

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 14B

JUDGES

CHAPTER 20

INTRODUCTION

Deuteronomy 1:17a (KJV),
“Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's:” This verse describes the key to righteous judgement. The basis is truth. The person we judge must not colour our judgement. The person's status in society must not affect our decision. The reason is that the judgement is God's. We stand in the place of God when we make judgements concerning God's people or our neighbour.

This was not so in Judges 20. In fact, the opposite was true of the tribe of Benjamin. Flesh and blood relationship was stronger than righteous judgement. As such, battles ensued which killed thousands of Israelites and it nearly destroyed a tribe. If that had happened, then Israel would be made of 11 tribes instead of 12 and the famous Sauls of the Bible would not have existed. But thanks be to

God the nation was left intact albeit a nation wreck by internal conflicts and horrendous judgement.

The marks and effects of what a man would do as long as it is right in his own eyes are seen in this chapter. The deed of the Levite was not anything to gloat about. He was a liar and also an evil man seeking vengeance at any cost. As a teacher and guardian of God's perfect Word, he should have known better than to hand over his concubine whom he is supposed to love to these animals! He saved himself at her expense.

The behaviour of this Levite after the fact was worse. He was callous and demonstrated no compassion or shock to find his concubine fallen down at the entrance of the house. All he could say was, *“Up, and let us be going.”* What harsh and unfeeling words could ever come out of the mouth of one who had just spent 5 days in the concubine's home, eating and drinking with her and her father and then to offer her up to wolves and found her dead at his feet!

What a dastard act from a teacher of God's Word! Are there lessons for us to learn from this chapter? The answer is an emphatic yes!

OUTLINE

1. The Storyline (20:1-7);
2. The Oath (20:8-11);
3. The Choice (20:12-17);

4. Israelites died (20:18-25);
5. Benjamites died (20:26-48).

COMMENTARY

The Storyline – 20:1-7

Responding to the report of the horrifying incident in Gibeah, all the Israelites from Dan to Beersheba turned up.¹ It is also emphasized that they were united as “one man.” In addition, they gathered before the LORD in Mizpeh (“*watch tower*”; 20:1). The combined number of soldiers from the rest of the tribes of Israel which responded totaled 400,000. They were ready for action. Benjamin was not there. Civil war was about to break out.

The Levite testified of what had happened as requested by the children of Israel. But he gave an edited account of the incident absolving himself of any blame. His version was a mixture of truth and lies. He lied that the men of Gibeah wanted to kill him, and that they forced his concubine to gratify their sexual desires (20:5). What he has done by offering his concubine to them was conveniently and strategically omitted on purpose! This omission makes him a victim and the evil men of Gibeah absolute monsters! Having given his testimony, he unashamedly sought

what action the children of Israel would take.

The Oath – 20:8-11

The children of Israel, having heard the testimony of the despicable Levite, made a vow of not returning to their homes until they had dealt with the tribe of Benjamin (20:8, 9). They will have to go up and punish the guilty no matter what the cost! Justice must be served was their heart’s cry.

The made concrete plans for the battle like confrontation if necessary! 10 percent of their men from all the tribes gathered there will fetch victual to confront the people of Gibeah of Benjamin. This was for the folly they had done against the Levite. The word for folly comes from the root word “nabal” which means foolish. This was the name of Abigail’s husband who rejected David’s request for food after the latter gave him protection from the enemies. Their conclusion was that the action of the people of Gibeah was foolish! They did not ascertain the facts. Nevertheless they were very united and moved as one against the men of Gibeah!

The Choice – 20:12-17

The children of Israel requested the Benjamites who lived in Gibeah to hand over the worthless culprits (sons of Belial) to them. The children of Israel wanted to punish them with death and put away evil from Israel. But the Benjamites would not accede to the demand. Instead,

¹ Dan is the northernmost city of Israel at that time and Beersheba the southernmost. The phrase “from Dan to Beersheba” meant that all of Israel took part.

they gathered their warriors to fight against the rest of the tribes. The army of Benjamin was quite a sizable one. They mobilized 26,000 soldiers and 700 men from the inhabitants of Gibeah. Amongst these soldiers there were 700 left handed highly skilled men who could sling stones accurately. They could not be easily defeated or bullied.

They knew how to ask the LORD which tribe should go first to attack Benjamin (20:18). But they should have asked the LORD *what* to do rather than *how* to do it. They had already decided what they were going to do according to what was right in their own eyes. This was definitely wrong. The outcome of their decision, if successful, would mean the elimination of an entire tribe.

Israelites died – 20:18-25

The first battle on the Israelites' side was led by the tribe of Judah as commissioned by God. It was appropriate, but not necessarily the actual reason for going first, because the Levite's concubine was from Bethlehem-judah. The battle was fought in the suburbs of Gibeah. The Benjamites came out of Gibeah to meet the "enemy" and defeated them by killing 22,000 soldiers.

This defeat did not demoralise them. They encouraged themselves and regrouped to fight again. But they went and wept before the LORD and asked whether they should fight against Benjamin. The LORD said to them to go ahead. Another battle was

fought on the second day. Again, the Benjamites were victorious. This time they killed 18,000 soldiers of the children of the Israel (20:25).

On both these occasions Israel asked the LORD and the LORD said yes to them and they lost. Why did God not stop them or at least say anything to them? 40,000 men of Israel died in these two battles. They were killed by their own! The sin of idolatry makes men lose their right mind. Pride and hatred and displaced loyalty set it and more evil occurs. The Israelites and Benjamites were set on a course that will have no winner, only losers.

Benjamites Died – 20:26-48

This second defeat caused the children of Israel to go to "the house of God" that is, Bethel.² They sat there before the LORD. They fasted that day until evening. This was a demonstration of repentance. Then they offered burnt offerings for sin, and peace offerings before the LORD. Interestingly, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron was then the active high priest, and he enquired of the LORD on behalf of the children of Israel. This means that the events mentioned here could not have happened too long ago after the death of Eleazer. This must have occurred during the early years of the period of Judges.

The answer from the LORD was to go, and the LORD would

² The phrase "the house of God" in Hebrew is "Bethel", 'beth' means house, and 'El' means God.

deliver the Benjamites into their hand. The LORD would intervene and they would be victorious. This third time, the children of Israel did not assume victory would be given on the basis of their superior numbers. They came up with a military plan to outwit the Benjamites. They set an ambush round Gibeah. A group attacked Gibeah but fled to draw the Benjamites out of their city. The fighting was fierce and the children of Israel lost 30 men. The unsuspecting Benjamites were caught by the ploy. All their men came out in full force to pursue the fleeing children of Israel up to Baal-tamar.

At that moment, 10,000 men from Israel, who had been hiding rose up and entered Gibeah. They killed the inhabitants — including the women and children, and burned the city. The Benjamites saw their city burning and destroyed. They lost the spirit to fight and fled in different directions. The battle was fiercely fought and the Benjamites were defeated. They lost altogether 25,000 warriors. Another 600 managed to escape to the rocky regions of Rimmon and they stayed there for four months. The war against the Benjamites was complete.

PRACTICAL VALUE

The Levite's testimony of what had occurred was only half truthful. He lied that the men of Gibeah had wanted to kill him and that they forced him to give them his concubine-wife. He had the nerve to

charge the Benjamites for sins of "lewdness and folly" while keeping silent his part in this entire dastard episode. He truly was despicable, portraying himself as good and innocent. Man has not changed morally and today, there are such people even amongst believers! We must be careful and resolve to walk in the path of righteousness according to the Word of God.

The Benjamites needed to be disciplined. The crime committed by a group of them in Gibeah could not be condoned. The children of Israel's decision to discipline the Benjamites was right. But they did not do it in the correct way. They did not seek the counsel of the LORD first as they had already decided what they would do. They went too far by trying to annihilate the entire tribe of Benjamin, many of whom were innocent of the crime. And they very nearly succeeded, but for the 600 who managed to escape into the mountains. AMEN.

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Judges 20:1-25; Hebrews 12:5-11; Proverbs 5:22-23.

TUESDAY: Judges 20:1-25; Hebrews 12:5-11; Proverbs 5:22-23.

WEDNESDAY: Judges 20:1-25; Hebrews 12:5-11; Proverbs 5:22-23.

THURSDAY: Judges 20:26-48; Exodus 20:22-26.

FRIDAY: Judges 20:1-48.

Discussion Questions

1. Is it common to omit certain facts that put us in a bad light when we report about a person who has hurt us? Have you done this before? Should Christians do this? Explain.

2. Is it right to make a judgement based upon one side of the story especially when it requires such a severe response? Are there instances where a one sided account is acceptable?

3. How should a leader in church view relationships within the church and within the leadership? What is the biblical approach?

4. Is it common for brethren to fight with one another? How can this be avoided within the Christian community? Are there instances where it is good to fight?

5. Why did the LORD ask the men of Israel to go and fight against the Benjamites and 40,000 died in the process? What could possibly be the cause of their defeats?

6. Why did God give Israel the victory in their third battle against the Benjamites? Could it be that the Israelites planned better this time?

7. What would you say is the main point in this chapter?
