

## Judges Chapter 20 Part 2

### **Proverbs 14:12 There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.**

In a sense, this verse could be used to characterize one perspective of the Book of Judges: Death as the result of walking by means of human viewpoint. In the Book of Judges, it is said that everyone “did what was right in his own eyes.” By observation, we see, that leads to death. But the Proverb verse overtly says so. Death.

Hebrew has many words for death and killing.

In a way, a culture can be characterized by its vocabulary.

There was a phrase used by the English of American soldiers during WWII: “Over paid, over sexed and over here.” Certainly Americans are often obsessed with money. There are many words for money: moolah, green, Benjamins, bringing home the bacon, a grand, a C-note, cash, loot and the list goes on. One website had 100 slang words in English for money.

Of course, there is the well known quip about the Eskimos having many words for snow. One estimate put it at 53 words for snow in the Inuit dialect spoken in Canada’s Nunavik region. Obviously, snow is important to the Eskimo. Here is some information from Wikipedia:

“Krupnik and others charted the vocabulary of about 10 Inuit and Yupik dialects and concluded that they indeed have many more words for snow than English does. Central Siberian Yupik has 40 terms. Inuit dialect spoken in Canada’s Nunavik region has at least 53, including “matsaaruti,” for wet snow that can be used to ice a sleigh’s runners, and “pukak,” for crystalline powder snow that looks like salt. Within these

**Judges Chapter 20 Part 2**  
**Judges 20:24-48**

dialects, the vocabulary associated with sea ice is even richer. In the Inupiaq dialect of Wales, Alaska, Krupnik documented 70 terms for ice including: “utuqaq,” ice that lasts year after year; “siguliaksraq,” a patchwork layer of crystals that form as the sea begins to freeze; and “auniq,” ice that is filled with holes.”

So in Hebrew there are many words for death and killing. In an agricultural society without modern medical advances, there was lots of death. In addition, there were wars in which many were killed.

It is interesting that in Judges chapter 19 there are no words for death or killing. Note that the concubine that dies on the doorsteps to the house that the Levite is in, is never said to be killed or to die. That seemed to be an intentional omission. The author seems to have avoided any of these words in chapter 19. But, it is obvious from the events that she dies. That omission plays into the character of the Levite who pretends not to notice that she is dead while the reader is shouting at him, “She is dead!” It contains the events that lead to much killing in chapter 20. I didn’t have time for this lesson to put together a study of the words for death and killing in Hebrew. Perhaps another day.

In chapter 20, the tribe of Benjamin is almost wiped out as a result of a civil war in Israel.

Here is the outline of the Benjamin episode as viewed by Robert Chisholm:

Sodom and Gomorrah Revisited (19:1b-30)

Retrieving a wife (19:1b-10)

Stopping in Gibeah (19:11-15)

Hospitality extended (19:16-21)

Evil personified (19:22-30)

**Bye Bye Benjamin! (20:1-48)**

**Considering the evidence (20:1-17)**

**Round one to Benjamin (20:18-21)**

**Judges Chapter 20 Part 2**  
**Judges 20:24-48**

**Round two to Benjamin (20:22-25)**

**Benjamin down and out (20:26-48)**

Six Hundred Brides for Six Hundred Brothers (21:1-25)

Feeling regret (21:1-3)

Murder and kidnapping (21:4-14)

Dodging a vow (21:15-25)

For reference:

**Judges 20:15 From the cities on that day the sons of Benjamin were numbered, 26,000 men who draw the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah who were numbered, 700 choice men.**

The point of referring back to this verse is to establish the total number of combatants from the tribe of Benjamin: 26,000 men with swords plus 700 elite troops = 26,700. The issue will be the “missing” 1,000 men later in the text.

1<sup>st</sup> Battle:

**Judges 20:19 So the sons of Israel arose in the morning and camped against Gibeah.**

**Judges 20:20 The men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin, and the men of Israel arrayed for battle against them at Gibeah.**

**Judges 20:21 Then the sons of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and felled to the ground on that day 22,000 men of Israel.**

**Judges Chapter 20 Part 2**  
**Judges 20:24-48**

**Felled to the ground.** Here is a word for killing. Death. The word for felled means destroyed, ruined, spoiled, corrupted. Per the TDOT, "... suggests that the verb signifies an act of ruthless destruction subjecting the object to complete annihilation or decimating and corrupting it so thoroughly that its demise is certain."

For the sons of Israel this was an unexpected outcome. After all, they asked God, didn't they? But, be careful what you ask for. They had already decided to attack Benjamin. They didn't ask God what should we do? Did they go to a priest or judge and ask for a solution? Don't try to impose your will on God. God may answer your prayer in ways you did not expect. And like previous incidents, the soldiers may have had their pocket idols with them for good luck.

There is something else to consider. They lived under the Mosaic Law in their dispensation. Remember, dispensation in the Greek means literally, "house rules." I suspect that later in the text when they offer sacrifices, this signifies return to fellowship. If that is true, then their efforts out of fellowship were allowed by God (permissive will of God) but were not blessed because they were accomplished by human (sin nature) effort. This whole episode demonstrates what can happen when people do what is right in their own eyes.

2<sup>nd</sup> Battle:

**Judges 20:22 But the people, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves and arrayed for battle again in the place where they had arrayed themselves the first day.**

Admirable that they picked themselves up, dusted themselves off and moved forward. However, if this is done apart from fellowship with God,

**Judges Chapter 20 Part 2**  
**Judges 20:24-48**

you might expect some troubles. As we have seen previously, doing a right thing in a wrong way is still wrong.

**Judges 20:23 The sons of Israel went up and wept before the Lord until evening, and inquired of the Lord, saying, “Shall we again draw near for battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin?” And the Lord said, “Go up against him.”**

This is just a repeat of the first time plus the weeping. Something is wrong. There is a lesson to be learned. If we are going to endeavor to do something, we need to be in fellowship and pray to God for guidance, not telling God what we are going to do from our own efforts (see Isaiah 64:6) and expect Him to bless us. As we will see, after being defeated a second time, the sons of Israel will go back and prepare correctly.

**Judges 20:24 Then the sons of Israel came against the sons of Benjamin the second day.**

**Judges 20:25 Benjamin went out against them from Gibeah the second day and felled to the ground again 18,000 men of the sons of Israel; all these drew the sword.**

Why did so many Israelite soldiers die? In many cases in the Old Testament, people die as a result of someone’s sin. Let us take a detour and see this principle illustrated in David’s life. Open your Bibles and read 1 Chronicles 21:1-14. The point is, our sins can affect others in ways we never expected.

**Judges Chapter 20 Part 2**  
**Judges 20:24-48**

Everyone dies, it is just a matter of when and how. For some, they die as a result of the sin unto death. For others there is a plan by God for each individual person. For the Christian filled with the Spirit, he or she should eagerly desire to glorify God in our death. Some die as martyrs. Others die in bed. Some soldiers die with their boots on in battle. At the appropriate time we all die. So, to give the Israelite soldiers the benefit of the doubt, it was their time. However, it is apparent that in a limited number of cases, God can answer prayer by providing an “extension.” See what happened to king Hezekiah.

**Isaiah 38:1 In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.’” (His time had come.)**

**Isaiah 38:2 Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord,**

**Isaiah 38:3 and said, “Remember now, O Lord, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in Your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.**

**Isaiah 38:4 Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah, saying,**

**Isaiah 38:5 “Go and say to Hezekiah, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of your father David, “I have heard your prayer, I have seen your**

Judges Chapter 20 Part 2  
Judges 20:24-48

**tears; behold, I will add fifteen years to your life.** (Now God answered Hezekiah's prayer and added fifteen years to his life. Unfortunately, as a result, there were some bad things happened. But that is a story for another time.)

**Isaiah 38:6 I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city.”**

I like Hezekiah. He was a “good” king. But he was human and made human mistakes.

3<sup>rd</sup> Battle:

**Judges 20:26 Then all the sons of Israel and all the people went up and came to Bethel and wept; thus they remained there before the Lord and fasted that day until evening. And they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord.**

Christians live in a different dispensation than the sons of Israel under the Mosaic Law. So, we might miss the significance of what just happened.

**Burnt offerings.** From GotQuestions.org: “A person could give a burnt offering at any time. It was a sacrifice of general atonement—an acknowledgement of the sin nature and a request for renewed relationship with God.”

This would appear to be, in the context of the Mosaic Law, an outward sign of a change of heart concerning God. These soldiers desire to be

**Judges Chapter 20 Part 2**  
**Judges 20:24-48**

back in fellowship with God. Remember, the Hebrews were a “show me” people.

**Peace offerings.** From GotQuestions.org: A peace offering in the Old Testament Law is described in Leviticus 7:11–21. It was a voluntary sacrifice given to God in three specific instances. First, a peace offering could be given as a freewill offering, meaning that the worshiper was giving the peace offering as a way to say thank you for God’s unsought generosity. It was basically just a way to praise God for His goodness. The second way a peace offering could be given was alongside a fulfilled vow. A good example of this was when Hannah fulfilled her vow to God by bringing Samuel to the temple; on that occasion she also brought a peace offering to express the peace in her heart toward God concerning her sacrifice—it was a way to say, “I have no resentment; I am holding nothing back in the payment of my vow.” The third purpose of a peace offering was to give thanksgiving for God’s deliverance in an hour of dire need. None of these three reasons to sacrifice had anything to do with propitiation, with appeasing God, or with pacifying Him.”

Keep in mind that those who offered a peace offering had been delivered from the previous two battles. The guy next to him may have been struck down in battle, but he survived. So now, the soldier gives thanks to God, recognizing who He is and that He determines if the soldier lives or dies.

Here they are talking about the location in Bethel. Where was it?

The map below is provided for reference since there is a question as to where the Ark of the Covenant was.



Judges Chapter 20 Part 2  
Judges 20:24-48



Locations of Shiloh, Bethel, Mizpah and Gibeah  
Sourced from FreeBibleImages.com

In some passages the “House of God” was at Shiloh:

**Judges 18:31** So they set up for themselves Micah’s graven image which he had made, all the time that the house of God was at Shiloh.

Compare that to Judges 20:26-27

**Judges 20:26** Then all the sons of Israel and all the people went up and came to Bethel and wept; thus they remained there before the

Judges Chapter 20 Part 2  
Judges 20:24-48

**Lord and fasted that day until evening. And they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord.**

**Judges 20:27 The sons of Israel inquired of the Lord (for the ark of the covenant of God was there (Bethel) in those days,**

Now later in the book of 1 Samuel, when the Israelites are fighting the Philistines and are losing, they take the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh:

**1 Samuel 4:3 When the people came into the camp, the elders of Israel said, “Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? [compare this to the sons of Israel asking why the Benjamites defeated them on the first two days of battle] Let us take to ourselves from Shiloh the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that it may come among us and deliver us from the power of our enemies.” [Why did they believe this? Because it worked before.]**

This indicates as do other passages in the Old Testament that the Ark of the Covenant, prior to the building of the temple in Jerusalem, was mobile or “portable.” It was built so that

**1 Samuel 4:4 So the people sent to Shiloh, and from there they carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts who sits above the cherubim; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and**

Judges Chapter 20 Part 2  
Judges 20:24-48

## **Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.**

Commentators are divided on how to explain this.

Here are some observations:

1. The Ark of the Covenant was portable. It was built to be transportable.
2. The Ark of the Covenant was considered by some to be a “good luck charm” with immense power.
3. Although the Ark of the Covenant was usually kept in the tabernacle at Shiloh during the days of the judges, it was transportable to other locations as desired. Who would make that decision? Certainly the priesthood had a say on where they took the Ark. Leadership likely consulted with the priesthood and agreed that the situation at hand required the presence of the Ark.

It is then possible, but not specifically stated, that the Ark of the Covenant was transported from Shiloh to Bethel for this war against Benjamin. Just imagine the sons of Israel taunting the sons of Benjamin saying, “We have the Ark of the Covenant and you don’t.”

**Judges 20:28 and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, Aaron’s son, stood before it to minister in those days), saying, “Shall I yet again go out to battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?” And the Lord said, “Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand.”**

**Judges Chapter 20 Part 2**  
**Judges 20:24-48**

Remember what the sons of Dan did with Micah. They needed a priest to go up with them to give spiritual encouragement to the troops prior to battle. Here is the quote from Deuteronomy from that study:

**Deuteronomy 20:2 When you are approaching the battle, the priest shall come near and speak to the people.**

**Deuteronomy 20:3 He shall say to them, ‘Hear, O Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies today. Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid, or panic, or tremble before them,**

**Deuteronomy 20:4 for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.’**

So here in Judges, the sons of Israel use a grandson of Aaron as a priest who “stood before it (Ark of the Covenant).”

**Judges 20:29 So Israel set men in ambush around Gibeah.**

**Ambush.** Now they are using combat tactics. We have seen this previously in the book of Judges.

**Judges 20:30 The sons of Israel went up against the sons of Benjamin on the third day and arrayed themselves against Gibeah as at other times.**

Judges Chapter 20 Part 2  
Judges 20:24-48

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

**Strike and kill.** Here we have a continuation of the killing.

**Judges 20:32** The sons of Benjamin said, “They are struck down before us, as at the first.” But the sons of Israel said, “Let us flee that we may draw them away from the city to the highways.”

More combat tactics.

**Judges 20:33** Then all the men of Israel arose from their place and arrayed themselves at Baal-tamar; and the men of Israel in ambush broke out of their place, even out of Maareh-geba.

**Judges 20:34** When ten thousand choice men from all Israel came against Gibeah, the battle became fierce; but Benjamin (the troops that had engaged the Israelite troops in front of the city, who were drawing them further from the city so they would not know it was being attacked and

**Judges Chapter 20 Part 2**  
**Judges 20:24-48**

hence could not defend it.) **did not know that disaster was close to them.**

**Judges 20:35 And the Lord struck Benjamin before Israel, so that the sons of Israel destroyed 25,100 men of Benjamin that day, all who draw the sword. (26,700 – 25,100 = 1,600)**

**Judges 20:36 So the sons of Benjamin saw that they were defeated. When the men of Israel gave ground to Benjamin because they relied on the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah,**

**Judges 20:37 the men in ambush hurried and rushed against Gibeah; the men in ambush also deployed and struck all the city with the edge of the sword.**

**Struck with the edge of the sword.** Per Robert Chisholm, this is literally “struck with the mouth of the sword.” This was “...used in the book’s prologue to describe Judah’s conquest of Jerusalem and Joseph’s victory at Bethel. But now we hear of Israelites inflicting the same kind of slaughter upon their own countrymen.”

**Judges 20:38 Now the appointed sign between the men of Israel and the men in ambush was that they would make a great cloud of smoke rise from the city.**

**Judges Chapter 20 Part 2**  
**Judges 20:24-48**

**Cloud of smoke.** This would indicate that the city had been destroyed. The smoke was the sign that it was being burned to the ground.

**Judges 20:39** Then the men of Israel turned in the battle, and Benjamin began to strike and kill about thirty men of Israel, for they said, “Surely they are defeated before us, as in the first battle.”

**Strike and kill.** Before the men of Benjamin see the smoke and realize what is going on, they advance forward thinking this will be the third time that they slaughter other sons of Israel.

**Judges 20:40** But when the cloud began to rise from the city in a column of smoke, Benjamin looked behind them; and behold, the whole city was going up in smoke to heaven.

**Judges 20:41** Then the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were terrified; for they saw that disaster was close to them.

**Disaster was close to them.** Their families, their possessions and their houses were being destroyed. They would have nothing but rubble to return to...if they survived.

**Judges 20:42** Therefore, they turned their backs before the men of Israel toward the direction of the wilderness, but the battle overtook them while those who came out of the cities destroyed them in the midst of them.

Judges Chapter 20 Part 2  
Judges 20:24-48

**Judges 20:43 They surrounded Benjamin, pursued them without rest and trod them down opposite Gibeah toward the east.**

**Judges 20:44 Thus 18,000 men of Benjamin fell; all these were valiant warriors.**

**18,000 men.** Now the tables are turned and Benjamin loses a large portion of their men. The previous total of 25,100 was obviously a summary. The Hebrews will do that in their writing. They might give a summary of results before going into the details. This is just a detail concerning a portion of the total.

**Judges 20:45 The rest turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, but they caught 5,000 of them on the highways and overtook them at Gidom and killed 2,000 of them.**

**Judges 20:46 So all of Benjamin who fell that day were 25,000 men who draw the sword; all these were valiant warriors.**

Again, these are details concerning the 25,100 men mentioned in verse 35.

**Judges 20:47 But 600 men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and they remained at the rock of Rimmon four months.**

These 600 men were left of the original number. As commentators point out, there is a group of 1,000 unaccounted for. These may have died in



**Judges Chapter 20 Part 2**  
**Judges 20:24-48**

battle during the first two battles. The point in the text of those first two battles was that Israel suffered great losses. It did not mention the losses from the tribe of Benjamin at that point in the text.

**Judges 20:48 The men of Israel then turned back against the sons of Benjamin and struck them with the edge of the sword, both the entire city with the cattle and all that they found; they also set on fire all the cities which they found.**

It is possible that the missing 1,100 men died while attempting to defend what was left of their cities in the tribal area.

Emotion of the battle overtakes the sons of Israel. Instead of just wiping out the errant city involved in the death of the Levite's concubine, they destroy ALL the cities of Benjamin. There is nothing left except the 600 men. Their wives were dead. Their children were dead. Their possessions and houses were burned to the ground. They have been forced into humility. Then Israel realized what it had done. Remorse and then the application of human viewpoint...again.