

JUDGES SESSION #25

Finally, we see Israel...

D. **Getting Right with God**

Judg 20:26-27

²⁶ Then all the children of Israel, that is, all the people, went up and came to the house of God and wept. They sat there before the Lord and fasted that day until evening; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord.

²⁷ So the children of Israel inquired of the Lord...

- absolute lack of success in their first 2 battles makes them examine their hearts, and now they do 4 important things to get on the right track:

1) **weeping & fasting**

- this was a way of showing sorrow for their sins

2) they gave **burnt** offerings

- every morning & every evening Israel was supposed to offer a lamb as a burnt offering
- this whole sacrifice being burned up as an offering to God was a constant reminder that they deserved to be “burned up” because of their sins but God’s grace provided a substitute lamb instead
- so here there is finally a recognition of their **guilt** of sin

3) they gave **peace** offerings

- these too were sacrifices of animals, but in the case of a peace offering there was a meal involved as well – the priest ate part of the sacrifice, and the person(s) making the offering ate the rest, along with their family & guests; as they did so, they recognized that God was the host and they could eat with Him now because the sacrifice had made ‘peace’ between them
- so these peace offerings symbolized **restoration** of communion with God again

4) and fourthly, they **inquired** of the LORD

- after having done a lot of talking among themselves (maybe too much!) they finally asked God what to do; they sought His direction

These 4 steps remind us that it’s not enough to be **against evil**; we must also be **right with God!**

[E. **Success – but at a Terrible Price**]

Verses 29-35 tell the story of the 3rd attack; and at last there is **success – but at a terrible price**

Judg 20:29-35

²⁹ Then Israel set men in ambush all around Gibeah. ³⁰ And the children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and put themselves in battle array against Gibeah as at the other times. ³¹ So the children of Benjamin went out against the people, *and* were drawn away from the city. They began to strike down *and* kill some of the people, as at the other times, in the highways (one

of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah) and in the field, about thirty men of Israel. ³² And the children of Benjamin said, "They *are* defeated before us, as at first."

But the children of Israel said, "Let us flee and draw them away from the city to the highways." ³³ So all the men of Israel rose from their place and put themselves in battle array at Baal Tamar. Then Israel's men in ambush burst forth from their position in the plain of Geba. ³⁴ And ten thousand select men from all Israel came against Gibeah, and the battle was fierce. But *the Benjamites** did not know that disaster *was* upon them. ³⁵ The Lord defeated Benjamin before Israel. And the children of Israel destroyed that day twenty-five thousand one hundred Benjamites; all these drew the sword.

- Israel is finally successful, after getting right with God
- but in keeping with the overall theme of Judges, the narrator emphasizes – in vs. 35 – that “The **Lord** defeated Benjamin” – it must always be so; victories in our lives are only possible by the action of our Lord – “*not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord*” (Zechariah 4:6)
- the verses we just read give the first account of this 3rd battle – which provides a **summary** and theological perspective on the battle
- verses 36 – 48 tell the same story but this time giving us more **details** as to *how* it was fought and won
- part of the army attacked Gibeah head on while another group of soldiers hid in ambush

Judg 20:38-39

Now the appointed signal between the men of Israel and the men in ambush was that they would make a great cloud of smoke rise up from the city, ³⁹ whereupon the men of Israel would turn in battle.

Judg 20:40

when the cloud began to rise from the city in a column of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them, and there was the whole city going up *in smoke* to heaven.

- vs. 40 uses a couple of words which help us understand better what is happening
 - the **first** word for “**smoke**” is a little unusual in Hebrew
 - the last time it was used in the OT was Joshua 8 concerning the Canaanite city of **Ai**
 - if you remember that story, you may recall that Joshua & his army used a classic military tactic of setting up an ambush behind the city while part of the army drew the defenders out the front gate; once the men of Ai had left the city then the men in ambush rushed in & set it on fire; at that point, with the soldiers of Ai in confusion, the other part of Joshua’s army turned back on them and they were caught in a deadly ‘sandwich’ and destroyed
- but when you look at the defeat of **Gibeah** here in Judges, it is virtually the same tactic! ...this Israelite city is now being treated as if it were an ungodly Canaanite town
- the **second** word for “**smoke**” in vs. 40 is even more unusual in Hebrew
 - it is the term used for a ‘**whole burnt sacrifice**’
 - and the last time that word was used in the OT was in Deut. 33:10 concerning ‘whole burnt offerings’

- in other words, Gibeah is not only destroyed but burned as a whole burnt sacrifice! – an offering to God for sin

What does this tell us about **sin**?

...it's **serious** with God!!

God's people must obey God and not do "what is right in their own eyes" – which brings us to one further sub-heading:

F. Focus on the Eye

Matt 6:22-23

"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great *is* that darkness!

- if our *physical* vision is good, we can see what we are doing & where we are going
- if our "eye is **good/clear**", if we have **spiritual** vision, life will be filled with purpose and drive; "your whole body will be full of **light**"
- but if our eye is "**bad**", if our spiritual vision is "clouded with evil thoughts and desires" – or in the vocabulary of Judges, by 'doing what is right in our own eyes' – then our whole life is "in **darkness**"
- the Greek expression for a 'good' or 'clear' eye literally means "to braid/twine together"
 - in other words, having **singleness of purpose**, not having a divided focus – opening our eyes towards God "wide in wonder and belief" (as Peterson's 'The Message' puts it)
- John Stott wrote: "just as our eye affects our whole *body*, so our ambition (where we fix our eyes and heart) affects our whole *life*"

Conclusion

- most people in the times of the Judges did "what was right in [their] own eyes" because they were no longer focused on God; they had turned away from God and their whole life, nationally & individually, became filled with darkness
 - Matt 6:22-23 once again (from Living Bible) – "If your eye is pure, there will be sunshine in your soul. But if your eye is clouded with evil thoughts and desires, you are in deep spiritual darkness. And oh, how deep that darkness can be!" – as these last chapters in Judges so graphically illustrate
- ...so, may God help us to "fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2)