

• *The nation responds to Gibeah's murderous ways*

The sin of Gibeah leads to civil war. The entire nation responds to the disgusting and murderous ways of Gibeah. The appeal of the Levite that the nation should take action against Gibeah receives a response. The entire nation responds to the summons of the Levite and gather at Mizpah ¹. A large number of representatives come, probably 'four hundred officers' (the Hebrew word for 'thousand' can sometimes mean 'officer' and that meaning fits here). The Levite tells his story ², presenting himself in a good light (compare 20:5 with 19:25). The assembly resolves to punish Gibeah ³; the people of Gibeah show no remorse ⁴. The people of Benjamin gather to fight ⁵; the rest of Israel does the same ⁶.

¹ 20:1
² 20:4-7
³ 20:8-11
⁴ 20:12-13
⁵ 20:14-16
⁶ 20:17

• *Urim and Thummim – the LORD consulted*

They consult the **LORD**, using the Urim and Thummim, and Judah is chosen to be the leader in the battle ¹. It reminds us of Judges 1:1–2, only at that stage of events God guidance was a means of blessing. At this stage God is giving them what they want and guiding them into His judgement!

¹ 20:18

• *Benjamin almost annihilated*

The Benjamites are skilful warriors and Israel suffers many losses. They grieve over the fact that they are fighting their brothers but the **LORD** confirms this is what they must do ¹. A second attack was unsuccessful ². Only at a third attempt do they succeed in defeating Benjamin ³.¹ The tribe of Benjamin was almost annihilated.

¹ 20:19-23
² 20:24-25
³ 20:26-48

• *The story is told as a sample of God's anger*

The story seems to have been given as a sample of the judgement of God. Several times in the Book of Judges we have been told that God got angry with Israel or that He let them fall into the hands of their enemies. This story seems to be told as another sample of God's anger.

When God is angry with His people they lose their wisdom

When God is angry with His people they lose their wisdom. It was true that the callous brutality of the people of Benjamin required some kind of punishment, but the nation almost wiped out the whole tribe! The **LORD** gave victory against the Benjamites only on the third attempt. The remainder of the nation was being punished as well as Benjamin. We have read in Judges of times when Israel's enemies virtually destroyed each other ¹. Something similar is happening here. When God is angry the nation starts destroying itself.

¹ 7:22

• *Needlessly extreme actions*

When God is angry with His people they become full of contradictions

When God is angry with His people they become full of contradictions. First they want to destroy Benjamin; then they are troubled at the near extermination of the tribe. The Benjamites were almost wiped out. What had been done shattered the unity of the nation. They had taken needlessly extreme measures. Yet they felt they had to keep their vows. At Mizpah they had sworn not to give any daughter in marriage to any Benjamite ¹. They call a meeting at Bethel, where they express their grief at what has happened ². Then they dedicate themselves to God with whole burnt offerings (symbolising dedication) and fellowship offerings (symbolising fellowship together), ³. The meeting is taken very seriously; the death penalty will fall on anyone who does not attend ⁴.

¹ 21:1
² 21:2-3
³ 21:4
⁴ 21:5

• *First they want destruction but then they are troubled*

The gathering was grieving over the lost tribe ¹ and wondering how to provide wives for the survivors ². Apparently there were surviving men but no surviving women. Then they discovered that the men of Jabesh Gilead have not come to the meeting ³. They send fighting men to wipe out that community also! It is strange that having wiped out Benjamin they now feel they should wipe out Jabesh Gilead also! But if they do so there will be some unmarried ladies who survive and this will solve their problem about brides for the surviving Benjamites. Four hundred young ladies survived this slaughter and they helped provide wives for the Benjamites ¹. It is all

¹ 21:6
² 21:7
³ 21:8-9

• *Wives for the Benjamite survivors – weird procedure full of blindness and contradiction*

weird procedure. They had punished Benjamin because of the sexual abuse of the Levite's concubine, but now are happy for four hundred women to be drastically taken from one tribe to another and handed over to strangers as wives. Their entire behaviour is full of blindness and contradictions.

☞¹ 21:10-14

• *More wives for the Benjamites...*

• *Everyone did right in their own eyes!*

But there were still not enough wives for the Benjamite men, so their next remedy was to make use of a countryside festival near Shiloh ☞¹. The Benjamites were allowed to hide in the bushes and at the appropriate time seize wives from among the young dancing girls who come to assist at the celebrations ☞². The plan is that when the girls' brothers and fathers complain, it will be explained that this was a way of securing the future of the tribe of Benjamin without breaking a vow ☞³! Apparently this explanation will be satisfactory! So that is what happened and the matter was settled ☞⁴. The narrator brings the book to a close by recalling what he said at the start of this unit: there was no king ☞⁵; everyone did what was right in his own eyes. By this time we are seeing what he means!

☞¹ 21:15-19

☞² 21:20

☞³ 21:21-22

☞⁴ 21:23-24

☞⁵ 21:25 see 19:1

When God is angry with His people they need a King to save them

• *A nation without unity and kingship had slipped into the most vile and ghastly depravity*

• *The worst story in the Bible points us to Jesus – we need a righteous Shepherd-King*

When God is angry with His people they need a King to save them. The Book of Judges tells the story of how Israel declined between Joshua and Samuel. If it had not been written we would not know how Israel had got from doing so well (Joshua and the battle of Jericho) to doing so badly (Eli and the totally corrupt state of Israel). By the time we reach Judges 21, we have certainly got the writer's point. A nation without unity and without kingship had slipped into the most vile and ghastly depravity. Those who sow to the flesh shall from the flesh reap ruin ☞¹. The last pages of Judges let us see what such 'destruction' might involve: loss of numbers, painful experiences of many kinds, wandering in the half-light of having only partial guidance from God, gross ignorance of God and His ways.

☞¹ see Galatians 6:8

By now we ought to be convinced: what Israel needs is kingship! They need a righteous Shepherd-King to bring them back into the ways of God. The next book of the Bible, 1–2 Samuel, will show how God got to a man of His own heart, a shepherd who would unite Israel and bring it back into the ways of the LORD. But even David will not be a complete answer, for his descendants will ruin what he did. It all points to the need of a different kind of king, a Son of David who would bring in, not partial and temporary righteousness, but eternal righteousness. The worst story in the Bible points us to Jesus. The worst sins need the best Saviour. He comes to call, not the righteous, but the kind of people we find in Judges 20–21.

Note 1 'Phineas' in Judges 20:28 might make us think this story took place early in the days of Judges. But the Phineas of Numbers 25 surely would not have been passive in a situation like this. And Judges gives the impression that the chaos of chapters 20–21 is the outcome of great deterioration not its beginning. More likely it is a different Phineas in the same line, named after the more famous one of Numbers 25. 'Son' means 'descendant'. We note that Eli also named one of his sons 'Phineas' (1 Samuel 1:2).



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