

JUDGES SESSION #24

One of America's early comedy teams was a couple of guys called Amos 'n Andy. In one of their routines Andy was constantly being terrorized by a big fellow who would always slap him on the chest. Andy got fed up with this and finally decided to get even. "I'm ready for him next time," he told Amos. "I put a stick of dynamite in my shirt pocket and the next time he slaps me he's going to get his hand blown off!"

...maybe so, but of course Andy will end up with a hole in his chest too!

- as we've noted in earlier sessions in this book, **revenge is a deadly business**

- now, chap. 20 shows us *how* deadly, as Israel nearly gets its own heart blown away in this story of national revenge and civil war

We've reached the final story in the second part of the Epilogue to the Book of Judges

- you'll recall that the previous story about the dreadful rape and murder of the Levite's concubine, told in chapter 19, ended with all Israel in shock and asking one another what should be done about this

- so what happens next?

Judg 20:1-3

So all the children of Israel came out, from Dan to Beersheba, as well as from the land of Gilead, and the congregation gathered together as one man before the Lord at Mizpah. ² And the leaders of all the people, all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand foot soldiers who drew the sword. ³ (Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.)

Then the children of Israel said, "Tell *us*, how did this wicked deed happen?"

The Levite re-told the awful story and ended by saying,

⁷ Look! All of you *are* children of Israel; give your advice and counsel here and now!"

Verse 8 So all the people arose as one man, saying, "None *of us* will go to his tent, nor will any turn back to his house; ⁹ but now this *is* the thing which we will do to Gibeah: *We will go up* against it by lot. ¹⁰ We will take ten men out of *every* hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, a hundred out of *every* thousand, and a thousand out of *every* ten thousand, to make provisions for the people, that when they come to Gibeah in Benjamin, they may repay all the vileness that they have done in Israel." ¹¹ So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united together as one man.

¹² Then the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What *is* this wickedness that has occurred among you? ¹³ Now therefore, deliver up the men, the perverted men* who *are* in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and remove the evil from Israel!" But the children of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brethren, the children of Israel.

¹⁴ Instead, the children of Benjamin gathered together from their cities to Gibeah, to go to battle against the children of Israel. ¹⁵ And from their cities at that time the children of Benjamin numbered twenty-six thousand men who drew the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, who numbered seven hundred select men. ¹⁶ Among all this people *were* seven hundred select men *who were* left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair's *breadth* and not miss. ¹⁷ Now besides Benjamin, the men of Israel numbered four hundred thousand men who drew the sword; all of these *were* men of war.

There are some serious problems revealed in these verses. The first is...

A. **No Recognition of Guilt**

- the **turning point** occurs in verses 13 & 14 – “the children of Benjamin would not listen”
 - the Benjamites would rather fight than admit wrong
 - ...another illus. of how terrible the sinful situation in the nation had become
- but notice how often in our own day we use vocabulary to avoid admission of guilt, refusing to call sin ‘sin’
 - adultery = is called *an affair*
 - theft in workplace = is glossed over as *perks of the job*
 - greed = is nothing more than *upward social mobility*
- furthermore, if many others are doing it, and it feels good or seems OK to me, it *is* OK!
- where there is no recognition of guilt for sin things will only get worse
- the narrator of ‘Judges’ is also using this story to highlight Israel’s **national guilt**, by drawing parallels with the life of King **Saul**
 - he cut up a cow & sent the pieces throughout the land in order to call up men for his army
 - he was of the tribe of Benjamin ...and his home town was? -- Gibeah!
 - he was chosen king at Mizpah ...the very same place the tribes gather for war against Benjamin
- ...as Israel’s first national king, Saul proved to be a bad choice
- and his parallels with this Judges story were likely intended by Samuel (assuming he’s the narrator) to show once again that the people should never have deserted their true King, Jehovah

The second problem here is that there was...

B. **No Respect for God**

- we’ll come back to the actual battles shortly, but first let me draw your attention to a small but very significant statement in vs. **27-28...**

Judg 20:27-28

So the children of Israel inquired of the Lord (the ark of the covenant of God *was* there [that is, at Mizpah] in those days, ²⁸ and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days)

- looks OK, doesn’t it? After all, they’re asking God for direction
- but there IS a problem here – the Ark of the Covenant is being kept at Mizpah, but where was the Tabernacle in these days? ...at **Shiloh** – about 20 kms away!

- the Ark was the most precious piece of furniture in the Tabernacle, representing the very Presence of God among His people; it was supposed to be kept in the Holy of Holies within the Tabernacle – but here it is, taken out of its holy place
 - ...i.e. the holiness of God has been cheapened in Israel
 - and apparently Phinehas, the high priest, who had been faithful to God earlier, is the one at fault
- whenever we cheapen the holiness of God, take him for granted, or treat him with less than awe-filled respect, we open the door of our lives for a host of other evil influences
 - ...treating **people** without respect, careless about our sexuality, hating our brothers & sisters, responding with anger, taking revenge into our own hands, etc.

The third problem in this story is that there was...

C. **No Success**

Let's read about the first two attacks, recorded in...

Judg 20:18-25

¹⁸ Then the children of Israel arose and went up to the house of God* to inquire of God. They said, "Which of us shall go up first to battle against the children of Benjamin?"

The Lord said, "Judah first!"

¹⁹ So the children of Israel rose in the morning and encamped against Gibeah. ²⁰ And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin, and the men of Israel put themselves in battle array to fight against them at Gibeah. ²¹ Then the children of Benjamin came out of Gibeah, and on that day cut down to the ground twenty-two thousand men of the Israelites. ²² And the people, that is, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves and again formed the battle line at the place where they had put themselves in array on the first day. ²³ Then the children of Israel went up and wept before the Lord until evening, and asked counsel of the Lord, saying, "Shall I again draw near for battle against the children of my brother Benjamin?"

And the Lord said, "Go up against him."

²⁴ So the children of Israel approached the children of Benjamin on the second day. ²⁵ And Benjamin went out against them from Gibeah on the second day, and cut down to the ground eighteen thousand more of the children of Israel; all these drew the sword.

- at the *beginning* of the book of Judges, Israel went up to war against the Canaanites
 - *now*, they are going to war against the moral & spiritual "Canaanites" - the tribe of Benjamin, one of their own!
- but they are **unsuccessful** in these first two attacks
 - they seem to be depending too much on their strength of **numbers** (it was a huge army – 400,000 strong)
 - and maybe they also depended too much on the **rightness** of their cause (as they thought)
- but as usual, victory for God's people doesn't come from our own strength or sense of rightness
- perhaps this lack of success was God's way of showing that **all of Israel was guilty** of sin, not just the tribe of Benjamin or the town of Gibeah

...40,000 Israelites were killed in the first 2 battles...this represented 10% of their total army!
- i.e. James Jordan suggests here that God took a 'tithed' of their army ...in recognition that they had sinned & not acknowledged it or repented – so God judged them **all**

- in our next session, the story turns a corner; be sure to join me for that one