
JUDGES 20:1 Then all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was assembled as one man, from Dan even to Beersheba, with the land of Gilead, to the LORD at Mizpah.

The heads of the eleven tribes come before the Lord in Mizpeh, and examine the Levite relative to the murder of his wife, who gives a simple narrative of the whole affair, Jdg 20:1-7. They unanimously resolve to avenge the wrong, and make provision for a campaign against the Benjamites, Jdg 20:8-11. They desire the Benjamites to deliver up the murderers; they refuse, and prepare for battle, having assembled an army of twenty-six thousand seven hundred men, Jdg 20:12-16. The rest of the Israelites amount to four hundred thousand, who, taking counsel of God, agree to send the tribe of Judah against the Benjamites, Jdg 20:17, Jdg 20:18. They attack the Benjamites, and are routed with the loss of twenty-two thousand men, Jdg 20:19-21. They renew the battle next day, and are discomfited with the loss of eighteen thousand men, Jdg 20:22-25. They weep, fast, and pray, and offer sacrifices; and again inquire of the Lord, who promises to deliver Benjamin into their hands, Jdg 20:26-28. They concert plans, attack the Benjamites, and rout them, killing twenty-five thousand one hundred men, and destroy the city of Gibeah, Jdg 20:29-37. A recapitulation of the different actions in which they were killed, Jdg 20:38-46. Six hundred men escape to the rock Rimmon, Jdg 20:47. The Israelites destroy all the cities of the Benjamites, Jdg 20:48.

Verse 1

Unto the Lord in Mizpeh - This city was situated on the confines of Judah and Benjamin, and is sometimes attributed to the one, sometimes to the other. It seems that there was a place here in which the Lord was consulted, as well as at Shiloh; in 1 Maccabees 3:46, we read, In Maspha was the place where they prayed aforetime in Israel. These two passages cast light on each other. Some think that Shiloh is meant, because the ark was there; but the phrase before the Lord may signify no more than meeting in the name of God to consult him, and make prayer and supplication. Wherever God's people are, there is God himself; and it ever was true, that wherever two or three were assembled in his name, he was in the midst of them.

JUDGES 20:2 The chiefs of all the people, even of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand footmen who drew sword.

Verse 2

The chief of all the people - The corners פּוֹנֵי pinnoth; for as the corner-stones are the strength of the walls, so are the chiefs the strength of the people. Hence Christ is called the chief corner-stone.

In the assembly of the people of God - The Septuagint translate, And all the tribes of Israel stood up before the face of the Lord, εν εκκλησιᾳ του λαου του Θεου, in the Church of the people of God. Here was a Church, though there was no priest; for, as Tertullian says, Ubi tres, ecclesia est, licet laici; "Wheresoever three are gathered together in the name of the Lord, there is a Church, although there be none but the laity."

JUDGES 20:3 (Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.) The children of Israel said, "Tell us, how did this wickedness happen?"

Verse 3

Tell us, how was this wickedness? - They had heard before, by the messengers he sent with the fragments of his wife's body; but they wish to hear it, in full council, from himself.

JUDGES 20:4 The Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered, "I came into Gibeah that belongs to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to lodge.

JUDGES 20:5 The men of Gibeah rose against me, and surrounded the house by night. They thought to have slain me, and they forced my concubine, and she is dead.

JUDGES 20:6 I took my concubine, and cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel; for they have committed lewdness and folly in Israel.

JUDGES 20:7 Behold, you children of Israel, all of you, give here your advice and counsel."

JUDGES 20:8 All the people arose as one man, saying, "None of us will go to his tent, neither will any of us turn to his house.

Verse 8

We will not any of us go to his tent - We will have satisfaction for this wickedness before we return home.

JUDGES 20:9 But now this is the thing which we will do to Gibeah: we will go up against it by lot;

JUDGES 20:10 and we will take ten men of one hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and one hundred of one thousand, and a thousand out of ten thousand, to get food for the people, that they may do, when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, according to all the folly that they have worked in Israel."

Verse 10

Ten men of a hundred - Expecting that they might have a long contest, they provide sutlers for the camp; and it is probable that they chose these tenths by lot.

JUDGES 20:11 So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, knit together as one man.

JUDGES 20:12 The tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What wickedness is this that is happen among you?

JUDGES 20:13 Now therefore deliver up the men, the base fellows, who are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel."

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

Verse 13

Deliver us the men - Nothing could be fairer than this. They wish only to make the murderers answerable for their guilt.

Benjamin would not hearken - Thus making their whole tribe partakers of the guilt of the men of Gibeah. By not delivering up those bad men, they in effect said: "We will stand by them in what they have done, and would have acted the same part had we been present." This proves that the whole tribe was excessively depraved.

JUDGES 20:14 The children of Benjamin gathered themselves together out of the cities to Gibeah, to go out to battle against the children of Israel.

JUDGES 20:15 The children of Benjamin were numbered on that day out of the cities twenty-six thousand men who drew the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, who were numbered seven hundred chosen men.

Verse 15

Twenty and six thousand - Some copies of the Septuagint have twenty-three thousand, others twenty-five thousand. The Vulgate has this latter number; the Complutensian Polyglot and Josephus have the same.

JUDGES 20:16 Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men left-handed; everyone could sling stones at a hair-breadth, and not miss.

Verse 16

Left-handed - They were ambidexters - could use the right hand and the left with equal ease and effect. See the note on Jdg 3:15.

Could sling stones at a hair - and not miss - $\alpha\upsilon\tau\eta\ \lambda\acute{\iota}\omega$ velo yachati, and not sin: $\kappa\alpha\iota\ \sigma\upsilon\kappa\ \epsilon\lambda\alpha\mu\alpha\rho\tau\alpha\nu\omicron\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$; Sept. Here we have the true import of the term sin; it signifies simply to miss the mark, and is well translated in the New Testament by $\acute{\alpha}\mu\alpha\rho\tau\alpha\nu\omega$, from α , negative, and $\mu\alpha\rho\tau\omega$, to hit the mark. Men miss the mark of true happiness in aiming at sensual gratifications; which happiness is to be found only in the possession and enjoyment of the favor of God, from whom their passions continually lead them. He alone hits the mark, and ceases from sin, who attains to God through Christ Jesus.

It is worthy of remark that the Persian khuta kerden, which literally signifies to sin or mistake, is used by the Mohammedans to express to miss the mark.

The sling was a very ancient warlike instrument, and, in the hands of those who were skilled in the use of it, it produced astonishing effects. The inhabitants of the isles called Baleares, now Majorca

and Minorca, were the most celebrated slingers of antiquity. They did not permit their children to break their fast till they had struck down the bread they were to eat from the top of a pole, or some distant eminence. They had their name Baleares from the Greek word βαλλειν to dart, cast, or throw.

Concerning the velocity of the ball out of the sling, there are strange and almost incredible things told by the ancients. The leaden ball, when thus projected, is said to have melted in its course. So Ovid, Met. lib. ii.. ver. 726.

Obstupuit forma Jove natus: et aethere pendens

Non secus exarsit, quam cum balearica plumbum

Funda jacit; volat illud, et incandescit eundo;

Et, quos non habuit, sub nubibus invenit ignes.

Hermes was fired as in the clouds he hung;

So the cold bullet that, with fury slung

From Balearic engines, mounts on high,

Glow in the whirl, and burns along the sky.

Dryden.

This is not a poetic fiction; Seneca, the philosopher, in lib. iii. Quaest. Natural., c. 57, says the same thing: Sic liquescit excussa glans funda, et adritu aeris velut igne distillat; "Thus the ball projected from the sling melts, and is liquefied by the friction of the air, as if it were exposed to the action of fire." I have often, by the sudden and violent compression of the air, produced fire; and by this alone inflamed tinder, and lighted a match. Vegetius de Re Militari, lib. ii., cap. 23, tells us that slingers could in general hit the mark at six hundred feet distance. Funditores scopas-pro signo ponebant; ita ut Sexcentos Pedes removerentur a signo-signum saepius tangerent. These things render credible what is spoken here of the Benjamite slingers.

JUDGES 20:17 The men of Israel, besides Benjamin, were numbered four hundred thousand men who drew sword: all these were men of war.

JUDGES 20:18 The children of Israel arose, and went up to Bethel, and asked counsel of God; and they said, "Who shall go up for us first to battle against the children of Benjamin?"

The LORD said, "Judah first."

Verse 18

Went up to the house of God - Some think that a deputation was sent from Shiloh, where Phinehas the high priest was, to inquire, not concerning the expediency of the war, nor of its success, but which of the tribes should begin the attack. Having so much right on their side, they had no doubt of the justice of their cause. Having such a superiority of numbers, they had no doubt of success. See the note on Jdg 20:1.

And the Lord said, Judah - But he did not say that they should conquer.

JUDGES 20:19 The children of Israel rose up in the morning, and encamped against Gibeah.

JUDGES 20:20 The men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin; and the men of Israel set the battle in array against them at Gibeah.

JUDGES 20:21 The children of Benjamin came out of Gibeah, and destroyed down to the ground of the Israelites on that day twenty-two thousand men.

Verse 21

Destroyed down to the ground - twenty-two thousand men - That is, so many were left dead on the field of battle.

JUDGES 20:22 The people, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves, and set the battle again in array in the place where they set themselves in array the first day.

JUDGES 20:23 The children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until evening; and they asked of the LORD, saying, "Shall I again draw near to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother?"

The LORD said, "Go up against him."

Verse 23

Go up against him - It appears most evident that the Israelites did not seek the protection of God. They trusted in the goodness of their cause and in the multitude of their army. God humbled them, and delivered them into the hands of their enemies, and showed them that the race was not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.

JUDGES 20:24 The children of Israel came near against the children of Benjamin the second day.

JUDGES 20:25 Benjamin went out against them out of Gibeah the second day, and destroyed down to the ground of the children of Israel again eighteen thousand men; all these drew the sword.

JUDGES 20:26 Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came to Bethel, and wept, and sat there before the LORD, and fasted that day until evening; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.

Verse 26

And wept - Had they humbled themselves, fasted, and prayed, and offered sacrifices at first, they had not been discomfited.

And fasted that day until even - This is the first place where fasting is mentioned as a religious ceremony, or as a means of obtaining help from God. And in this case, and many since, it has been powerfully effectual. At present it is but little used; a strong proof that self-denial is wearing out of fashion.

JUDGES 20:27 The children of Israel asked of the LORD (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days,

JUDGES 20:28 and Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days), saying, "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease?" The LORD said, "Go up; for tomorrow I will deliver him into your hand."

Verse 28

Phinehas, the son of Eleazar - This was the same Phinehas who is mentioned Num 25:7, and consequently these transactions must have taken place shortly after the death of Joshua.

JUDGES 20:29 Israel set ambushes all around Gibeah.

Verse 29

Israel set liers in wait - Though God had promised them success, they knew they could expect it only in the use of the proper means. They used all prudent precaution, and employed all their military skill.

JUDGES 20:30 The children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and set themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times.

JUDGES 20:31 The children of Benjamin went out against the people, and were drawn away from the city; and they began to strike and kill of the people, as at other times, in the highways, of which one goes up to Bethel, and the other to Gibeah, in the field, about thirty men of Israel.

JUDGES 20:32 The children of Benjamin said, "They are struck down before us, as at the first." But the children of Israel said, "Let us flee, and draw them away from the city to the highways."

Verse 32

Let us - draw them from the city - They had two reasons for this:

1. They had placed an ambuscade behind Gibeah, which was to enter and burn the city as soon as the Benjamites had left it.
2. It would seem that the slingers, by being within the city and its fortifications, had great advantage against the Israelites by their slings, whom they could not annoy with their swords, unless they got them to the plain country.

JUDGES 20:33 All the men of Israel rose up out of their place, and set themselves in array at Baal Tamar: and the ambushers of Israel broke out of their place, even out of Maareh Geba.

Verse 33

Put themselves in array at Baal-tamar - The Israelites seem to have divided their army into three divisions; one was at Baal-tamar, a second behind the city in ambush, and the third skirmished with the Benjamites before Gibeah.

JUDGES 20:34 There came over against Gibeah ten thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and the battle was severe; but they didn't know that evil was close on them.

JUDGES 20:35 The LORD struck Benjamin before Israel; and the children of Israel destroyed of Benjamin that day twenty-five thousand one hundred men: all these drew the sword.

Verse 35

Twenty and five thousand and a hundred - As the Benjamites consisted only of twenty-six thousand and seven hundred slingers; or, as the Vulgate, Septuagint, and others read, twenty-five thousand, which is most probably the true reading; then the whole of the Benjamites were cut to pieces, except six hundred men, who we are informed fled to the rock Rimmon, where they fortified themselves.

JUDGES 20:36 So the children of Benjamin saw that they were struck; for the men of Israel gave place to Benjamin, because they trusted the ambushers whom they had set against Gibeah.

JUDGES 20:37 The ambushers hurried, and rushed on Gibeah; and the ambushers drew themselves along, and struck all the city with the edge of the sword.

JUDGES 20:38 Now the appointed sign between the men of Israel and the ambushers was that they should make a great cloud of smoke rise up out of the city.

Verse 38

Now there was an appointed sign - From this verse to the end of the chapter we have the details of the same operations which are mentioned, in a general way, in the preceding part of the chapter.

JUDGES 20:39 The men of Israel turned in the battle, and Benjamin began to strike and kill of the men of Israel about thirty persons; for they said, "Surely they are struck down before us, as in the first battle."

JUDGES 20:40 But when the cloud began to arise up out of the city in a pillar of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them; and behold, the whole of the city went up in smoke to the sky.

JUDGES 20:41 The men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were dismayed; for they saw that evil had come on them.

JUDGES 20:42 Therefore they turned their backs before the men of Israel to the way of the wilderness; but the battle followed hard after them; and those who came out of the cities destroyed them in its midst.

JUDGES 20:43 They surrounded the Benjamites, chased them, and trod them down at their resting place, as far as over against Gibeah toward the sunrise.

JUDGES 20:44 There fell of Benjamin eighteen thousand men; all these were men of valor.

JUDGES 20:45 They turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon: and they gleaned of them in the highways five thousand men, and followed hard after them to Gidom, and struck of them two thousand men.

Verse 45

Unto the rock of Rimmon - This was some strong place, but where situated is not known. Here they maintained themselves four months, and it was by these alone that the tribe of Benjamin was preserved from utter extermination. See the following chapter, Judges 21 (note).

It is scarcely possible to imagine any thing more horrid than the indiscriminate and relentless slaughter of both innocent and guilty mentioned in this chapter. The crime of the men of Gibeah was great, but there was no adequate cause for this relentless extermination of a whole tribe. There was neither justice nor judgment in this case; they were on all sides brutal, cruel, and ferocious: and no wonder; there was no king in Israel - no effective civil government, and every man did what was right in his own eyes. There was no proper leader; no man that had authority and influence to repress the disorderly workings of the pell-mell mob.

JUDGES 20:46 So that all who fell that day of Benjamin were twenty-five thousand men who drew the sword; all these were men of valor.

JUDGES 20:47 But six hundred men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and stayed in the rock of Rimmon four months.

JUDGES 20:48 The men of Israel turned again on the children of Benjamin, and struck them with the edge of the sword, both the entire city, and the livestock, and all that they found: moreover all the cities which they found they set on fire.
