

# OpenTheo

## Judges 19 - 21



### Judges - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg provides an analysis of Judges 19-21, cautioning against interpreting the stories as attempting to make a broader point about the pitfalls of having a monarchy. The character in the story, while not significant in the grand scheme of things, is depicted as a rotten individual. The high value placed on hospitality in Middle Eastern culture is highlighted when a man offers his daughters to be abused instead of his guests, but the act is still deemed offensive today. Eventually, Israel mobilizes against the tribe of Benjamin and conquer them, and the story serves to vindicate the wrongs committed.

### Transcript

Alright, we're going to look at the last segment of the book of Judges. That's chapters 19, 20, and 21. It is also the second part of the appendix, which began in chapter 17.

There were two, there's two separate stories, not very closely related to each other at all, in this final segment of the book, which differs from the rest of the book in that the book is primarily a sequence of cycles of Israel rebelling against God, coming under judgment, under oppression from foreign armies, crying out to God, God raising up a hero, a deliverer who sends the oppressors packing, and then that hero becomes their judge for the remainder of his life. And there's a series of those. That occupy the material in most of the book, except Samson is the last of those judges.

His story is the longest also, and it ends in chapter 18. But then there's these two other stories at the end of the book. They're kind of tacked on.

They're not in chronological order. Both of them have to do with the earlier period of the judges, although they're saved for last to be told, as if it was not convenient to interrupt the story and break up the symmetry of the account in the earlier section. And so they're saved for the last.

They are not in chronological order. Now, the stories are strange stories, both of them. And the one in chapter 17, 18, was about this man named Micah, who hired a Levite to serve in his home at a shrine that he'd built with a silver idol.

And then the tribe of Dan was moving from one location to another, and they happened upon this Levite and this idol. And they stole them. And those things became the objects of worship.

And the priest became the hereditary priest in his family, served after him in the tribe of Dan after they conquered the city of Laish. And it became called the city of Dan. Now, this story is more confusing and more disturbing than even the other one, if anything, that just gets worse.

And so that the. The Book of Judges ends up closing on one of the most depressing possible notes. And you might say, why are these two strange stories told? They're told in some interesting detail.

I mean, there are conversations recorded that don't seem to be absolutely essential to telling the story. The details that are given indicate that they are authentic stories. Not someone made them up because people would not make up all the details unnecessarily, probably if they're creating a fictional story.

But a lot of detail is given about stories that might seem to be weird and even irrelevant in general to the main theme of the Book of Judges. And so the question would reasonably arise, what is the relevance of these two stories at the end? And some people think that they are primarily there to give us a sort of a sample of the degeneration of Israel after the death of Joshua and as they entered the period of the judges, we have this religious compromise and religious confusion that was so characteristic of the story about Micah and his Levite in the story that's before us. It's not so much religious confusion as moral confusion or moral degeneration.

There's atrocities committed here. It's disgusting, actually. And so these stories may well be there somewhat to underscore what things are like or were like in Israel when there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Now, this is not necessarily an advertisement in favor of having a king in Israel, because if Samuel is the author of this book, he was not all that much in favor of Israel having a king. It was in Samuel's lifetime that the Israelites demanded wanting Samuel was displeased by the request. So, it's not so much that the writer, if he is Samuel, as is traditionally thought, is trying to say, boy, it sure was bad before there were kings.

It's a good thing we got a king now, because he is not favorable toward kings. Actually, the king that Israel got was a bad king, Saul. But, it is showing that when people are not following God as their king, and they do what's right in their own eyes, they really are confused about what's right.

Or, in some cases, they may not care as much as they should, even about what is right. But, these two stories have another function, is that each of them tells something

significant about one of the, in each case, one tribe. In the first story, it tells us how the tribe of Dan, which failed to conquer their tribal inheritance that Joshua had assigned to them, ended up relocating to another area in the far north of the country and having the form of worship that they had, which was a compromised worship.

That was a significant thing for the history of one of the twelve tribes, namely the tribe of Dan. And, this story tells how that came about. It's the story of how they were unable to conquer their original territory.

They moved out. They co-opted this idol and this priest, and they moved and took over this city where they later existed. So, in a sense, this story is not just an insignificant story about a slice of life in the period of the judges.

It has to do with how the fortunes of one of the tribes were determined and how they changed, and so forth. And, that is true also of this last story. It's weird.

It's disgusting. It's disturbing. But, it is a story that is told, at least in part, to let us know how the tribe of Benjamin came to be so decimated and reduced to such a small and insignificant tribe.

It had been a significant tribe, but it became very small. By the end of this story, there's only 600 men, apparently, of the tribe of Benjamin, and they're having a hard time finding wives. And, that is all because of this story.

Now, this story starts out, as did the other one, with the story of someone inconsequential, Micah, who is the beginning of chapter 17 and the first of these two stories. He's not important. He stole from his mother.

He built a shrine in his house. The only reason he's even mentioned is because he's the one who first put this Levite to work as a priest, and it was from Micah that the Danites stole the idol, and so forth. But, a story that then ultimately has significance for one of the tribes of Israel begins with a story about an individual who is really not a very important individual in the grand scheme of things.

Likewise, this story is about a Levite, a different Levite, and his concubine. Not very important people in themselves, but because of what happens to the concubine and the outrage and the way that the Levite publicizes this to the tribes of Israel, it causes a national outrage which leads to a war with them. It leads to the decimation of the tribe of Benjamin, to a very small remnant.

So, we begin with the story of this man, and it's just kind of a quaint detail, although the story is an ugly story. It nonetheless gives interesting detail about interactions that are almost inconsequential, like between himself and his father-in-law, just the kind of things that belong to a true story, details that don't necessarily impact its outcome directly, or are not what we call significant. So, we begin at chapter 19, and it came to pass in those

days when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning in the remote mountains of Ephraim.

He took for himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. Now, he was a sojourner, not a permanent resident, but a temporary resident in the mountains of Ephraim. He may have had a wife in addition to his concubine, I don't know.

Generally speaking, concubines were not the first partner that were chosen by a man. Usually, a man would have a wife, and if she was barren and couldn't bear him children, he might take a concubine or a second wife to try to remedy that situation. We're not told anything else about his marital situation, except that among other circumstances in his life, he had taken this concubine.

Now, a concubine is a wife, but of a different sort than an ordinary wife. A concubine was a wife who was more or less a slave. She was purchased with money.

It was not a dowry, it was the price of a slave. She would bear children for her husband and so forth, but she only had the rights of a slave, not the rights of a free woman. Somewhat different than an ordinary wife.

Nonetheless, she was a partner to her husband, largely for the purpose of reproduction. We don't read of this couple having children, and it may be that they were only together for a short time before she actually, it says, she played the harlot. Verse 2, but his concubine played the harlot against him, and went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there for a whole month.

Now, she may have gone to her father's house as a place of refuge after committing adultery. She could be thrown to death under Israel's law, although I'm not sure how familiar the Israelites were with their laws at this time, or how much they were inclined to keep them. But, under the law of Moses, she apparently slept with somebody who was not her husband, and she, of course, could be put to death for that.

Instead, she fled, probably from the penalty, and went to her father's house, and there she remained for four months, and it seemed as if she had gotten away with her crime. As it turned out, she did not. Then her husband arose and went after her to speak kindly to her and to bring her back, having his servant and a couple of donkeys with him.

Now, it says he went to speak kindly with her, obviously to persuade her to come back. He could have come with a vindictive attitude and said, okay, I caught up with you, you deserve to die, and I've traced you here to your father's house, and now you're going to pay the penalty. Instead, he was hoping to persuade her to leave and go back with him.

You know, by her own choice. So, he spoke kindly to her, whether sincerely or not, we don't know. But, he knew that he had to persuade her to go with him, with kind words, rather than a threat, in all likelihood, since she was in her father's house, after all.

It may be, we don't know, it may be that he didn't love her. He didn't act very much like he loved her. In the sequel, he didn't protect her from rape, and even when she died, he seemed entirely callous about it.

So, it may be that he had no love for her, and his kind words to her were simply a ruse to get her out of the protection of her father's house, and get her back to where he could, you know, treat her harshly, even stone her. It's hard to say what he really intended, because their plans were interrupted by unforeseen circumstances. Where this man's heart was at, we do not know.

But, he does not come off as exactly a loving husband. Yet, he comes to speak kindly to her, when he actually has been offended by her. She's actually played the harlot on him, the kind of thing that could make a man angry, and even give him the right to kill her under the law.

But, he comes, rather, to talk in a way that would be persuasive to her, to leave and go back with him to his home. And, it says, he brought a servant with him, and a couple of donkeys, so she could ride comfortably. So, she brought him to her father's house, and when the father of the young woman saw him, he was glad to meet him.

Now, this father-in-law, we don't, you know, I don't know why he's important in the story. The story could have been told without any reference to the father-in-law, except there's this drawn-out portion about how the father-in-law keeps delaying the departure of his daughter and the Levite. It says, now his father-in-law, the young woman's father, detained him, and he stayed with him three days.

So, they ate and drank and lodged there. Then, it came to pass, on the fourth day, that they arose early in the morning, and he stood to depart. But the young woman's father said to his son-in-law, refresh your heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way.

So, they sat down, and the two of them ate and drank together. Then, the young woman's father said to the man, please be content to stay all night, and let your heart be merry. We're having a good time drinking, and, you know, by the time they'd been drinking and eating all day, it was now getting close to night.

They said, why don't you just stay the night again, and we'll just have another party. We'll let your heart be merry. It certainly means to enjoy yourself with the wine, in this case.

And, when the man stood, so he did. And, verse 7, when the man stood to depart, his father-in-law urged him, so he lodged there again. Then, he arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart, but the young woman's father said, please refresh your heart.

So, they delayed until afternoon, and both of them ate. Now, I'm not really sure how all

of this is important enough to really include in the story. I mean, it could have just been said, he went, and on the fifth day he went home.

But, it's given all this talk about how the father-in-law keeps deliberately delaying him until the next meal, and the next day, and so forth. There may be some kind of a subtext going on here. There may be some kind of undercurrent of what the father-in-law has in mind, is to maybe detain him indefinitely, keep him there.

Maybe he's trying to protect his daughter from going off and being vulnerable to this man's, you know, wrath. We don't know why she played the harlot in the first place. He might have been a really rotten guy.

We don't know. The father may know that she's not really happy with him, and wants him to just stay. He may just be sorry to see his daughter go.

If so, then the father may have more affection for his daughter than this Levite has. But, ultimately, the man decides to leave. So, it says in verse 9, when the man stood to depart, he and his concubine and his servant, his father-in-law, the young woman's father, said, Look, the day is now drawing toward evening.

Please spend the night. See, the day is coming to an end. Lodge here, that your heart may be merry.

Tomorrow, go your way early, so that you may get home. But the man was not willing to spend that night. So, he rose and departed and came to a place opposite Jebus, that is, Jerusalem.

It was called Jebus because it was lived in by the Jebusites, and it was still a pagan city. With him were the two saddled donkeys. His concubine also was with him.

And they were here, Jebus. The day was far spent, and the servant said to his master, Come, let us turn aside into the city of the Jebusites and lodge in it. But his master said to him, We will not turn aside here into the city of foreigners, who are not of the children of Israel.

We will go on to Gibeah. He did not trust the Canaanites to be hospitable or safe, and he wanted to rather stay with other Israelites. But that was a miscalculation, too.

He thought that the Israelites' city would somehow be safer than the Canaanites' city. We cannot say what would have happened to them in Jebus, but we find that what happened in Gibeah was far from safe. The Israelites were not really any better than pagans.

In fact, the story seems to illustrate that they were not even much better than the worst pagans of Sodom and Gomorrah. So he said to his servant, Come, let us draw near to

one of these places and spend the night in Gibeah or in Ramah. And they passed by and went down the way.

And the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin. Now, once the sun is down, you really cannot travel anymore. So they just went to the nearest town.

They arrived at the Benjamite city of Gibeah. They turned aside there to go to lodge in Gibeah. And when he went in, he sat down in the open square of the city, for no one would take them into the house to spend the night.

So usually in the Middle East, if a stranger comes down, somebody invites them over. Hospitality is a really important value in Middle Eastern culture. And so he sat with his servant and his concubine there in the square, waiting for someone to invite him in for the night.

It was getting dark, but no one invited him in. It was a very inhospitable city. And it proved to be more inhospitable still as the night progressed.

Just then an old man came in from his work in the field at evening, who also was from the mountains of Ephraim, like the Levite himself was. They're from the same region. He was sojourning in Gibeah, whereas the men of that place were Benjamites.

So this old man wasn't a native of the city, and we're not sure why he was there. He was working there. It says he came in from working outside, but he had a home in the city.

But it wasn't a permanent home. He was sojourning there. He was a traveler like the Levite.

He had come into the town as a visitor and had stayed for some period of time. But he was not a Benjamite like the others. And when he raised his eyes, he saw the traveler in the open square of the city.

And the old man said, where are you going and where do you come from? And he said to him, we are passing from Bethlehem and Judah toward the remote mountains of Ephraim. I am from there. I went to Bethlehem and Judah, and now I'm going to the house of the Lord.

But there is no one who will take me into his house. Although we have both straw and fodder for our donkeys and bread and wine for myself, for your maidservant and for the young man who is with your servant, there is no lack of anything. In other words, we just need shelter.

We don't need anyone to provide any food for us or anything. We've got all our own stuff. We've got plenty.

We just don't have a shelter. And the old man said, peace be with you. However, let all

your needs be my responsibility.

Only do not spend the night in the open square. So he brought him into his house and gave fodder to the donkeys and they washed their feet and ate and drank. So as they were enjoying themselves, suddenly certain men of the city, perverted men, surrounded the house and beat on the door.

The expression perverted men in the Hebrew is sons of Belial or Belial. This is an expression used quite a lot in the Old Testament. And it basically has the meaning of worthless people, sons of Belial or sons of Belial, depending on the pronunciation, B-E-L-I-A-L, is a common expression for worthless people.

The name Belial or Belial eventually in the development of the Hebrew culture and language came to be a name for Satan. And we find Paul saying, you know, what fellowship has the temple of God with Belial in 2nd Corinthians, chapter six, meaning with Satan. But at this time, that phrase was being used simply to mean it's just an idiom that means people who are of no good.

And so these perverted men came and they spoke to the master of the house, the old man saying, bring out the man who came to your house that we may know him carnally. But the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to him, no, my brethren, I beg you do not act so wickedly. Seeing this man is coming to my house.

Do commit. Do not commit this outrage. Look, here is my virgin daughter and the man's concubine.

Let me bring them out now, humble them and do with them as you please. But to this man, do not do such a vile thing. Now, we encountered exactly these behaviors in the story of Sodom in the 19th chapter or 18th and 19th chapter, 19th chapter of Genesis.

And there are two angels who resembled men came to visit the house of Lot. Actually, they were going to camp out in the open square in that case, too. But Lot urged them to come and stay with him.

This old man urged this Levite entourage to come in. And likewise, in Sodom, the men of the city came around and wanted to rape the visitors. So also here.

Now, obviously, they're referring to homosexual activity, but they were not strictly homosexual men. They were obviously heterosexual and well, they're bisexual, I guess you'd say, because they were quite content to settle for a woman in this case. In Lot's case, they were not.

Lot offered his daughters to them, just like this man offered a daughter to them. And in Sodom, they didn't want the daughter. They wanted the men.



And likewise here, they didn't take the daughter. But they, as we see, the men would not heed him. So the man took his concubine and brought her out to them.

And they knew her and abused her all night until morning. And when the day began to break, they let her go. Now, this story has a different outcome than the one of Sodom and Gomorrah, because the angels took care of themselves and blinded the men at the door of Lot's house so that no harm came to anyone.

In this case, there were no angels present. And the concubine became the sacrificial lamb, as it were, to spare the family inside. Now, it's very offensive to us.

A number of things are very offensive. Certainly, it would be even very offensive in biblical times to read this story, because, first of all, this is a very inhospitable city. When a person has brought somebody into their own home in the Middle East, that act of bringing them into their home means that you are protecting them with everything, with your life, if necessary.

You don't bring someone into your home and then allow them to be endangered. You will protect them with your life. Now, both Lot and this old man both showed that conviction.

I'm not going to turn my guests over to you. And it was very, you know, obviously quite contrary to the customs of the time for the people to expect him to. So, they say, no, we want to abuse your guests.

Well, that would be offensive to all Middle Easterners. This was an outrage in itself. But then, it's outrageous to us that Lot and this man both offered their daughters to be abused instead of their guests.

And there's just no way to make that sound good. It isn't good. It is reflective of the culture of the time, though, where women were considered to be, you know, somewhere in the middle range between animals and men.

You know, they were not exactly on the same status as men. A man might very well love his daughter, but he couldn't become too attached to her because she's going to go off and become another man's wife and she's going to have some other inheritance. His sons are what he's putting all his hope in.

Having only daughters was a tragedy for a man. He needed his sons. Daughters were of less value to them.

And so, because of the high view of hospitality that people in the Middle East generally held, they would sacrifice themselves or probably before that, their daughters, before they would endanger their guests. Now, this is totally foreign to us. And that's exactly the right word.

It's foreign. They're not from our culture. They're not from our time.

These are people living thousands of years ago in a culture totally different than ours, and we can't relate with it. And we're not being asked to approve of it, but we can't even relate with it. You know, we can't even figure out why would anyone even be willing to do that kind of thing because of the way that they thought in those days in that culture.

That's just how that would be a fairly predictable action to offer the daughters. Now, the men of Sodom refused Lot's offer of his daughters, but these men apparently were satisfied to have this woman to gang rape, and they abused her all night long. Now, somewhere in the middle of the night, they had their fill of abusing this woman, and they left her not quite dead.

She was able to drag herself to the door, but she didn't survive till morning. She was half dead. It says they abused her all night until morning, and when the day began to break, they let her go.

Then the woman came as the day was dawning and fell down at the door of the man's house where the master was till it was light. And we don't read of her alive again after this point. Now, it seems like her husband would have been watching at the window for any chance to bring her into safety.

But, you know, here she's half dead. She's at the doorstep. He's sleeping in until he sleeps in, and then he comes and finds her dead.

I mean, it seems like a man, even callous as he was, and maybe even willing to sacrifice this slave woman to save his own skin, would still have enough affection for her or just humanitarian kindness to rescue her as soon as that was possible, as soon as the crowd had gone, at least to bring her in and nurse her back to health. Instead, she's at the doorstep and she just lays there and expires without any assistance from him. And it says in verse 27, when her master arose in the morning and opened the doors of the house and went out to go his way, there was his concubine fallen at the door of the house with her hands on the threshold.

It doesn't say she was dead, but that's that is what turns out to be the case. And he said to her, get up and let's be going. But there was no answer.

So the man lifted her onto his donkey and the man got up and went to his place. Imagine even if he didn't know she was dead, he said, get up and let's go. Like she's been gang raped and abused all night long.

And it's just that counts where we're going now. It's very clear this man didn't have any kindness in his heart toward her as a husband would. And it says he put on the donkey and went on home.

And when he entered the house, that is his own house, he took a knife and laid hold of his concubine and dismembered her into 12 pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. Now, what was that about? Well, it was done very largely for shock value, and that's the and that's the effect it had. Everyone was shocked to receive some package from Federal Express.

And they open up and there's an arm and a hand in it of a woman or a leg or a shoulder or something of a woman or a head. I mean, everyone just freaked out by that. And it says so it was that all who saw it said no such deed has been done or seen from the day that the children of Israel came up from the land of Egypt till this day.

Consider it. Take counsel and speak up. And we find that as a result, in Chapter 20, all Israel mobilizes to come and hear what this man has to say.

He apparently had his return address on the package so that they would know who sent it and who to inquire of. What's this weird thing about now? There's a very similar thing, not identical by any means, but a similar thing in principle in First Samuel, Chapter 11, because there as Saul's first act of leaving Israel after he had been anointed as king, he wants to rally the armies of nation of Israel to rescue. Actually, give you that at a later date is this is, I think, a different give you this is, I think, to give you on the other side of the Jordan, but the Ammonites come against Gibeah and besiege it.

And Saul, the king, wants to rescue them. And so he summons all of Israel to come to war. He does it this way.

It's when he heard about the need in Chapter 11 of First Samuel, verse seven, it says, so he took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hands of messengers. Now, that's what this guy did. He cut up his concubine and sent her pieces to all the tribes of Israel.

Similar thing. However, the meaning of the act is stated in this case because he says whoever does not go out with Saul and Samuel to battle, so it shall be done as to this oxen or to his oxen. Excuse me.

So essentially, by cutting up an ox and sending it out to people, there is the implied message or the stated message. This is what I will do to your oxen if you don't respond to this summons. Receiving these parts of this ox are a summons to appear and to, in fact, to mobilize.

And anyone who doesn't respond to this summons, this is a draft notice. This is a recruiting people to come to an army, to form an army to make a war. You know, whoever doesn't respond to this summons is going to have their oxen cut up like this was.

Now, there may have been and probably was an implication in cutting up the concubine

center out, saying everyone come and mobilize. And anyone who doesn't respond to this, this is what will be done to your concubines. So it was a ghastly thing, although of course, she was already dead.

He didn't do any more harm to his concubine by doing this than he'd already done by delivering her over to the abusers who killed her. But now this was a way of getting the attention of the people of Israel and essentially summoning them to come and redress the problem. They at first did not know what the problem was.

So they came chapter 20. Then all the children of Israel came out from Dan to Beersheba. Now we read about Dan in the previous story.

That was the city of Laish, which the Danites had conquered named Dan. From Dan to Beersheba means from the north and to the southern extremities of the country. And it says, as well as the land of Gilead, which is across the river and the congregation gathered together as one man before the Lord at Mizba.

And the leaders of all the people and all the tribes of Israel presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, 400,000 foot soldiers who drew the sword. Now, the children of Benjamin, which were, of course, were Gilead, the offending city was in their tribe. They heard that the children of Israel had gone up to Mizba.

Then the children of Israel said, tell us, how did this wicked deed happen? By receiving these woman parts in the mail, it was a communication that there had been some horrible deed done, apparently to this woman. And an explanation was called for. So they assembled to ask.

So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, my concubine and I went into Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin, to spend the night. And the men of Gibeah rose against me and surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me, but instead they ravaged my concubine so that she died.

So I took hold of my concubine, cut her into pieces and sent her throughout all the territory of the inheritance of Israel because they committed lewdness and outrage in Israel. Look, all of your children of Israel, give your advice and counsel here and now. Then all the people arose as one man saying, none of us will go to his tent, nor will any of us turn back to his house.

But now this is the thing which we will do to give you. We will we will go up against it by lot. So they said, OK, this is an urgent situation.

We won't even go home before we've remedied it. We're all going to go against Gibeah. They're going to try to first have the Benjamites deliver the offenders over so they don't have to fight a war.

But that's not going to work out. So they're going to have a war. But it says we'll go up by lot, apparently meaning we'll consult by casting lots.

We'll consult the will of God as to which tribes should lead the advance and so forth. We will take 10 men out of every 100 throughout all the tribes of Israel. A hundred out of every thousand, a thousand out of every 10,000.

All of that just means the same thing. We're going to take one out of 10 to make provisions for the people that when they come to Gibeah in Benjamin, they may repay all the violence that they have done in Israel. So apparently they're going to take 10 percent of the probably of the resources.

It's not clear exactly what this one out of 10 is going to do. They're somehow going to provide for the soldiers while they fight against Gibeah. It was probably clearer to them than it is to me as I contemplate it.

So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united together as one man. Verse 12, then the tribes of Israel sent men through 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 brother and 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, this shows just how how stupid their tribal loyalties were. I mean, there's some wicked men, probably a few handfuls of them that are guilty of this deed.

The Benjamites, if they had any concern about justice, would be glad to turn them over to face justice at the hands of the Israelites. And they would have spared the whole city. They would have spared thousands of warriors.

They wouldn't have had to fight a battle. But because the city that offended was one of their territory and their tribe, and there's tribal loyalty, they're going to defend the wrong actions of this one city, even at the expense of thousands of lives and the great expense of war. This is just the pride and sort of the, I guess, patriotism for your tribe that we see happening here.

And it was it led to a tremendous amount of bloodshed on both sides. And from their cities at that time, the children of Benjamin numbered 26,000 men who drew the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, who numbered 700 select men. So Gibeah itself only had 700 warriors, but the rest of the cities of Benjamin could come up with 26,000.

But then among all this people, there were 700 select men who were left-handed. Everyone could sling a stone at a hair's breadth and not miss. So there's some real

marksmen among them.

We think of a slingshot as a kid's toy. In those days, it was a deadly weapon. In fact, it was the closest thing to a gun that they had.

They had arrows and spears they could throw, and those were deadly too, of course. But a stone traveling at the rate of speed of a bullet and hitting someone in the head, as we know, could even kill a giant. And most men would not sustain, would not survive probably a head wound from a stone smacked that hard.

Now, these guys were such marksmen, they could hit target the breadth of a hair at a distance. I don't know from what distance, but the idea is that they didn't miss their mark. They were sharpshooters for sure.

And it says, now, besides Benjamin, the men of Israel numbered 400,000 men who drew the sword. All these were men of war. So, the people of Benjamin only had 26,000 and a few, maybe 27,000 total men, as opposed to 400,000 of Israel.

The Gibeonites, though, or the Benjamites actually had one advantage, they had these sharpshooters, 700 of them. They don't have to go down into battle with their swords and endanger themselves. They can sit in the cracks of the rocks and pick off people from a distance.

Apparently, Israel didn't have any of those. Only the Benjamites had those. So, actually, the Benjamites did pretty well against overwhelming odds in this case, initially.

And the children of Israel arose and went up to the house of God to ask counsel of God. And they said, which of us should go up first to battle against the children of Benjamin? And the Lord said, Judah should go up first. So, God's actually given them instructions.

So, it turns out that those who are receiving their instructions from God suffer heavy losses the first couple of times they go to battle. This despite the fact that God is giving them directions, which is a bit confusing. But apparently, God did not consider that initial losses, you know, were something that was frankly, that was a price he was willing to pay, I guess, for the initial outcome.

But it does seem strange that he didn't give them victory right off. He said, Judah should go first. So, the children of Israel rose up in the morning and encamped against Gibeah.

And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin. The men of Israel put themselves in a battle array to fight against them at Gibeah. Then the children of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and on that day cut down to the ground 22,000 men of the Israelites, almost as many as the total number of warriors on the side of Benjamites.

They killed that many of their enemy and apparently didn't lose many of their own.

There's no mention of the Benjamite casualties here. So, it would appear that the Benjamites win the first round, taking out 22,000 of the men of Israel.

And the people, that is the men of Israel, encouraged themselves after that discouraging defeat and again formed the battle line at the place where they had put themselves in array on the first day. Then the children of Israel went up and wept before Yahweh until evening and asked counsel of Yahweh saying, shall I again draw near for battle against the children of my brother Benjamin? And the Lord said, go up against him. So, the children of Israel approached the children of Benjamin on the second day and 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, total of 40,000 then in two days, all who drew the sword.

Then all the children of Israel, that is the people, went up and came to the house of God and wept. They sat there before the Lord and fasted that day until evening and they offered burnt offering and peace offerings before the Lord. Now, notice this was actually pretty commendable of them at a time where there's not very much religion of Yahweh in the land, that these people are being cut down.

They've lost 10% of their warriors. They've come with 400,000, they've lost 40,000 and they apparently have gained nothing against their enemies and yet they keep coming to the Lord and the Lord is encouraging them to go into battle where they're getting cut down again. It seems like it takes some strong faith to keep seeking the Lord about this and stay in the field, but it seems like God's counsel isn't really helping.

Their faith is no doubt being tested in this, but they're passing that test and now they're fasting. They don't just say, oh well, we tried. You know, we've lost more men than the Benjamins have total.

We certainly have done what we could to rectify the situation. We're going to go back to the safety of our own homes, but instead they felt like they were on the Lord's mission. God had told them to go up and so they're still putting themselves in harm's way, but they're seeking the Lord more diligently.

So the children of Israel inquired of the Lord, says the Ark of the Covenant was there probably in Mizpah, we're talking about in those days because that's where they'd gathered. So the Ark was for some reason not in Shiloh. Maybe they moved it from time to time from Mizpah to Shiloh for access reasons for different people in different parts of the country.

I don't know. And Phineas, the son of Eliezer, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days. That's how we know this came from a very early period of the judges because Phineas was alive contemporary of Moses and Joshua.

Phineas was the one who stopped the plague at Bealpeor by throwing a javelin through the Israelite who was having sex with the Midianite woman. This guy, you know, he overlapped the life of Moses and Joshua and certainly wouldn't have lived very long after Joshua's time. So this story happened when Phineas was still alive.

It's very early, you know, probably very shortly after Joshua was dead, all this happened. So that's a good time marker of the chronology. And they said, shall I again go out to battle with the children of my brother Benjamin or shall I cease? You know, God, we've lost 10 percent of our soldiers.

This is the time for us to give up. And God said, no, it's not time to give up. And the Lord said, go up for tomorrow.

I will deliver them into your hand. Now, he had not made that promise the previous days. He just said, go.

And they did. But this time he said, OK, this time you're going to win. He makes a promise there.

So they'd have something more positive, definite to hang their faith on here. Then Israel sent men in ambush around Gibeon. They actually did the same thing that Joshua did to conquer Ai.

They attacked from the front, but there were hidden men going to ambush from the back. They drew out the citizens of the city in the battlefield who were overconfident from their previous gains and wins. And then the ambush party would sneak into the city and burn it, which would, of course, demoralize the Gibeonites and leave them stranded on the battlefield between two armies, the one that had ambushed their city and the one that they had been pursuing.

It says the children of Israel went up against children of Benjamin on the third day. They put themselves in battle array against Gibeon, as at other times. Verse 31.

So the children of Benjamin went out against the people and were drawn away from the city. They began to strike down and kill some of the people, as at other times in the highways. One of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeon.

And in the field, about 30 men of Israel actually fell, apparently. And the children of Benjamin said they are struck down 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.

So all the men of Israel rose from their place and put themselves in battle array at Baal Tamar. Then Israel's men in ambush burst forth from their position in the plain of Geba. And 10,000 select men from all Israel came against Gibeon.



And the battle was fierce. But the Benjamites did not know that disaster was upon them. The Lord defeated Benjamin before Israel.

And the children of Israel destroyed that day 25,100 Benjamites, all with through the sword. Now, that's the total. And that's a summary statement of the battle, though the story of the battle is not over.

This is sort of looking forward to how it all ended. Benjamin lost 25,000 and some. But we're going to read about the battle still before this total number was reached.

In the following verses, we're going to read about other numbers falling, but they're part of the 25,000. They're not in addition to it. Because this is mentioned, this fact is mentioned out of chronological order.

Just as a summary statement of the fact they defeated them and killed as many. But the battle has continued to be described before that number has been slain. Verse 36.

So the children of Benjamin saw that they were defeated. The men of Israel had given ground to the Benjamites because they relied on the men of ambush whom they had set in Gibeon. And the men in ambush quickly rushed upon Gibeon.

The men of ambush spread out and struck the whole city with the edge of a sword. Now, the appointed signal between the men of Israel and the men of ambush was that they would make a great cloud of smoke rise from the city, whereupon the men of Israel would turn in battle. Now, Benjamin had begun to strike and kill about 30 of the men of Israel, for they said, surely they are defeated before us as in the first battle.

But when the cloud began to rise from the city in a column of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them and there was the whole city going up in smoke to heaven. And when the men of Israel turned back, as the ones who had been fleeing now turned on them, the men of Benjamin panicked, for they saw that disaster had come upon them. Therefore, they turned their backs before the men of Israel in the direction of the wilderness.

Instead of fighting, they totally fled, but they couldn't flee back to their city. So they just had to flee into, you know, undeveloped wilderness. It was the only place they could go to get away, they thought.

But the battle overtook them, and whoever had come out from the cities they destroyed in their midst. They surrounded the Benjamites and chased them and easily trampled them down as far as the front of Gibeah toward the east. And 18,000 men of Benjamin fell.

All these were men of valor. This is, as I said, not in addition to 25,000. We'll find at the end of this that the total was 25,000.

This was just how 18,000 of them fell. That means not many of them fell in the battle. Most of them fell in their flight, as they were being pursued.

Then they turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and they cut down 5,000 of them on the highways. So in addition to the 18,000, another 5,000 went down. That's 23,000, only about 2,000 Benjamites were killed in the battles.

The rest were killed as they were fleeing, which means that when they killed 40,000 people of Israel, they themselves didn't lose many more than 1,000 or 2,000 themselves. So they really had the upper hand for a while. And it says then in the end of verse 45, then they pursued them relentlessly up to Gidom and killed 2,000 of them.

So all who fell of Benjamin that day were 25,000 men who drew the sword. All these were men of valor. But 600 men, that is of Benjamin, turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and they stayed at the rock of Rimmon for four months.

Apparently of the thousands who fled toward the rock of Rimmon, only 600 got there alive. The rest were overtaken and killed, and they didn't come out for a while. It was probably easily defended, this rock, whatever it was like.

It was probably a place where they could probably fend off attack for a long time, and the pursuing armies didn't bother with them because there were so few of them, they let them go. So the men of Israel turned back against the children of Benjamin and struck them down with the edge of the sword from every city, men and beasts, all who were found, and they also set fire to the cities they came to. Now the last chapter deals with the problem that this victory caused, and that was that the tribe of Benjamin was almost entirely exterminated.

Now it's very important to not lose a complete tribe, and yet it was almost extinct. 600 men could easily just become absorbed into another tribe, and we'd lose Benjamin altogether. But the men of Israel wanted there to be 12 tribes.

They didn't want the Benjamin tribe to disappear, and so the rest of the nation of Israel who had caused this slaughter of the Benjamites actually took it on themselves to find wives for the survivors so that the tribe would not disappear. Now the men of Israel, chapter 21, had sworn with an oath at Mizpah, this is before the battle, saying, none of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin as a wife. So it was not so easy as simply saying, well, there's 600 men of Benjamin left, no one else, we'll just give 600 of our women.

No, they made an oath before God that none of them would do that. This was part of their contempt for Benjamin that they expressed before they went to battle. Then the people came to the house of God and remained there before God till evening.

They lifted up their voice and wept bitterly and said, oh, Lord God of Israel, why has this come to pass in Israel that today there should be one tribe missing in Israel? So it was on

the next morning that the people rose early and built an altar there and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. The children of Israel said, who is there among all the tribes of Israel who did not come up with the assembly to the Lord? For they had made a great oath concerning anyone who had not come up to the Lord at Mizpah saying he shall surely be put to death. So in the early stages, before they went to battle, they apparently made a number of oaths that we had not been told about earlier.

Before they engaged the battle of Benjamin, they made an oath that they wouldn't give any of their daughters to Benjamin. They also said that any of the tribes of Israel or cities of Israel that didn't send representatives to fight, that they would be, they'd die. This was a battle that everyone had to get involved with or else they'd be punished with their lives.

And so the children of Israel grieved for Benjamin, their brother, and said, one tribe is cut off from Israel today. What shall we do for wives for those who remain? Seeing we have sworn by the Lord that we will not give them our daughters as wives. And they said, what one is there from the tribes of Israel who did not come up to Mizpah, to the Lord? And in fact, no one had come up to the camp from Jabesh Gilead to the assembly.

So they thought, okay, they have to die because we made an oath that whoever didn't come would die. For when the people were counted, indeed, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead was there. So the congregation sent out 12,000 of their most valiant men and commanded them saying, go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead with the edge of the sword, including the women and children.

This is not a command God gave. This is just a barbarian kind of a thing that these people did because of their vengeful spirit on this occasion. This is not something that God authorized them to kill these women and children.

And this is the thing you shall do. You shall utterly destroy every male, every woman who has known a man intimately. So they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead, 400 young virgins who had not known a man intimately, and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

Then the whole congregation sent words of the children of Benjamin who are at the Rock of Rimmon and announced peace to them. So Benjamin came back at that time and they gave them the women whom they had saved alive of the women of Jabesh Gilead. And yet they had not found enough for them.

So they got 400 wives for 600 men. They were still needed 200 more. Now that you wipe out a city and kidnap their unmarried women and give them away to your enemies as wives, it's just so foreign to us and so unthinkable.

And the Bible is not saying this was a good thing. This whole story is a bad thing.

Everything that was done was bad, except that they consulted the Lord about their battle plans.

The battle to conquer Benjamin was something God wished to happen in order to vindicate a wrong done. But most of these actions are simply done by the people of Israel without any commentary from the author saying that God was in this or wasn't in this. We're getting simply a snapshot of the kinds of behavior these people were involved in and the way they settled problems.

It was not a godly thing. And so they still didn't have enough for 200 of the men. So the people grieved for Benjamin because the Lord had made a void in the tribes of Israel.

God hadn't really done this, but I guess he had by giving the victory to the Israelites in that battle. I guess God had made a void there. Then the elders of the congregation said, What shall we do for wives for those who remain since the women of Benjamin have been destroyed? And they said, There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin that a tribe may not be destroyed from Israel.

However, we cannot give them wives from our daughters for the children of Israel have sworn an oath saying cursed to be the one who gives a wife to Benjamin. There's a lot of repetition in the way the story is told. It seems like it could have used an editor.

Then they said, In fact, there is a yearly feast of the Lord in Shiloh, which is north of Bethel on the east side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, the south of Lebanon. Therefore, they instructed the children of Benjamin saying, Go lie in wait in the vineyards and watch. And just when the daughters of Shiloh come out to perform their dances, then come out from the vineyards and every man catch a wife for himself from the daughters of Shiloh and then go to the land of Benjamin with them.

Then it shall be when their fathers or brothers come to us to complain that we will say to them, Be kind to them for our sakes, because we did not take a wife for any of them in the war. For it is not as though you have given them the young women to them at this time, making yourselves guilty of your oath. So Israel is going to kind of turn a blind eye while a mass kidnapping takes place.

There's this festival to the Lord where the women will be out dancing and celebrating. And of course, the vineyards are nearby so that Benjaminite soldiers or individuals will be hiding in the vineyards. And as they can watch the women dance and the ones that are unmarried would be dancing separately from the others.

And so they could pick out virgins for themselves and go grab them and rush back into the vineyard and hide with them and then take them off to Benjamin. And of course, the fathers of these kidnapped girls are going to be upset. But the children of Israel will placate them and say, Listen, let's kind of turn a blind eye to this.

These guys need wives. And we, you know, it's not like you violated your oath by your daughter marrying them. You didn't let it happen.

You didn't give them. They took them. So this is the way they split the hairs of how to get around their oath.

And the children of Benjamin did so. They took themselves enough wives for their number from those who danced, whom they caught. Then they went and returned to their inheritance and they rebuilt the cities and dwelt in them.

So the children of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family. And they went from there, every man to his inheritance. In those days, there was no king in Israel.

Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. And these stories are an example of what that looked like. Now, Benjamin then was forever a very small tribe.

In fact, eventually it just became absorbed in Judah and was hardly a separate tribe at all. Though those who were descended from Benjamin still kept track of who they were. King Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin, and that was after this, because there was no king in Israel at this time.

But the first king came from this very small tribe of Benjamin. Actually, the apostle Paul also came from that tribe. He was of the tribe of Benjamin.

So although the tribe was small, it still produced some significant individuals. And this story simply tells us how they became so small. But that makes being a Benjamite and being an important one all the more, I guess, significant.

Because there was a smaller pool in Benjamin from which to pull out great people. And yet some great people came from that tribe later on. And God obviously redeemed a bad situation.

Somewhat.