

Judges 20

Introduction – The Levite was zealous for the unity of Israel, but not at the expense of his own honest confession and repentance. He represents Israel, who also begins with a zealous desire for vengeance, but refuses to acknowledge her own sin as well.

A Quick Review (vv1-11) – Twelve pieces of a murdered concubine declare that Israel has been torn apart by sin and unfaithfulness. There is a Canaanite/Sodom-like city that is made up of Benjamites. All Israel (Dan-Laish, northernmost city and Beersheba, the southernmost) gathers as ‘one man’ (v1, 8, 11) in full fighting force to “*repay all the vileness.*” Knowing the story (from chapter 19), we should be unimpressed at the Levite’s lack of owning his sin. Nevertheless, the perverted men have transgressed in such a way worthy of death.

All Except One (vv12-17) – While all the rest of Israel has gathered together in Mizpah, a land in Benjamin, the tribe of Benjamin remains absent. An offer of peace is made to them if they will turn over the perverted men, following the laws of war in Deut 20:10-11. But Benjamin refuses and instead prepares for battle, choosing blood-relations over covenant-keeping. Jesus warns us about such false discipleship (Luke 14:26).

First and Second Battles (vv18-25) – The campaign against Benjamin, the neo-Canaanite, begins just as the battles against the Canaanites began in Judges 1. Judah is selected to go first. Two battles and two terrible losses later, we are reminded of the battle of Ai in Joshua. The problem is not that the battle is sinful, but that Israel herself is sinful. A ‘tithe’ of the 400,000 fighting men is killed in these two battles and weeping before the Lord doesn’t seem to make any difference.

Point One – It’s not enough to simply be in the right. It’s not enough to be a member of the ‘Moral Majority.’ It’s not enough to be against homosexuality or abortion or feminism or evolution. It’s not enough to be right about education or government tyranny or biblical liturgy or the doctrines of grace. We must first be right with God ourselves. Jesus warns us of such hypocrisy (Luke 6:39-42). The one who brings discipline must not only have the right doctrine. He or she must also have the right heart (Gal 6:1). These principles apply to the family, to the church, and to the state, for each one falls under the jurisdiction of God’s Word. Judgment will always begin in the household of God

The Lord Purifies His People (vv26-28) – This time there is weeping and fasting. This time there is an ascension offering and a peace offering. The fasting portrays their need for God over anything else. Their ascension offering is the atonement granted by a substitute, wholly offered to God. Their peace offering is the communion meal when fellowship is restored. The Lord purifies and nourishes His people. The covenant with Yahweh is renewed. Now they are ready for battle. Zealous Phinehas is there. His presence not only helps to date this event, but points us to a different priest, one who is zealous for God’s name, not his own (Num 25).

The Battle of Benjamin (vv29-36) – Remembering the battle of Ai, we see the same strategy in place, as the ‘new’ Israel sees victory against the spirit of the Canaanites. More details come later. We are given a ‘theological’ summary of the battle in verse 35, “*The Lord defeated Benjamin before Israel.*”

Important Details (vv36b-48) – Drawing the Benjamites out of the city, an ambush is brought upon Gibeah and it is burnt up (v40), the smoke rising to heaven as a sign of complete destruction and ‘holy war’ before the Lord. There is a relentless pursuit of the fleeing Benjamites, even the 5,000 are “*gleaned*” (“*cut down*”, v45). This is the same rare word used, translated “*abused*” with regard to the concubine in 19:25. In both situations, the idea of a brutal, awful, and complete ‘harvest’ is in mind. Her life was cut down, and Gibeah is cut down. A small remnant finds refuge in the battle at the rock of Rimmon and stays there four months. Besides them, the destruction is total – men, women, beasts, and cities fall under the wrath of Israel, the wrath of the Lord (remember v35).

Conclusions – God vindicates His name and purifies His people in His sovereign administration of justice.

Facing God’s Wrath – Every individual and every people group will face God’s wrath for their sin and rebellion. They will either face it in an accepted Substitute who dies in their place, or they will face God’s wrath on their own. Gibeah, like Sodom, faced God’s wrath and was destroyed with fire. God uses hail-fire from heaven and God uses civil-war battles to accomplish His justice.

People of God Who Act Like Canaanites – Christians must hear this warning as well. You are not protected by your church-membership from the wrath of God. Jesus makes His warnings very clear in Matt 7:21-23. Do not fall into the sin of presumption. “*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?*” (1 Cor 6:9). Paul does not give that warning to the unbelieving world, but to the church.

But We Must See the Grace of God – Benjamin was judged. But Israel was saved. She was restored to God by His grace. And this is what He is doing now in Christ. He provides atonement for your sin, invites you to His table, and sends you out to partake of His victory. He disciplines His people, and He gives them victory. Receive His Word, His promises, His warnings, repent and believe. Follow Christ to His cross, to His resurrection, to His ascension, to His triumph, until His last enemy falls and His church is holy and blameless at last. You can only follow by a faith that God gives, and that faith is always accompanied with a zeal for His holy name.