointed place before the desert plain. But he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city. And Joshua and all Israel pretended to be beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. And all the people who were in the city were called together to pursue them, and they pursued Joshua, and were drawn away from the city. So not a man was left in Ai or in Bethel who had not gone out after Israel, and they left the city unguarded and they pursued Israel. Then Jehovah said to Joshua, "Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand." So Joshua stretched out the javelin that was in his hand toward the city and the men in ambush arose quickly from their place and when he had stretched out his hand, they ran and entered the city and captured it; and they quickly set the city on fire. When the men of Ai turned back and looked, behold, the smoke of they city had ascended to the sky, and they had no place to flee, this way or that, for the people who had been fleeing to the wilderness turned against their pursuers. When Joshua and all Israel saw that the men in ambush had captured the city and that the smoke of the city was ascending, they turned back and struck down the men of Ai. And the others came out from the city to meet them, so that they were trapped in the midst of Israel, some on this side and some on that side; and they struck them down until no one was left of those who survived or escaped (Joshua 8:10–22).**

Now, I want you to understand the geography of all of this. Ai is at the northern edge of the territory of Benjamin; Gibeah is not too far south of Ai. Right after Joshua defeated Ai (Joshua 8), he went to the aide of the Gibeonites (Joshua 9). Therefore, we are probably five miles away from the site of Ai at this point (it had been burned to the ground). Very likely, what the case was, is that someone recalled the attack upon Ai and how successful it was (we probably have even some of the same soldiers who were with Joshua; and, if not them, then their sons). The plan worked once; they decided to use it again. The tribe of Benjamin, who lived not far from the ruins of Ai, did not even realize what was being done to them.

There is also a word in this verse which we don't find often: *kâlîyl* (כָּלִיֵּל) [pronounced *kaw-LEEL*], which means *the whole, the entirety*. Rotherham and another source suggest *the holocaust of the city*, referring back to its use in Deut. 33:10, where this adjective by itself is often rendered by many translators as *whole burnt offering*. However, *holocaust* is obviously not a transliteration of the Hebrew (or of the Greek). This is one of the times that the KJV translation is way off: they render this *flame*. Strong's #3632 BDB #483.

And a man of Israel turned and so were dismayed a man of Benjamin that they saw that touched them the evil.

Judges
20:41

And the men of Israel turned and the men of Benjamin were dismayed when they saw that the evil had touched them.

But then, when the men of Israel turned on them, the men of Benjamin were dismayed. When they realized that disaster had struck,...

The last verb in this verse is the Qal perfect of *nâgaʿ* (נָגַע) [pronounced *naw-GAHG*], which means *to touch, to reach out and touch*. This verb is very similar to another verb which means *to strike down, to kill*; this verb is not quite as strong, but there is a potential for harm indicated. Strong's #5060 BDB #619. The subject of the verb is the word *evil*. Suddenly, the men of Benjamin realize that they have been defeated. If the battle went badly for them, they could always return to their city, regroup, and fight from there. However, they were surrounded on three sides by Israel. The men that they thought they were defeating had suddenly turned on them. The men of Benjamin went into a psychological panic.

And so they turned for faces of a man of Israel unto a direction of the wilderness and the battle overtook them, and who from the cities¹⁴ destroying them in a midst of him.

Judges
20:42

So they turned [away] from before the men of Israel toward the direction of the wilderness, but the battle overtook them, and those from the city [began] destroying them in its midst.

...they turned before the men of Israel and ran toward the desert-wilderness. However, they were caught up in the battle, and the men of Israel who came from the city began to slaughter them.

The men of Israel in front of them who they were pursuing, stopped and began running in their direction. Behind them, they saw their city going up in flames with the men of Israel coming from that direction. The men of Israel were the ones who came out of the city after setting fire to it. Then they began to slaughter the Benjamites. The sons of Benjamin then turned toward the wilderness, which stretches from Bethel to Jericho, and tried to retreat in that direction, but they were enveloped by Israel in battle. The Israelites who had originally attacked and then feigned retreat were in front of them. The Israelites who had stormed the city and began to burn it were behind them. To the west (see v. 43) were the others in ambush who flanked them. *In its midst* refers to the *desert-wilderness* rather than to the Benjamite troops.

Since v. 42 is the last verse which parallels Joshua 8, let me place these passages side-by-side:

¹⁴ The Hebrew is plural, as is the LXXb; the Greek of the LXXa is apparently singular.

The Parallels Between Joshua 8 and Judges 20

<p>And you will do to Ai and her king just as you did to Jericho and her king, except that you may take from her possessions and cattle. Position yourselves behind the city in order to ambush it.”...And then he commanded them, saying, “Listen up, you lie in wait behind the city, but not too far from the city; and all of you be on red alert standby.</p>	<p>Joshua 8:2, 4</p>	<p>Judges 20:29</p>	<p>And so Israel set [men to] ambush around Gibeah.</p>
<p>And then all of the men in the city were summoned to pursue them; and they were thus drawn away from the city in to pursue after Joshua.</p>	<p>Joshua 8:16</p>	<p>Judges 20:31</p>	<p>And the sons of Benjamin went out to meet the people. They were drawn away out [away] from the city and they began to strike down [those] from the people—wounded ones—as [they had done] previously, in the highways (one which goes up into Bethel and one [which] goes up toward Gibeah in the open country)—[they had struck down] about thirty men of Israel].</p>
<p>And so it came to pass when the king of Ai saw, the men of the city quickly prepared, arose early and went out to meet Israel in battle, he and all his people before the Arabah. Furthermore, he was unaware of the ambush from behind the city.</p>	<p>Joshua 8:14</p>	<p>Judges 20:34</p>	<p>Then they came in out in front of Gibeah, 10,000 chosen men from all Israel. The battle was vehement and they did not know that the calamity [or, the evil one] was reaching out against them.</p>
<p>So Joshua and his soldiers pretended to be defeated before the men of Ai and fled into the wilderness.</p>	<p>Joshua 8:15</p>	<p>Judges 20:36</p>	<p>So the sons of Benjamin saw that they [the Israelites] were struck down and so the men of Israel gave ground to Benjamin, for they trusted in the ambushers whom they had set against Gibeah.</p>
<p>And those in hiding behind Ai rose up quickly from where they were just as Joshua stretched out his hand; and they quickly entered the city, capturing it, and then they burned the city with fire.</p>	<p>Joshua 8:19</p>	<p>Judges 20:37</p>	<p>Then the ambush acted swiftly and they viciously attacked Gibeah. Then the ambush advanced and then struck down all the city with the mouth of the sword.</p>
<p>And so the men of Ai turned [or, looked] behind them and so they saw and, behold, went up smoke of the city towards the heavens and there was not within them hands to flee this way or that and the people the fleeing ones [into] the wilderness were turned back against the pursuers.</p>	<p>Joshua 8:20</p>	<p>Judges 20:38, 40</p>	<p>Now the signal between the men of Israel and the ambush: their causing a rising of smoke out of the city....And the signal—a column of smoke—began to rise from the city. Then [the men of] Benjamin [turned and] faced behind them, and, observe, the entirety of the city went up toward the heaven.</p>

The Parallels Between Joshua 8 and Judges 20			
And Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambushers had seized the city and the smoke of the city ascended, and so they turned back and they struck down men of the Ai.	Joshua 8:21	Judges 20:41	And the men of Israel turned and the men of Benjamin were dismayed when they saw that the evil had touched them.
And so it came to pass as Israel completed the execution of the men of Ai in both the field and in the wilderness where they had pursued them. And all of them fell by the edge of the sword until they had all be finished off. Then Israel returned to Ai and was caused to strike her down with the edge of the sword.	Joshua 8:24	Judges 20:42	So they turned [away] from before the men of Israel toward the direction of the wilderness, but the battle overtook them, and those from the city [began] destroying them in their midst.

[<<Return to Chapter Outline>>](#)

[<<Return to the Chart Index>>](#)

The reason that I place these passages side-by-side is because there are those who are detractors of Scripture who either allege that one incident did not happen or that this is just some oral tradition which was written down twice. With these passages next to each other, we can see that the explanation is much simpler: we do not have one author copying the idea of another author, but a general who is also knowledgeable about the Word who uses the strategy and tactics of Joshua with some modification.

They surrounded Benjamin [or, those surrounding Benjamin]; they pursued him [to] a resting place. They trod him down as far as a front of Gibeah from a rising of a sun.

Judges
20:43

They surround the Benjamites and they pursued them. With ease, they trod him down as far as in front of Gibeah to the sunrise.

Those surrounding the Benjamites pursued them. They easily trod the Benjamites underfoot from the front of Gibeah all the way toward the east.

As you certain have noticed, most of the sentences in Hebrew begin with a wâw consecutive or a wâw conjunction. This verse does not; however, the Greek Septuagint has the equivalent kaí to begin this sentence. The first verb is the 3rd person plural, Piel perfect of kâthar (כָּתַר) [pronounced *kaw-THAHR*], which means *to surround*. Strong's #3803 BDB #509. LXX a and LXX b both render this differently and it is possible that this was supposed to be *cut down*. I wouldn't be surprised that this portion of the verse was lost altogether, and that we could even have a 3rd person plural, participle, making it act like a noun (the lack of wâw consecutives on both verbs is quite unusual). On the other hand, Barnes suggests that this is more poetical than narrative (poetry in Hebrew does not generally have near as many wâw consecutives or conjunctions), and that this is the excerpt of a song or a poem. Since we really do not know, we would certainly not want to base any key doctrines on this verse. Keeping this in mind, here are the more literal translations:

The Emphasized Bible

...they hemmed in the Benjamites, they pursued them, with ease trode they them down, —as far as over against Gibeah towards sunrise.

NASB

They surrounded Benjamin, pursued them without rest *and* trod them down opposite Gibeah toward the east [lit., sunrise].

Young's Lit. Translation

...they have compassed the Benjamites—they have pursued them—with ease they have trodden them down till over-against Gibeah, at the sunrise.

After *they pursued him*, we have the feminine singular noun *m^enûwchâh* (מנוחה) [pronounced *m^e-noo-KHAH*], which means *rest, resting place, place of rest, quietness*. Strong's #4496 BDB #629. Two sources suggest that this might be a proper noun here, indicating how far away they were pursued. Obviously, Rotherham and Young both render this *with ease*. Luckily we don't have to base too many doctrines upon this verse. The clear indication is that the army of Israel destroyed the army of Benjamin.

[<<Return to Chapter Outline>>](#)

[<<Return to the Chart Index>>](#)

Final Stats and Disposition of Benjamin

And so fell from Benjamin 18,000 a man, all of them a man of valor. Judges 20:44 **And 18,000 men from Benjamin fell—all men of valor.**

The army of Benjamin took 18,000 casualties, all military types.

There were 18,000 soldiers who fell in this battle. They are described as a man of the masculine singular of *chayil* (חַיִל) [pronounced *CHAH-yil*] and it means *efficiency, army, strength, valour, power, might*. Strong's #2428 BDB #298. What was likely the case is that there are men on detail assigned to count the bodies and this is approximately how many fell right in front of the city of Gibeah.

And so they faced and so they fled the wilderness-ward unto the rock of Rimmon. And so they glean him in the highways 5000 a man. And so they pursued hard after them to Gidom and so they struck down from them 2000 a man. Judges 20:45 **And they turned and fled toward the wilderness-desert, to the rock of Rimmon. Then they cut them down—5000 men—in the highways. They also followed after them to Gidom and struck down 2000 men of them.**

Many turned and fled toward the desert-wilderness, to the rock of Rimmon. Israel cut down 5000 of their men in the highways and followed some of them to Gidom and killed 2000 of their men there.

The third verb in this verse is the Poel imperfect of *ʿâlal* (עָלַל) [pronounced *aw-LAHL* or *gaw-LAHL*], which means *to glean, to harvest*; and metaphorically *to mock, to cut down*. Strong's #5953 BDB #760. The Poel is a different form of the Piel. In other words, there were immediate casualties of about 18,000. However, enough of them got away so that Israel pursued them, striking down an additional 5000 in the highways and 2000 who made it all the way to Gidom. We have no clue as to the exact whereabouts or history of Gidom as it is only mentioned in this passage.

The *Rock of Rimmon* is found here, in v. 47 and in Judges 21:13. This is no relation to the Rimmon mentioned in Joshua 15:32, which is too far south. *Rimmon* means *pomegranate*, which apparently could be found throughout Israel. ZPEB tells us that this is a high rock about 6 miles north-northeast of Gibeah, which can be seen from all directions. It has ravines on the north, south and west sides, and is a bastion of caves, providing long-term protection for the men who managed to get that far¹⁵.

And so he is all falling from Benjamin 25,000 a man drawing sword in the day the that all of them a man of valor. Judges 20:46 **And it was [that] all who fell that day from Benjamin [were] 25,000 who drew the sword—all of them men of valor .**

And it came to pass on that day that a total of 25,000 Benjamite soldiers were killed—all military types.

¹⁵ Information from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; ©1976; Vol. 5, p. 119.

Now, there are some who would jump to their feet at this point and call *contradiction*. What we find here is more of a testimonial to the respect that scribes had for God's Word rather than a contradiction between this verse and v. 35, where we have 25,100 Benjamite casualties. Any scribe could have *fixed* this error, but they did not over a period of 3000 years. Furthermore, it is not a discrepancy nor is it an error.¹⁶ As I mentioned before, there seems to be two separate reports of the battle, this latter one appears to be an actual field report. Now, first of all, you don't think that *exactly* 5000 men fell on the highway, do you? It might have been 4,858 or 5,093; the observer rounded everything to the nearest thousand. However, the first observer rounded everything to the nearest 100. We do this all this time in real life. Someone might measure the slab of my house to be 40' x 55' and put that information into some report. Then I might measure this and come up with 39.8' X 55.2'. Was he lying? Certainly not—his measurement was less accurate than mine. Was my measurement absolutely correct? No; what most people do not realize is that this is no such thing as an exact measurement. When we see numbers, because of our past dealings with mathematics (more precisely, with arithmetic), we tend to think in terms of right and wrong. However, there is no such thing as correctly measuring anything. We can only measure with greater accuracy until the accuracy becomes meaningless.¹⁷ All we have here two different estimates—although there could have certainly been a fairly accurate head-count of the dead, there was not, and we are given two figures, both of which are obviously rounded and neither of which is represented as perfectly accurate. Although God the Holy Spirit is the Co-author of Scripture, this does not mean that all human conventions are waved. Some people when they write, speak metaphorically. The author of this verse speaks in the previous verse of gleaning the Benjamites along the highway. This does mean that the Benjamites were ears of corn? Of course not! The Bible can be the Word of God and still written by men and subject to the normal conventions of literature. When the approximation for Pi (π) in Scripture is given as 3, that is not incorrect, no more than a child using $\pi = 3.14$ is incorrect, no more than an engineer using $\pi = 3.1415927$ is incorrect¹⁸.

Given all this, there are still about a thousand Benjamites unaccounted for. Recall that there were approximately 26,700 Benjamite soldiers, of which 25,100 were killed in battle and 600 escaped to the Rock of Rimmon. However, the casualty count was given for the third day of battle (see v. 35 which says on *that day* and the context of our passage does not have to include the first two battles) . Therefore, we have another 1000 men who died either in battle in the first two days or escaped in scattered, small groups. Again, there is no contradiction; nor is there any requirement to give some goofy interpretation to any passage in order to explain what happened to the 1000 men.

And so faced and so they the wilderness-ward unto a rock of the Rimmon 600 a man and so they lived in a Rock of Rimmon four months.

Judges
20:47

And 600 men turned and fled to the desert-wilderness to the rock of Rimmon and they lived in the Rock of Rimmon [for] four months.

There were 600 Benjamites who had turned and fled into the desert-wilderness who managed to get to the Rock of Rimmon where they hid out for four months.

There were some Benjamites who escaped and they are named here. How this was determined is not given; I would reasonably suppose that it was a guess on the part of one of the observers who recorded this information. What is not explained here is how they knew that the Benjamites remained there for four months, but that will be explained in the next chapter. However, these 600 men will be the seed which will begin the Benjamin tribe. Apart from them, there would be no tribe of Benjamin.

¹⁶ This is apart from the large numbers, which I am undecided on.

¹⁷ If I told you that we were 93,000,000 miles from the sun, that would make sense. Now, if I told you how far we are from the sun in terms of the nearest mile, that would no longer make sense, as such accuracy makes no sense for two continually moving astronomical bodies.

¹⁸ I mention this as I have read one person who argued that the Bible was incorrect to use 3 for the value of π . People who argue vehemently and passionately that the Bible is inaccurate or contradictory for things like this need to get a life.

The Rock of Rimmon has been identified with Rammon, which is located on a high rock on a conical chalk hill, about 3 miles east of Bethel, just outside the northern border of Benjamin. This hill can be seen from all directions and has a plethora of caves in it.¹⁹ This area is only mentioned in these two chapters of the Bible.

And a man of Israel turned back unto sons of Benjamin and so they struck them down to a mouth of a sword from a city an entire as far as beasts as far as all the found ones, also all of the cities the found ones they set in fire.

Judges
20:48

Then the men of Israel turned back toward the sons of Benjamin and they struck them down with the mouth of the sword from the cities, even men and animals, as far as all those found. They also set on fire the cities they found.

Then the men of Israel turned around toward the territory of Benjamin and began to strike them down indiscriminately with the edge of the sword all that were found in their cities, men and animals both. Furthermore, they set many of these cities on fire.

Let's glance at a couple translations:

The Emphasized Bible

Thus the men of Israel turned against the sons of Benjamin and smote them with the edge of the sword, beginning with the city, each and every one down to the beast even to every one that was met with,—moreover all the cities they came to they set on fire.

NASB

The men of Israel then turned back against the sons of Benjamin and struck them with the edge of the sword, both the entire city with the cattle and all that they found; they also set on fire all the cities which they found.

Young's Lit. Translation

And the men of Israel have turned back unto the sons of Benjamin, and smite them by the mouth of the sword out of the city,—men unto cattle, unto all that is found; also all the cities which are found they have sent into fire.

Israel observed that about 600 Benjamite soldiers escaped to the Rock of Rimmon, and they did not pursue them further. They *turned back* from the Rock of Rimmon, which is just outside northern Benjamin and went back into the territory of Benjamin and proceeded to go from city to city, killing both men and cattle, and then setting fire to the city. The destruction which Israel heaped upon the tribe of Benjamin was not unlike that done to the inhabitants of Jericho several decades previous. **And the Israelites put under the ban [that is, destroyed] everything in Jericho, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword** (Joshua 6:21).

After the first occurrence of the word *city*, we have another problem with the text; it reads *entire* (as in *the entire city*) but it may refer to *man*, as the words are very similar. My Greek Bible renders this word as a proper noun, making it the city of M^ethôm. It is clear that we have corrupt text here and there in this chapter and making a dogmatic judgment is not possible. I would tend to go along with Young at this point.

Something else that we should mention: God did not give the order for these tribes of Israel to go throughout the territory of Benjamin and kill all of the Benjamites, remaining men, and then the women and children. How many men did not go out to war with Benjamin because their cause was not just? This is never spoken of. We have a civil war—the tribe of Benjamin is in the wrong, mostly—but there is a reasonable possibility that some men of Benjamin did not participate.²⁰ It is reasonable to suppose that some of their women and children did not go along with this program as well. No one stops to ask God what to do at this point. We have the armies of all Israel, only a few of which have seen any real fighting, and many of them are itching to fight. So they go out and completely destroy the remaining people of the tribe of Benjamin (an act they will regret tearfully in the next chapter, by the way). My point is that these men do not appear as though they know what they are doing. Keil and Delitzsch: *...feelings of personal revenge had disturbed the righteous cause in consequence of the defeat which they had twice sustained at the hands of the Benjaminites, and had carried away the warriors into a war of extermination, which*

¹⁹ Paraphrased from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; ©1976; Vol. 5, p. 119.

²⁰ Do not mistake this as a call for pacifism. These men of Benjamin who resisted the law of the land were rebels.

*was neither commanded by the law nor justified by the circumstances, and had brought about the destruction of a whole tribe from the twelve tribes of the covenant nation with the exception of a small vanishing remnant*²¹.

We need to stand back from this for a moment and recognize what has occurred. A significant number of the men of Benjamin in Jerusalem were ready to gang rape a Levite male; since they were prevented from doing this, they gang raped his mistress instead, leaving her to die at the door step of his host. He carves her up and sends pieces of her body along with an explanation as to what happened to the various tribes of Israel and they are outraged. They went to the Benjamites and requested the guilty parties. The tribe of Benjamin refused to give these degenerates up. Israel then chose to make war against the tribe of Benjamin, a decision which God sanctioned. Now, since God approves this, then one principle that we can get from this is that it is not noble nor is it right to cover for your friends or family no matter what. The degeneracy of the men of this town was well-known (see Judges 19:16, 20). What they did could not be ignored or covered up. The men of Benjamin who stood by them in support not only condoned this behavior, but then became participants in the crime when they would not allow for justice to be done. It is obvious that friendship and family are important in Scripture—however, there are higher laws. Some criminals who tout some form of *criminal honor* will be the first ones to rat you out. What they mean is they don't want *you* to turn *them* in—that is their concept of honor.

Before we move on to the next chapter, we ought to stop and take a look at the **Doctrine of the Tribe of Benjamin**.

[<<Return to Outline>>](#)

[<<Return to the Chart Index>>](#)

²¹ Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 331.