

Judges 08-09-05a

This is Friday the 5th of September 2008. We continue our study tonight in the Book of Judges. We're in chapter 20, looking at the internecine, the intramural fraternal warfare, civil war, as it were, in Israel.

We'll take a moment at the beginning, as is our custom, to take just a moment to individually exercise our priesthood. We can each pray a short prayer and ensure that we are in a position to hear and understand the Word of God because of the ministry of God's Holy Spirit. Shall we pray? Father, how grateful we are for the fellowship of which we are a part.

We thank you for the uniting bond that we have in Jesus Christ. We thank you for the ministry of your Spirit, which he left us as an encouragement and as an enablement so that we can live the life to which we have been called and prepare for the future to which we are all advancing day by day and challenge by challenge, test by test, and decision by decision. We thank you for this portion of your Word and we ask that you will bless it to our hearts.

We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen. Well, as we have seen in our recent studies, this section is a return to the early days of the period of the judges. The first 18 chapters carried us from the death of Joshua all the way down to the lifetime of Samuel.

Samson and Samuel are near contemporaries. They are alive at the same time. Samson is a little older, but Samuel is alive.

Eli, Hophni, and Phineas, that whole thing is going on in Shiloh, while Samson is tearing down the temple in the opposite corner of the country. Then, beginning in chapter 19, we have seen events that go back to the beginning of the period, in the early days. We saw the establishment of false worship up in the hills of Ephraim in the household of Micah.

We saw that this is a cancerous development that is just going to grow and grow over the decades and centuries between the death of Joshua and the time of the monarchy. This is going to be part of the reason, and it is the acceptance and the encouragement and the embracing of this kind of thinking in the north that is going to characterize that northern part of Israel all the way down until they go out in 721 BC. This is the reason that they are not going to survive the incursion of the Assyrians, because they are judged by God for this lackadaisical attitude.

It has trappings. It has overtones. It has vocabulary and accoutrements that seem to reflect the God of Israel.

They've got ephods. They've got Levitical priests. They have the right vocabulary, and they've got some of the right trappings, but it is not obedient to God.

This amalgamated, half-baked answer for worship is going to result in their destruction. When we got to the latter portion of chapter 19, we saw this Levi who is associated with this false

worship. This is in the early days.

Joshua is hardly cold. Some of the elders that served with Joshua are probably still in their latter years, and there is a reason why we know this. But already, things are starting to turn.

It's kind of like Moses hasn't even gotten down from Sinai, and they're already forming a golden calf. Well, Israel is just barely in the land, barely settled into their inheritance when this molten image and this carved image is set up and is adopted by the tribe of Dan. Now, what is the interpretation application of this? It is easy to become complacent when you obtain possession.

The church has always done better under persecution than it has in prosperity. Persecution weeds out those who aren't really interested. Hardship and hard times, pressure weeds out those who have false motivation for dedicating themselves to God.

The church has always done better under persecution than it has in prosperity. But in a time of prosperity, in a time when things are not so bad, it is easy for compromise. It is easy for inattention to detail and for the accepting of things that don't belong to God by those who are not being constantly driven back to God and back to the truth and back to the reality by adversity.

They've settled into the land and almost immediately they relax. We used to have an expression in the Marine Corps that you slip off your pack. The old Alice pack, I don't know what they carry now, probably some kind of high speed parachute thing.

But in the old days when we had real gear, we had 782 gear, we had web belts, we had Alice packs, old uncomfortable things that would rub blisters on you and hurt you and screw up your posture for life. But when you wanted to take that thing off, it had quick release tabs and you could pull those things and your pack would just drop off. So this became a metaphor, it became an expression for somebody who was no longer taking a load.

You carry the thing so far and then you just drop your pack. And somebody who got short in an overseas tour, you used to have one year overseas tours unaccompanied. And so you get down to the last 30 days or the last 45 days and somebody who had been working hard for the first 10 months, first 11 months, they start looking ahead and they say, well, I'm short, I'm leaving.

We had all kinds of expressions for people being short, so short that you couldn't see them and midget jokes and things about them. And you would say, well, you've got burns on your shoulder from your pack slipping off so fast. Well, this is kind of the attitude in northern Israel.

They've gone in and they've got this wonderful hill country up there in Ephraim. It's lush, it's verdant, it's already, there's a lot of cultivation that had been done by the previous owners who had been evicted, and it's there for the taking. And they're like, hey, all right.

And the single-minded dedication to mission that they had, to survival in the wilderness and to

conquest under Joshua, those two missions are complete. They survived and they conquered. What's the mission now? Seize and hold.

You've seized, now just hold on. Well, hold on is not near the, I mean, they're not being attacked, there's not riotous incursions by all kinds of armed marauders, as there will be in the later days, in the days of Gideon, in the days of Jephthah and so on. These are the early days.

All of the opposition has been crushed. God has fulfilled His promise to drive them out. We have situations like this where we come to a place of rest and we're not challenged like we were.

And it's easy to hit the quick release. It's easy to get that short-timers attitude and think, well, you know, all I've got to do is just sit here, time's going to pass and everything's going to be great. And this is what happens in northern Israel.

You can see it. There's a relaxation. So we've been given all of this background.

And the Levite goes up and there's actually this horrible, these people have just decided to party. The men of Gibeah, these men of Benjamin, they're just like party city. Hey, you know, they're not near any borders.

They don't have to fight anybody. And so they have just been partying down. And you party, party, party, and pretty soon you get sick of the same old party and, well, we need to do something wilder.

Let's do something more extreme. Let's do something more outrageous. Look at the history of the Roman Empire.

If you ever get a chance, you can't read Gibbon, but you can browse him. And if you read the decline and fall of the Roman Empire and just check the status of culture in Rome and in the Empire in general, as they no longer had to go out and fight or as the fighting was way out on the frontiers. You remember Caesar, even way back in the days of Caesar, he was way off.

He was across the Rubicon. He was way off in, you know, who knows where. And they were all getting dissipated and they were getting dissolute and they were immoral and they were just very relaxed and interested in personal pleasure.

Well, this is what happened in Gibeah. And many times when people get tired of the same old thing, they've got to up the ante. This is why you have people now who have got all kinds of perverted interests in the areas of immorality.

You just wonder, how could someone get into some of these perverse areas? Well, you've got to push the envelope because after a while, the same old just doesn't have a thrill. And you've got to push the envelope. You've got to find that edge and push it and go further and further.

And you wind up in things that people would never have thought themselves, would have never

imagined themselves to be in. But they're seeking that rush. They're seeking that high, that element of, that feeling of danger.

And I'm way beyond the rules here. And, you know, I'm going where few people dare to go. And there's a rush.

There's a high associated with that. This is what the men of Gibeah have done. And their fellow Benjamites let them.

It was tolerated. It was overlooked. The blind eye was turned to it.

Well, you know, they're still family. Ha ha, those Gibeahites. And they just didn't think anything about it.

Well, always, dissolute, dissipated, disintegrating morals lead to violence. And they lead to harm in the realm of evil. And that's what happens here.

A stranger wanders into town. And the heart of these men is revealed. And this woman is raped and killed.

It always happens. It will happen in our lives. If we tolerate immorality, if we tolerate a town of Gibeah in our soul.

The nation of Israel represents the soul of the church-age believer by way of application. And, you know, they used to talk about, well, you've got a sinful nature and it's got an area of strength and an area of weakness. Usually the area of strength gets you into human good.

And you do things in your own strength for your own glory. That's the area of strength. And the area of weakness is where you fail in the area of morals.

And you yield to temptations and all kinds of bad things happen. Well, you can have a town of Gibeah, a town where there's an area of disobedience or an area of weakness that's not addressed. It's not brought to judgment.

It's not brought to justice. It's not expunged. It isn't given an ultimatum.

It's just tolerated. It's overlooked. It's put aside.

And we can have these things. And we say, well, you know, I look around and I'm not as bad as a lot of people. And so if I do X every once in a while, well, what's the harm? Well, the harm is that that kind of thing never stands still.

There's no such thing as saying, well, you know, this malignant tumor that I've got, I think if I just don't think about it and overlook it, I'll be okay. It's going to metastasize. It's going to grow.

It's going to spread. It's going to infect and corrupt things around it. That's what this town has done in Israel.

So the advertisement is sent the, the, you can't get more graphic. This is better than a blog. This is better than a 32nd spot on TV.

You send pieces of this woman's body all through Israel. Everybody gets incensed and there's this righteous indignation. Well, how can this have taken place? And this is where we, we pick up here in chapter 20.

They gathered themselves together and they encamped against Gibeah in chapter 20, verse 19. And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin. Now how many of them are there? You may remember if you go back up that there are 400,000 foot soldiers.

This is really great in Hebrew because it's ish raglim. Regel is foot, raglim is feet. These are, these are men of the feet.

These are feet men, literally. They're footmen. They're infantry.

They're O-trees. They're, they're foot soldiers. O-3 is the MOS designation for infantry in the Marine Corps.

But because so many of them are from the South and because we figure that's what you are if you're not going to be in tanks or artillery or in intel or communications or motor transport or anything else in the Marine Corps, they're called O-trees. They're just O-trees. And there's, there's like a forest of them.

They're just out there and that's what they do. Well, these are foot soldiers. Now here's the thing.

How many of them show up? 400,000. We've talked about LF. These are 400 units, 400 fighting units.

And regardless of how you want to understand LF, it means the same thing here that it does in the Book of Numbers. When is the last time Israel had to put an army out and we knew its numbers? Well, you've got the Book of Numbers that tells us that. So keep your place here and turn back to Numbers chapter 26.

I'm going to show you something really interesting here. Numbers chapter 26. In fact, as long as you're at 26, go back to 25 and you'll remember that there was evil in the camp.

They were at the Acacia Grove and they began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. This again, they're just about to go into the land and here's the danger that the suggestion of Balaam on how to defeat the Israelites was to get them from within, attack their relationship with God, estrange them from their God. This is like shearing off Samson's hair.

If you can get evil in the camp, they will collapse from within because their God will no longer help them. Balaam suggested this and this is what the women of Moab do. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods.

They ate and bowed down to their gods. They were joined to Baal of Peor. The anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel.

The Lord said to Moses, take the leaders of the people. Hang the offenders before the Lord out in the sun that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel. It's an argument for the televising of capital punishment, by the way.

If I had anything to say about it, all executions would be on c-span. They would just break from covering Congress and they would cover executions and they would be hangings. This is just me.

Believe what you want. Think what you want. It was up to me.

I would do away with lethal injection. No electric chair. Hang them.

There's an art to it. It's a wonderful art of figuring out exactly how far they should drop so that their neck will break and so that it's a relatively humane way to execute someone. But it's very graphic.

There's an instant at which somebody ceases to be alive and they are on display. The whole reason to have capital punishment is twofold. It is A, to get rid of the offender and B, to discourage future offenders.

We've taken half of that away because it's all done behind closed doors and some cryptic message comes out, well so and so died at such and such a time. No. You put them out there, point all the cameras at them and they drop, their necks break, they're dead and they hang there and everybody sees it.

This is the biblical form of execution. Stone them, everybody sees it. Hang them, everybody sees it.

God said hang them out for everyone to see because these people are evil and the consequences of evil need to be visible as a warning. And if you don't do that as a society, you end up with a society like we've got. Anyway, I digress.

So, every one of you, kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor. He says this to the judges of Israel. Each of you go and kill these that have broken the law.

Indeed, one of the children of Israel came presented to his brethren, a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel who were weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting when Phineas, the son of Eliezer, the son of Aaron the priest, does this ring a bell? Who in our story is currently serving the Lord at the house of the Lord? Who is the current priest in Israel in our story and judges? Phineas, the son of Eliezer, the son of Aaron the priest. It's this guy. This is the guy.

He's young here because Moses is alive and they haven't even gone into the land yet. But this is

the guy. This is Phineas.

Phineas saw it, rose from among the congregation, took a javelin in his hand, and he went in after the man of Israel into his tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through her body. The plague was stopped among the children of Israel. Those who died in the plague were twenty-four elephs, twenty-four thousands.

The Lord said to Moses, Phineas, the son of Eliezer, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the children of Israel because he was zealous with my zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in my zeal. Therefore say, Behold, I give to him, Phineas, my covenant of peace, and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God and made atonement for the children of Israel. Now that's a great priest.

And they give the name, they give some more details. Now, go down to chapter 26. Came to pass after the plague, the Lord spoke to Moses and Eliezer the son of Aaron the priest, saying, Take a census.

Notice Eliezer is still alive. Phineas is still a sort of junior here. He's not officiating because his father is still alive.

That's how young he is. He's probably maybe in his late teens or early twenties when he does this javelin thing. Well, they take a census at God's command and they count everyone in Israel.

And if you go down to verse 51 of chapter 26, these are those who were numbered of the children of Israel, 601,730. There are 600 Eliphs in the 12 tribes of Israel. This is when Phineas is a young man, 600 Eliphs, 601 Eliphs and some change.

Now go back to Judges and how many men are put in the field against the tribe of Benjamin? You've got 400 Eliphs, right? The fighting force here is only two-thirds the size of the available fighting force in the early part of this same generation. Phineas is still alive. He's still the priest.

But from the time he stuck Cosby and the other guy through with the javelin until now, for whatever reason, instead of 600 Eliphs, there's only 400 Eliphs. Now I ask myself, what is the reason for this? I've seen some speculation. Some commentators think, well, this indicates that the curse has already begun to work on Israel because they are being faithless.

And God said over in Deuteronomy 28, 18 or whatever it is, I will curse the fruit of your womb and so on and you will not be so prolific as you begin to be apostate. But I personally think it's a little bit early for that. Here's my thought.

They're in the land and unlike when they were in the wilderness, when they're going to go out to fight, everybody goes because all you've got is a camp to defend. Now they're spread all through the land and if you don't send all of your able-bodied men, because your women and children are back at home unprotected, there's got to be a rear guard, there's got to be a home

militia, you know, the National Guard or somebody's got to still be back there defending, especially your border towns. You've just got through driving out all these Canaanites and there's a lot of angry people on your borders.

You don't assemble every fighting man and send them down to Benjamin and leave yourself open. So I suspect that part of the difference, part of this one-third difference is that there are some garrison troops who have remained behind to guard the borders and guard the towns and villages and that may account for this difference. But at any rate, it says all Israel came out and they've already detailed out a tenth.

Forty of these Eliphs are logistics guys to handle the supply lines and make sure that they get fed, that they have water and that they have all the gear that they need. So I would assume that there probably has been a drop in the number and to the extent that there has been a drop beyond garrison troops, this is the failure of the next generation to step up and be counted, be able-bodied, to be a fighting man at all. Maybe there's not as many of them, maybe it's a combination of all of these factors.

But the strength that Israel can muster now is only two-thirds of what they had under Moses and this is within a generation. The same Phineas is standing there. Now, Phineas is an amazingly prominent man to be so little known.

If you turn back to Joshua chapter 18, we have another reference to Phineas. At the beginning of the chapter, it says, Now the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh and set up the tabernacle of meeting there. Now the priest that is presiding over that is Phineas.

He says in verse 7, The Levites have no part among you, for the priesthood of the Lord is their inheritance. Oh, I've lost my reference. There's another reference to Phineas here in the vicinity of this chapter.

So he has been presiding since the days of Joshua. Here it is. It's in chapter 22, verse 30.

When Phineas the priest and the rulers of the congregation, the heads of the division of Israel who were with him, heard the words of the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and the children of Manasseh spoke. Remember that whole thing where they were across the Jordan and they set up that altar? And all the children of Israel assembled and they said, We've got to get this. We don't want to go back to the evil of Baal Peor.

And so they were all going to go fight Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh. And they all assembled together. And that was done under Phineas.

In chapter 22, verse 13, The children of Israel sent Phineas, the son of Eliezer the priest, to the children of Reuben, to the children of Gad, and to the half-tribe of Manasseh in the land of Gilead with him ten rulers. They came to the children of Reuben and they asked him, they said, What's going on with this altar you've built? That was Phineas. Phineas was the leader.

And when they wanted to find out what's up, because they were ready to go to war with their own people, they sent Phineas as the arbiter, as the mediator to go find out. And that's Joshua chapter 22. So now we're back in Judges chapter 20 and Phineas is still on the scene.

No doubt an old man by this time. But when they first go up against Benjamin, they don't send Phineas to find out what's up. They've already mapped out the army.

They've got their tent of the army for logistics. And then the tribes of Israel in verse 12 of chapter 20 sent men through Benjamin saying, What is this wickedness that has occurred among you? Deliver up the man, the perverted man, and give him to you. There is no inquiry with anybody that's got authority to speak for all Israel because Phineas is not there.

They have already decided on a policy. They've already made a decision. They send these men and they say, Give it up.

And the men of Benjamin say, Well, we won't. Well, where's the authority that these men have? Where is their right to make this demand? They're just men. They just sent some men.

The tribe sent some men through the tribe of Benjamin. So in verse 14, somewhat understandably, the children of Benjamin gathered together to go to battle against the children of Israel. And from their cities, they've got 26 Eliphs, these men who drew the sword.

And they've got these 700 select men who are left-handed. And in Hebrew, when you want to call somebody left-handed, there is no real word for left-handed. So it says they are constrained in the right hand.

It says they had 700 men who are constrained in the right hand. And the word for left-handed is actually constrained in the yad yamin. You know, that is how that works.

So everyone can sling a stone at a hair's breadth and so on. Well, this left-handed gene seems to persist for some time because these Benjamites are going to show up even in the later history of Israel. And you'll remember in Judges chapter 3, remember Ehud? What tribe was Ehud from? Back in 3.15, when the sons of Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer from them, Ehud, the son of Gerah, the Benjamite, a left-handed man.

Ehud was a left-handed Benjamite from this same gene pool. And later on, these guys are going to show up in the later history of Israel. And you'll remember in the days of David, when you get down to 1 Chronicles chapter 12 and verse 2, you find out that some of Saul's kinsmen who are in David's band of troops are left-handed.

And they're called ambidextrous or left-handed down in 1 Chronicles 12 too. So this was kind of a persistent trait. Very ironic given the name of the tribe.

So all of these trained soldiers come up against, and then we had these three battles, these three encounters. In the first instance, how did they inquire of the Lord who shall go up first?

How was that determined? Did they go to Phinehas? Did they say, inquire of the Lord for us and tell us what God wants? What did they do? How was the choice of Judah made for who shall go up first in 18? They went up to the house of God to inquire of God. They said, which of us shall go up first? And the Lord said, Judah first.

Well, they did this pretty much by casting lots. This is the standard thing. Same thing they did when they were trying to find Achan, who wears the sin in the camp.

They would cast lots, and whichever tribe was taken. And we saw the progression as they get progressively more of a realization that they need to be thinking about God and what God's will is, and inquiring more carefully of him. And so the third time, after they bring burnt offerings and peace offerings and prostrate themselves before God, that's when Phinehas finally speaks.

They were told the second time to go up against him, and they did, and they had more people cut down. And so the third time, in verse 27, they inquired of the Lord, and Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before him in those days. Now they have finally come in contact with Phinehas.

This is the Phinehas who was there at the Jordan, when they did not go up against their brethren, because they got the right answer. Reuben and Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh. Phinehas was involved in that.

This is the same Phinehas who was at Baal Peor, and stopped the anger of the Lord with his javelin. So when they finally get back to talking to Phinehas, they get a good answer. God says, go up and tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand.

So this is where we pick up tonight. Israel set men in ambush all around Gibeah. The children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day.

This is the third attack. It is the third day, and they put themselves in battle array against Gibeah as at other times. The children of Benjamin went out against the people, and were drawn away from the city.

They are overconfident now. They have whipped them twice before. And so they are dropping their guard.

They are assuming victory. They are assuming success. Now, isn't this what has happened to Israel? Israel accomplished mission number one in the wilderness.

They survived. They came to the Jordan. They accomplished mission number two under Joshua.

They crossed in and they conquered the land. And now this is their third mission. They had to survive the wilderness.

They had to conquer the land. And now they have to hold the land. They are sort of like these Benjamites.

When it comes to the third mission, they have kind of gotten soft and overconfident, haven't they? They have taken things for granted. They have dropped their guard. They have relaxed.

Evil is growing in the midst of Israel. Well, it is demonstrated in these Benjamites. The third time they went out against the people.

They were drawn away from the city. They began to strike down and kill some of the people, as at other times, in the highways, one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah. Now, why are these two cities mentioned? We already know that the highway goes to Gibeah, because that is the road that the guy was on.

But think about the significance of those two towns, Bethel and Gibeah. What does Bethel represent? What does the name mean? It is the house of God, isn't it? This is where Jacob laid his head on the rock and saw the angels ascending and descending and had a covenant promise from God. Bethel, formerly Luz, is the place where God has met with Abraham.

It is where he met with Jacob. It is a point of close approach to God. Angels ascend and descend in Bethel.

What does Gibeah represent? It is the most evil town in Israel. Here is this highway between Gibeah and Bethel. Which way are you moving? Which end of the highway are you on? You cannot get a more concise statement of extremes than Bethel and Gibeah.

That is your choice. Are you heading for Bethel or are you heading for Gibeah? The man, the Levite, who claimed that he was going to the house of God, Bethel, ended up in Gibeah. So, out in the field, 30 men of Israel are killed, and the children of Benjamin said, They are defeated before us, as at the first.

But the children of Israel said, Let us flee and draw them away from the city to the highways. Now, this is an old trick. Remember, this is what they did at Ai.

Remember, they went up there against Ai, overconfident, got defeated, and so what did they do when they went back? They said, Oh, we are being defeated, we are being defeated, run away, run away. And as they ran away, they drew all the men out of the city. And then what happened? Ambush, pincher movement, great slaughter.

Well, these wonderful valiant warriors of Benjamin forget that lesson. It is within living memory. Think about it now.

Phineas is still alive. Phineas was alive with the javelin with Moses before the second census. It is a living memory of what happened at Jericho and Ai.

How could the Benjamites forget this? They are in the identical situation. They are overconfident because they have won some victories. These are men who are skilled with their hands.

They can knock the eye out of a bird with their sling at 100 yards. They are hot shots with their skills, but they get no credit for their strategic thinking. They want to go out and hit something with their left-handed prowess, but they have lost sight of the larger situation.

This is an incredible danger for us. We can be working our skills and we can say, I am really skillful. I can do this all day long.

I can do this with my right hand tied behind my back, literally. That is what they are doing. They say, I am a mighty warrior.

I have the skill. Look at me. These people are fleeing before me.

Watch me chase them down. I am hitting them from behind. 30 of them are laying on the ground.

They are winning the battle and losing the war. As they get away from their city, they are drawn away. The men of Israel rose from their place and put themselves in battle array at Baal Tamar.

I can draw you a big picture and show you the diagram. It is real similar tactically to what happened at Ai. They basically drawn them out.

This is a pincher. This is an ambush from two sides as the men of Gibeah go up the road toward Bethel. The ambush burst forth from their position in the plain of Geba.

10,000 select men from all Israel came against Gibeah. These are 10 LFs come against them. The battle was fierce, but the Benjamites did not know that disaster was upon them.

They are working their skill. Their skill is paying off. They are thumping people with rocks and hitting people with javelins.

They are thinking, look at my left hand work. All the time, they don't know that disaster is upon them. They are overconfident.

They see success in the short term, in the near term, in the immediate view, and they are losing. Every step they take away from their city is going to lead to slaughter. The Lord defeated Benjamin for Israel.

This is a classic piece of Hebrew storytelling. Watch closely and think about Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. Think about other places where we've seen, I'm going to tell you what I'm going to tell you before I tell you, then I'm going to tell you, and then I'll tell you what I told you after I tell you. So the narrator stops and summarizes the whole story, and now he's going to go back and give us the details.

He says, the Lord defeated Benjamin for Israel, and the children of Israel destroyed that day 25,100 Benjamites. All these drew the sword. You would say, okay, well that's the end of the battle story, but it's not.

This is kind of like the close, this is like male and female created he them, and the evening and the morning were the sixth day. Look at verse 36. So the children of Benjamin saw that they were defeated.

The men of Israel had given ground. Now we're back into the details of the ambush. The men of Israel gave ground to the Benjamites because they relied on the men in ambush who they had set against Gibeah, and the men in ambush quickly rushed upon Gibeah.

The men in ambush spread out and struck the whole city with the edge of the sword. Now the appointed signal between the men of Israel and the men in ambush was that they, the ambush men, would make a great cloud of smoke rise up from the city. When was the last time we saw this happen? A.I. The Israelites remember A.I. Benjamin does not.

So they made this great cloud of smoke rise up from the city, verse 39, whereupon the men of Israel would turn in battle. Now Benjamin had begun to strike and kill about 30 of the men of Israel. We had this information already, right? Why are we getting it again? Because this is Hebrew storytelling.

Why are there certain stories that are told once and certain stories that are told twice? Why would you tell a story twice? Why is a creation story told twice? It's the most important story in the whole book of Genesis. That's why. It's the most important story.

Adam and Eve, male and female, Cleve unto the wife, two become one flesh, Cain and Abel. It's the most important story. So you tell it, and then you go back and tell it again.

Why is this story told twice? Was the Levite and the concubine told twice? Careful. Was the Levite and the concubine told twice? Yes it was. It was told once by the narrator, and it was told once by the Levite to Israel.

And it didn't say, and the Levite said thus and so before the children of Israel, that the details are recounted. Because it's important. This battle is important.

It's put in the book to be important. Because when you go to this battle of Ai, and you come to the battle of Gibeah, and then you come to the battle of Gibeah again, and you have a threefold reminder, don't become overconfident. Don't be drawn away by an immediate short-term success and the wonderful effectiveness of your skill, and lose, and be slaughtered, and have a catastrophe come upon you that you don't even know.

We have to have a longer view. We have to be looking in terms of strategy, not just tactics. We have to be looking in terms of long-term, enduring spirit, not a short-term, tall spirit.

It's the long view. There's all kinds of crazy stuff happening in the stock market, and in the investment world, whether it's real estate or whatever. And I am the last guy anybody should ask about that stuff.

I am beyond a box of rocks in terms of ignorance of that kind of thing. But one thing I know is it's like global warming. You can't see global temperatures going up within the space of a few years and say, we're all going to melt, we're all going to drown, we're all going to die, because look, temperatures in the last few years have gone up and up.

You have to take a long view. When you have investments, and they go up, and they go down, and the bottom drops out of this, and the something else, and you say, oh, I should have had my stock in this, or I shouldn't have had it in that. You could drive yourself into an early grave.

You could be jumping off a building in 1929 if you take a short-term view. If you have investments, the one fact I know is let it ride. You know, wait.

If they're wise investments, if you've had good advice, if they're solid, and they take a dip and your net worth drops, be patient. Things that dip, rise. Things that rise, dip.

There's a longer trend, and you can't be looking at the spikes. You've got to look at the trend. In our spiritual life, we can be faced with things.

We can be distracted. We can be challenged. We can have failures.

Other people can fail. We can fail. We all fail at once.

We fail separately. Just about the time we stop failing, somebody else fails. Just about the time they quit failing, we fail.

It can look dismal. There's lots of short-term spikes. Just be patient.

Look in strategic terms. The only way we can do that is through the ministry of God's Holy Spirit and the perspective that is given to us by God's Word. This is something unbelievers don't have.

This is something ignorant Christians do not have. This is something emotional Christians do not have, is the long view. Because it takes God to lift us up above ourselves.

It takes God to lift us to where we can see. God says, I am the God that tells you what's going to happen before it happens. Nobody else can do this.

I am the Lord. Remember that in Isaiah and Ezekiel? God says, look, what other God is there? What other force on earth is there that can tell you what is going to happen before it happens? It's only me. God lifts us up.

That's the one leg of the tripartite Christian virtues, is hope. Hope is the confident expectation of things that we can't see. We confidently expect things that God promises.

We can see them. They are real to us because He presents them to us. You can't be a Benjamite.

You can't be an Aiite. You can't be someone who says, look at this success. I'm going to pursue it.

I'm going to exploit it. Isn't this great? I am succeeding. Obviously God is with me because look at these 30 dead Israelites.

There's going to be 26,000 dead Benjamites before this thing is over. You can't look at the 30 that you've killed and not look over your shoulder and see the 25,000 that are dying behind you because you're wrong, because you've taken a short-term view. We have to look at this in terms of our own soul, in terms of our own challenges and the battles that we fight.

We have to look at them from God's perspective. You can't be sucked away from your objective. You've got to protect the things that count.

Home and hearth and family, if the Benjamites had stuck to the walls of Gibeah, it would have been a completely different battle story. But they got overconfident and they left the things that they loved to pursue this military success for which they were famous. And it costs them their lives and it nearly wipes out their tribe.

Well, it's something to think about. We'll pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll see the conclusion of this second telling of the story and what the emphasis is in the remainder of Judges chapter 20.