

Judges 08-08-27b

Let's resume our study now in Judges chapter 19 and moving into chapter 20 now. The Israelites have assembled after seeing pieces of this concubine getting mailed around the area. So all the sons of Israel from Dan to Beersheba, obviously it goes without saying that although we believe in the literal truth of the Bible, we understand that a word like all doesn't mean every single son of Israel showed up.

We would have had Canaanites coming in from all sides taking over towns and villages if you didn't have some people left behind. But it means representatives, it was practically everybody. All the sons of Israel came out, the congregation assembled as one man to the Lord at Mizpah.

Now, why does it say they assembled as one man to the Lord at Mizpah? Is the Lord at Mizpah? Normally when you see people assembling to the Lord or coming before the Lord, there is some semblance, all or part of the tabernacle. We're not told here, but there is something to indicate the presence of the Lord. It is likely, I think, that the Ark of the Covenant was on hand.

It had no permanent location at this point. It wasn't located in Shiloh, it wasn't located in any one particular town, so the remnant of Levites may have brought it there. But when it says assembled before the Lord, normally this means that there is some formal symbol of God's presence there.

So, one would expect that if you are assembled before the Lord, you're going to get some sort of information from the Lord. This is common in Israel, God will speak in some form or fashion, and that's kind of the reason for assembling. Shall we go up, get the high priest, let's do the oriment them in, let's find out what God wants us to do.

So we'll be watching for that as we go through our story here, because obviously it hasn't been that long since Joshua and the elders and the lots were cast, and everybody came up and God revealed His will for the partition of the land and so on. God has spoken in the living memory of a lot of these people, so here's a crisis that has come up and you will be watching, since they have assembled before the Lord, that they're going to be listening to the Lord so they do the right thing. The chiefs of all the people, even of all the tribes of Israel, the leaders, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, and once again, they are not assembling as the people of Israel, they are assembling as the people of God.

Righteous indignation, we're going to rectify a crime against the laws of God. We are the people of God, we are assembling before the Lord, we've got 400 LFs, 400 battalions, this would be roughly 40 from each tribe, more from the bigger tribes, fewer from the other tribes, but this would seem about right. Children of Benjamin heard that they had gone up, but the children of Israel said, speak, how did this wicked deed happen? The Levite, this is his big moment, he gets to stand on a stump and address all Israel, he's a celebrity now, so he answers and says, my concubine and I went into Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin, to spend the night.

He doesn't give any of the preamble that we got, does he? He doesn't explain that this woman left him in anger and he had to go fetch her, and then he dallyed around and left at the wrong time of day, and that it was his fault that they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Didn't listen to the father, didn't listen to his servant, he won't listen to somebody that outranks him, and he doesn't listen to somebody below him, he's doing what's right in his own eyes. The men of Gibeah arose against me and surrounded the house at night because of me, me, me, I, I. They intended to kill me, but instead they ravished my concubine so that she died.

So I took hold of my concubine, cut her in pieces, sent her through all the territory of the inheritance of Israel because they committed lewdness and outrage in Israel. Now these words, lewdness and outrage, are significant terms. They are used specifically to describe certain kinds of behavior.

Lewdness is used for all sorts of sexually deviant or immoral behavior. This looks at the kind of action, this is the same thing the sodomites wanted to do, this is what these men of Benjamin wanted to do. You can have these long discussions, if you look at some of the commentaries on this book, they get into the whole thing about, well, which is worse? One kind of rape or another, against the same gender or against a different gender? Isn't it man-centered and patriarchal to think that one kind is worse than another? The Bible is not making that kind of judgment here.

It's a Canaanite-ish identity. They have been identified with the wickedness that God punished with fire and brimstone. You don't have to try to make a value judgment, which kind of rape is worse? They are evil, they are both abominations, and there's plenty in the law.

Don't let anybody ever tell you, if you get into a discussion, and they say, well, you know the Bible, that's just men wrote it, it's all geared toward men, women get short shrifted. There is no other ancient document anywhere that treats women as highly and as fairly as the Bible. The Old Testament scriptures are unique in the ancient Near East for their high view of women.

And feminists notwithstanding, you can't please them, you address a letter and say, Mrs. So-and-so, they're going to get upset. There's no pleasing them. So just remember that this is a false charge.

Go read some of the other ancient Near Eastern documents that describe how women were treated. Israel was unique in its respect and its value and the protection under the law of Moses in terms of what happened to someone who committed adultery or someone who committed fornication, which is a crime against women. Men are the initiators of these types of things.

Women are often the victims, or they are bullied or coerced or otherwise unwilling participants in this in many cases, and it is the law of Moses that gives them protection and elevates them so that there is an equal punishment for these crimes, just as there would be for crimes against men in other ways. So he states his case, they committed lewdness and they committed outrage. Now, we haven't seen an assembly like this since Joshua chapter 22, and you'll

remember that there was this whole issue of the Transjordan tribes, and they had set up an impressive altar and so the children of Israel, somebody says the children of Reuben, the children of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh had built an altar on the frontier of the land of Canaan in the region of the Jordan on the children of Israel's side.

When the children of Israel heard it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered together at Shiloh to go to war against them. And so then they sent Phineas, the son of Eleazar, to the children of Reuben, to the children of Gad, to the half-tribe of Manasseh. This is Joshua 22, the middle of the chapter, and ten rulers, one ruler each from the chief house of every tribe of Israel, each one was the head of the house of his father among the divisions of Israel.

They came to Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh in the land of Gilead. They spoke with them. Thus says the whole congregation of the Lord, what treachery is this that you have committed against the God of Israel to turn away this day from following the Lord? You have built for yourselves this altar, you're rebelling against the Lord.

Is this the iniquity of Peor? And so on. You remember that. They were ready to go to war against these tribes.

So we have sort of a similar situation here where one tribe seems to be in trouble. And you think, well, here's another case where Israel is going to kind of do the right thing. They're going to rise up and they're going to rectify this bad situation.

That's what they did before. They were so concerned that somebody was going to err that the tribes piled up some rocks and they were ready to go destroy them because they didn't want to repeat iniquity against God. Now you've got another grand assembly of the tribes and you think, okay, well now let's see some goodness come out of this.

Let's see something, you know, cursing turned to blessing here. And that's kind of the expectation because everybody's familiar with the book of Joshua. Seems promising.

Maybe the Israelites are going to learn and recognize. But what they do instead is rise up in verse 8. None of us will go to his tent. Nobody's going to turn back to his house.

This is the thing which we will do to give you. We will go up against it by lot. We will take ten men out of every hundred throughout all the tribe of Israel, a hundred out of every thousand and a thousand out of every ten thousand to make provision for the people.

Now the one out of every ten is valid. Ten out of every hundred, a hundred mea means a great many. It's probably pretty close to a hundred.

Then you have the word for eleph. You'll take a mea out of every eleph and then you have ravava which is the word for ten thousands or it's translated ten thousands here in any case. So the words we have are ten which is asher or asherah.

You have hundred which is mea, m-e-a-h. You have the word for thousand which is eleph, e-l-e-p-h. And then the word translated ten thousand is ravava which is r-b-a-b-a-h.

And this comes from the word many or great is rav, r-a-v. The ravshaka is the grand pooba so to speak. Rav means many.

It's the standard word that means a whole lot. And ravava means lots and lots. Eleph means a great amount.

Ravava means bunches. And they're not sitting there counting. These people don't have the time to sit there and watch ten thousand guys file by.

One of them making a scratch in a clay tablet or something. You run out of clay, you run out of time. It's just a big gaggle of folks.

It's an innumerable multitude. And so they can count tens and they can count hundreds. And after that, well, that's a big group and that's a really big group.

And so that's what they're saying. Out of these smaller groups from the smaller tribes and the smaller divisions of tribes, clans and families within tribes, if they sent a hundred guys, we'll take ten of them and these guys will be responsible for logistics. If they sent a gaggle, well, we'll take a hundred guys out of the gaggle.

And if they sent a whopping lot, well, we'll take a lot out of the whopping lot and they'll be responsible for logistics. They're not counting these big numbers. They can't.

It's just, I mean, how many guys are going to have to stand there with their fingers and toes? How much time is it going to take to file? Think about it. It's just not feasible. So they just go by big groups.

And the whole idea here is that they're going to apportion a percentage of each group to be responsible for supply because everybody can't fight. And this was an issue later on. You remember in the days of David when he crossed the creek and some of the guys stayed behind with the gear.

They were pushing on. They were trying to get the captured women and stuff. While David was off in one place, his people got snatched out of the city.

His wife is among them. And he goes and pursues. And some of them got to travel fast and light, so they leave a big pile of stuff.

And some of the wearier guys stay back there to guard that. The rest of them go. And they have a big defeat.

They get a lot of booty. And when they come back, some of the guys that pursued and got the booty didn't want to share with the guys that stayed in the rear with the gear, literally. They

didn't want to share.

And David made it a law and an ordinance in Israel that is share and share alike. Your job back there in the rear is just as important as the guys out there, you know, not shooting bullets, but slinging arrows and stones or whatever it is they were doing. Everybody is a part of the team.

And you don't get short shrift just because you weren't in the forefront of the battle. You can be in a support role and you get just as much as share. And that is a great principle.

And you see it in action here. It had been a tradition in Israel and it got lost. And David restored it.

But you think about this, you know, they have the saying, behind every man there is a woman. And that's the best version of that statement. And it's true.

There's a lot of guys that achieve great things. And one of the reasons they can do so is that their wife is nailing down the household. She's doing all of the things like, you know, laundry and groceries and schedule coordination and providing all of the infrastructure so the guy can go out and do the bread by the sweat of the brow thing.

And sometimes you wind up with the roles reversed. I've had that role reversed where, you know, my wife was working and I wasn't for a relatively brief period of time. Sometimes it's more than brief.

But whatever it is, sometimes we find ourselves in a supporting role. It can be in employment. You know, somebody can be up there grandstanding and getting all the glory for a great project, but they could not have done it if it wasn't for the guy back there crunching numbers or gathering data or doing the legwork and putting the presentation together so that this guy could shine.

You know, you put something together and a vice president goes and presents it and everybody says, well, Ed, that was a great presentation. I think we will get this million dollar account. Well, all Ed did was stand up and show off the hard work of his subordinates.

Well, in the plan of God, in the word of God, the principle is, don't be discouraged if you are not the face of greatness. If you are not there, maybe you're not the missionary in Africa winning souls. Maybe you're not the pastor preaching, you know, the wonderful words of truth of God's plan and purpose.

Maybe you're not the evangelist that gets to share the gospel and see someone come to Christ, but you are in a support role. You support by prayer. You may support financially.

You may support by providing the infrastructure that allows other people to do those things. The principle of the word of God is God knows and God gives equal credit to the person back in the rear. You may be the one out of the ten or the ten out of the hundred or the hundred out of

the many or the many out of the great many.

And, you know, you can imagine they go duck, duck, goose, duck, duck, goose, and every goose has to do the supply, and the rest of the guys get to go fight. And you say, well, I didn't want to be goose, I wanted to be duck. And well, sorry, but that's just the luck of the draw here, that's the assignment that you have.

And it's not glamorous, and it's not glorious, and it wasn't what you wanted, but this is what you get. It is required in a steward that a man be found faithful. It is required in the plan and purpose of God that whatever we get assigned, we're faithful.

He that is faithful in that which is least will be faithful also in that which is much. And you will find people that do grand belly flops on big things have been inconsistent and unreliable on small things as well. And people that achieve great things and people that can be relied upon to do important things are people who pay attention to detail.

You see this even when you go and visit a business or an office or whatever, and you can tell. Some of us have been looking at software, and you can look at the company and the way they operate and how much feedback do they cultivate. There's places all of us, I think, have gone out and gotten software, and you try to go back and say, well, I've got a question.

Well, there's no support. There's bugs in it. It doesn't work right.

It's relatively inexpensive. You buy it over the web, and it does certain things, but it crashes. It's buggy.

You try to get a hold of somebody, you get no response. You try to get information. Well, what if I want to do this? It's poorly documented.

Then other programs, they're very responsive, and they ask for feedback, and they try to improve, and they're very proactive. Businesses that are this way, that cultivate feedback, and you say, you know what? This is somebody I would trust with my important data, or with my health, or with whatever it may be, because they're faithful in small things. You figure, you know, this is the kind of person that's going to be faithful when I really need something important.

We want to be those people. We should be those people in the plan and purpose of God. What are the small things? Well, it's the unglamorous.

It's the supply. All of us have to be the 10 out of 100 sometimes. We're just supposed to sit there and pray, or look for ways to support somebody who is in the battle, in the conflict, and we're not.

We're on the edge. We're on the periphery. We have wonderful people who can see needs and meet them logistically.

Somebody's got an illness or a disruption in their schedule, and they provide a meal, or they provide babysitting, or they take care of errands, or they bring something over. Churches that do this for their members, as our church does, and the church that our folks are in up there in Claremore, it's a wonderful fellowship where people are watching for opportunities to do those small things in support, because people are fighting personal spiritual battles, and they can concentrate on that, and other people are filling unglamorous gaps. That's what you see here.

It's a good principle, but Israel was very inconsistent in its application, and David finally had to pass a law during the days of his kingship to make sure that people that do the unglamorous, rear-with-the-gear stuff, share equally, just as important. So that's what they're doing here in verse 10. We'll take so many to make provision for the people so that when they come to Gibeah and Benjamin, they may repay all the vileness that they have done in Israel.

We had a question during the break, you know, what was it that everybody was shocked at when the pieces circulated around? Well, it was all shocking, the pieces of a woman circulating in the country, that's shocking, and the message that accompanied it, that this vileness had been done in Israel. They're not looking for the Levite, how could you cut up that concubine? They're looking for the men of Gibeah, and they're motivated to go fight against them, their own brethren, because this is just unspeakable violence. So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united as one man.

You notice they didn't speak out against the Levite and say, well, couldn't you have found a better way to tell us? He stood up and said his piece. They're not mad at him. They're not upset about the chopping of the woman.

They have been galvanized into action by the heinousness of this situation. So far, so good. So they do, similar to what we saw back in Joshua, the tribes of Israel sent men throughout all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, what is this wickedness that has occurred among you? 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. Instead, the children of Benjamin gathered together from their cities to Gibeah to go to battle against the children of Israel. Now what is the rationale for this? We love those homosexual, pervert, concubine-abusing and killing men, and this is what we stand for, and so we're going to fight.

What is Benjamin thinking, that they're going to go to defense of these gross, depraved denizens of Gibeah? Why would they go and fight? What's their rationale? Well, all you have to do is answer this question. Who is fighting in defense of Gibeah? Fellow Benjamites. What is the basis for it? Pure tribe loyalty.

They're in Benjamin, I'm in Benjamin, somebody's picking on a Benjamite, I'm going to fight them. I don't care what it's about. I am loyal to my fellow Benjamites.

What was he adding to the Levite when he went by Jebus? I'm not going to have anything to do with somebody that's not an Israelite, I'm only going to go with the Israelites. But the Israelites that he chose to associate with turned out to be utter, depraved, criminally so perverts. But he stays in that town, and of course he had various sets of knowledge at various times, but the idea here is that blind filial loyalty is troublesome if it blinds you to moral turpitude.

You cannot allow your brotherly love or your familial love or your loyalty in terms of well, blood's thicker than water, to get in the way of discriminating between what is right and what is wrong. They used to have this thing, my country, may she always be right, but my country, right or wrong? Well, Lieutenant William Calley might have thought that in Vietnam, some of us are old enough to remember the My Lai Massacre, where he got orders and went in and did something that was wrong, an order that he should have questioned and didn't, because he said, well, I'm just following orders. Well, you know, jack-booted SS soldiers were just following orders in Germany in World War II.

Lots of people can slough off responsibility by saying, well, I'm just following orders or I'm just being loyal to somebody I should be loyal to. I should be loyal, you know, wives get tangled up in evil and in crime because they're loyal to their husband. Well, I love my husband and I'm supporting him no matter what he does.

Well, certain times your husband does something wrong, you've got to get away. You've got to establish some distance. You cannot be a part of something just because there is some sort of bond.

We have to watch this. This is the mistake the Benjamites make. Well, give you this Benjamin, we can't allow anybody to pick on a Benjamite.

Look at who you're defending, but they don't have the perspective. They don't have the perception anymore. Their conscience has been seared with a hot iron because they are not close to God and they do not have the objectivity that comes from the word of God to make the right decision.

So they are going to defend perverts and you see this all over our country today where there's all sorts of defense for heinous, abominable, immorality on the basis of some sort of loyalty. Well, how can you make a human feel bad by picking on them for their preferences? I think they were born that way, so it's evil. That's what Benjamin does.

Children of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brethren, the children of Israel. Instead, they gathered together from their cities to Gibeah to go to battle against the children of Israel. And from their cities at that time, the children of Benjamin numbered 26 battalions.

Remember I said if you had 400 battalions from all around Israel, that would probably be roughly 40 battalions from 10 tribes, give or take, larger tribes more, smaller tribes less. Benjamin is not an exceptionally numerous tribe, and so they can field 26 battalions of men.

And so this is on the order of probably, if you figured just for round numbers sake that there's 200 men in a battalion, then you've got what, 5,200 men, something like that.

This is reasonable for the area, it's reasonable for what the land would support, 5,000, 6,700 men is what we're talking about here, not 26,000. The land of Benjamin would not support that many people, they'd all starve, as these numbers would elsewhere in Israel. So 26 battalions of men who drew the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, who numbered 700 select men, and that's probably about right.

You go count the cities in Benjamin and figure you could get 700 men out of each town, you'd end up with 5,000 to 7,000 men, and that's a more reasonable number. Among all these people were 700 select men who were left-handed, everyone could sling a stone at a hair's breadth and not miss. Now besides Benjamin, the men of Israel numbered 400 battalions, so you've got 400 battalions against 26 who drew the sword, all of these were men of war.

The children of Israel arose and went up to the house of God to inquire of God. Notice, they went up to the house of God, it said that they had assembled before God at Mizpah. Now they've gone up to the house of God, so there's some remnants of the tabernacle at this time, this would have been the tabernacle tent perhaps, and the Ark of the Covenant, we don't know if it had already started to get scattered or not, but it's nearby.

They assembled at Mizpah before the Lord, so now they're going up, they arose and went up to the house of God to inquire of God. Now did they inquire about whether or not to fight Benjamin, did they inquire about any of the preceding action, should we go up or should we not? Their question is, which of us shall go up first to battle against the children of Benjamin? And the Lord said, Judah first. What does this remind you of? What happened back in chapter 1? Chapter 1, verse 1. Chapter 1, verse 2. After the death of Joshua, it came to pass that the children of Israel asked the Lord, saying, who shall be first to go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them? Remember that? The Lord said, Judah shall go up.

Indeed, I have delivered the land into his hand. That's what God said when they first came in against who? The Canaanites. What have the men of Gibeah and Benjamin become? Sodomites, Canaanites.

And so this is an echo, although now they're going up against their own people. But when they say, who shall go up first? God says, well, if somebody's going up against somebody, Judah. Why Judah? Both times.

Chapter 1, chapter 20. Who should go up first? The tribe of Judah should go up first. Why? Reuben is the firstborn.

Levi is the spiritual leaders. Birth order is Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and then Judah. Why Judah? That is the ruling tribe.

Has been ever since Jacob pronounced the blessings. Scepter is in his hand. He's got the white

teeth.

He's got the milk and the donkey tied to the vine. And you remember that whole prophecy about Judah. Scepter shall not part until Shiloh comes, and so on.

So Judah is supposed to go. Now, where have I suggested to you are the most mature believers in all of Israel? Where are the Bible studies still going on? Bethlehem of Judah. This is where people like Boaz and his descendants, all the way down through Jesse and to David, are dwelling.

This is where the concubine came from. The concubine is from Judah. Judah is going to go avenge, in a sense, the murder of this girl.

It is the avenger of blood principle. But in a larger sense, Judah, as the civil and military leaders of Israel, ought to be leading Israel back toward that goal, represented by that woman. Israel ought to be married to, and committed to, the plan and purpose of God.

And Judah is the tribe that ought to lead, and ought to move Israel in that direction. And ultimately, it will be. David, from the tribe of Judah, is going to accomplish that.

So this makes perfect sense. Judah first. So the children of Israel arose in the morning and encamped against Gibeah.

And the number one tribe there is going to be Judah. Now we are looking at the amount of space here that gets devoted to these battles. Because it is pretty extensive.

We are going to have three battles now in the rest of this chapter. First battle begins here in verse 18, it is 18-21. And the pattern here is the question, who shall go up first? The answer, Judah.

So they attack. In verse 20, the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin, put themselves in battle array to fight against them at Gibeah. Children of Benjamin came out of Gibeah, and on that day cut down to the ground twenty-two battalions of the men of Israel.

They pretty much, you know, got that stuff you put in your stomach that eats up its weight in excess acid, or that sort of thing. You got twenty-six battalions of Benjamites that killed twenty-two battalions. Each guy basically killed a man, on average.

They pretty much wiped out their weight in opponents, close to it. So who shall go up first? Judah. They attack and they are defeated.

Twenty-two battalions of men are slaughtered. And you say, well now, how does this happen? We asked God who should go up first. He said, Judah.

We did what he said and we got our twenty-two battalions slaughtered. We got our helmets handed to us, we lost. So the people, that is the men of Israel, verse 22, encouraged themselves

and again formed the battle line at the place where they had put themselves in array on the first day.

We'll come back and give it another go. So this is the second battle now. The second battle is verses 22 through 25.

And 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? Should we go again or not? So we got the inquiry. The answer is, yes. The Lord said, Go up against him.

Now how did the Lord say this? He says, *Rehm* and *Thumim*, two *Alephs*, came out. Double thumbs up. Go for it.

So the children of Israel, verse 24, approached the children of Benjamin on the second day. Benjamin went out against them from Gibeah on the second day and cut down to the ground 18,000 more of the children of Israel. All these drew the sword.

18 more battalions. So in the first two days, how many battalions got slaughtered? What's 22 plus 18? One of those biblically significant numbers. Forty battalions.

So now let's just think back. When Joshua went into the land and started hacking and slashing the evil, depraved, immoral Canaanites, what were the casualty statistics we were given in the book of Joshua? Did he lose battalions of men in those battles? From all appearances, he didn't lose anybody. Hailstones coming down, God fighting on their behalf, Canaanites scattering to the wind, chasing him, the sun standing still, chasing him some more, slaughtering them all the way as far as Aphek and beyond, all the way down to the borders and clear out of the land.

Here in their righteous indignation, they go before the Lord, Lord, we've got to purge these evil men. Why are they suffering this decimation? How many of them assembled? How many battalions? Four hundred battalions. At the end of two days, how many men have they lost? Forty battalions, which is what percent? Ten percent.

And how many of the men are back doing the supply thing? Ten percent. They have tithed their army to God. Remember the tithe was twenty percent, not ten, in Israel.

But they are paying a terrible price. Why? Didn't God say, one of you will put to flight an elephant, and ten of you will put to flight that many more? In other places, he said five of you will put to flight so many, and ten of you will put to flight that many more. They're not putting to flight anybody.

They're getting decimated. But they're appealing to God, and God is giving them answers, and they're following God's instructions, and they're getting bloodied badly. They've lost ten percent of their fighting force.

One man out of every ten is dead. One family out of every ten in Israel is not having a father or a son come home. Terrible price to pay.

Why is this? Well, we keep going. We get the third battle now in verses 26 through 48. Notice the space that is allocated to these battles.

I told you that fully half of this Levite concubine story is this portion, the reaction. It begins at verse 18 and goes all the way through to verse 48. Thirty verses here on the battle.

So the third battle, verse 26. So, children of Israel, 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, apparently for the first time, burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. Have you noticed a gradual quickening of attitude and humility and an increasing sense of what is right before God in these three approaches? What did they do the first time? They went up before the Lord and they did what? Lord, who should go up first? Was there any kneeling? Was there any worship? Was there any sacrificing? Was there anything? They went before the Lord and said, Lord, who should go first? Judah. Huge loss.

The second day, what was different about their attitude? They went up and wept before the Lord until evening. Did they weep about having to go to battle against their own brethren the first time? They didn't. But now they've sobered up.

They've suffered and it's been good for them. They've got more humility. This is godly sorrow, so to speak.

And they are more attentive the second time. And they ask a more detailed question. Shall I again draw near for battle against the children of my brother Benjamin? It's beginning to hit home to them that I'm not so sure I'm doing the right thing here.

This fraternal, internecine warfare here. Maybe I'm not as right as I thought I was. My righteous indignation is beginning to cool into a little more sober reflection.

But they still get... It's more than a bloody nose. They lose quite a few more men. Now that they've lost 10% of their fighting force, the third time, look at their attitude.

They went up, they came to the house of God, and they wept. They sat there before the Lord. They fasted all that day until evening.

And they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. Wouldn't it have been great if that had been their attitude the first day? But it wasn't. They were full of their own self-righteousness.

And now they have humility. The children of Israel inquired of the Lord. The ark of the covenant of God was there in those days.

Now why didn't we get this note up at the beginning? Why does the narrator give us this fact down here? Because this is where the children of Israel really started to think about God and His presence and His ark. And that's why the narrator puts the note down here. It dawns on them for the first time, we are in the presence of the God of Israel.

And their attention is turning much more to God and His will instead of their righteous indignation and their sense of being full of themselves. And this is the point where the narrator says, Oh, by the way, they're just now really beginning to realize the ark of God is here. The ark that was constructed at the foot of Mount Sinai.

The ark that carried the Israelites for 40 years through the wilderness and on across the Jordan and into the Promised Land and gave them this inheritance. They're beginning to refresh and remind and renew themselves in relation to God. They're not defining themselves relative to the Benjamites.

Now they're defining themselves in relation to God. It's hugely significant. The author knows exactly what he's doing when he puts this note here.

The ark of the covenant of God was there in those days. Phineas, the son of Eliezer, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days. You remember Phineas? This is the same Phineas that is famous for other acts.

Remember I told you there are other clues that tell us how early a story this is. This is the grandson of Aaron. You've got the grandson of Moses up there at the house of Micah.

Remember Jonathan? And you've got the grandson of Aaron faithfully standing before the ark. Nobody's paying any attention to him. Israel has gone its own way.

Every man does what is right in his own eyes. Phineas, who's probably elderly by now, is still standing his ground. He is capable of running people through with a javelin when necessary.

And he can stand his ground for year after year after year, despite the faithlessness of all the people around him. And at the point when the nation is again in crisis, it is Phineas standing at the ark of God. And here is where he reemerges after all of those many years.

And he's right where he's supposed to be. And so now Israel comes and says, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease? The first time they've ever said, Maybe we ought to stop. The Lord says, Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand.

Why do you suppose God is now ready to deliver them? Because now their heart is right. Now they see the ark of God. Now they see the priest of God.

Now they are truly hearing the word of God, and they're going with a right heart and with a right attitude. And of course, it doesn't mean that all of Israel's problems are solved. But by way

of symbolism and by way of picture, there's been a vast change of heart in the remaining Israelites before they go up to battle a third time against these wicked men of Gibeah.

Well, it gives us pause for thought how important our heart attitude is before God. It isn't just what we're doing and whether it's right, but are we doing a right thing in a right way, in the power of God, for God's glory, with a humble heart? That makes all the difference. Well, we'll pick up here in Judges chapter 20, verse 29, in about a week and a half.

But let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the graphic illustrations of the truths that guide us and inform us and strengthen us and enable us to live lives that are pleasing in your sight.

We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will impress these things on our hearts. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.