

Biting & Devouring One Another

by Mike Attwood

This sermon delves into the story of the battle between the children of Benjamin and the men of Israel in Judges chapter 20. It emphasizes the dangers of self-confidence, the importance of seeking God's will in all decisions, and the need for unity, repentance, and dependence on the Lord in times of conflict. The narrative highlights the role of Phineas, a zealous man of God, and the presence of the ark of the covenant as symbols of holiness and divine guidance. Ultimately, the victory is attributed to the Lord, showcasing the significance of humility and reliance on God in spiritual warfare.

Scripture: Numbers 25:6, Joshua 8:1, 1 Samuel 30:6, 2 Corinthians 10:4, Psalms 149:1, Genesis 49:27, 1 Chronicles 8:40, Numbers 25:6, Judges 20:28

Topics: "Seeking God's Will", "Unity in Conflict"

Description

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Transcript

Go ahead, Mike. Okay, so I'd like us please, if we could, to turn in our Bibles to the book of Judges again in chapter 20, Judges chapter 20. I'm going to read from verse 15 down to verse 28.

Judges 20, 15 down to 28. I'm going to borrow a title from the New Testament text, really, to describe our passage today. And the passage that I want to borrow from is Galatians 5, and where Paul says, lest ye bite and devour one another.

And so this title is biting and devouring one another, biting and devouring one another. And in this case, almost being consumed one of another. So let's begin verse 15.

It says, and the children of Benjamin were numbered at that time out of the cities 20 and 6,000 men that drew sword beside the inhabitants of Gibeah, which were numbered 700 chosen men. Among all these people, there were 700 chosen men left-handed. Every one could sling stones at an air breadth and not miss.

And the men of Israel beside Benjamin were numbered 400,000 men that drew sword. All these were men of war. And the children of Israel arose and went up to the house of God and asked counsel of God and said, which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin? And the Lord said, Judah shall go up first.

And the children of Israel rose up in the morning and encamped against Gibeah. And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin. And the men of Israel put themselves in array to fight against them at Gibeah.

The children of Benjamin came forth out of Gibeah and destroyed down to the ground of the Israelites that day, 20 and 2,000 men. And the people, the men of Israel encouraged themselves and set their battle again in array in the place where they put themselves in array the first day. And the children of Israel went up and wept before the Lord until even and asked counsel of the Lord saying, shall I go up against again to battle against the children of Benjamin, my brother? And the Lord said, go up against him.

And the children of Israel came near again against the children of Benjamin the second day. And Benjamin went forth against them out of Gibeah the second day and destroyed down to the ground of the children of Israel again, 18,000 men. All these drew the sword.

Then all the children of Israel and all the people went up and came onto the house of God and wept and sat there before the Lord and fasted that day until even and offered burn offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. And the children of Israel inquired of the Lord for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days. And Phinehas, the son of Eliezer, the son of Aaron stood before it in those days saying, shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin, my brother, or shall I cease? And the Lord said, go up for tomorrow.

I will deliver them into thine hand. And again, God will indeed bless that reading from his precious word. And I'd like to just take a moment if I could just to read from Galatians chapter five and particularly the couple of verses I have in mind as kind of a helpful way to consider this portion of scripture.

And it's in Galatians 5, 15 and 16. It says, but if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that you be not consumed one of another. This I say, then walk in the spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

The context as we recall from last time is that the men of Benjamin had failed to hand over the guilty party, the men of Gibeah, who had committed a horrendous crime that was worthy of discipline, divine punishment. Actually, the death penalty was to be enacted for rape, which is what they were guilty of. And so a kind of false sense of loyalty to their brothers rather than to the Lord had caused the men of Benjamin to fail to hand over the guilty party to the disciplined.

And so the result of that is that now we're about to enter into a civil war that is almost going to wipe a tribe off the map. The tribe of Benjamin is in danger of being completely destroyed. And again, I just say this that by way of practical application, that over the years, we have seen many in assembly torn apart, sometimes because of discipline and people's misplaced loyalty to family members rather than to the Lord.

And as a result, what should have been dealt with very easily and clearly and swiftly ended up tearing an assembly apart. And so often I was saying to some brethren this morning, I get phone calls and people tell me the story and I feel a bit like an agony ant of assembly splits and disciplines and all of these things.

And so people talk to me.

And what's interesting is that all I ever hear about is the symptoms, but nobody ever discusses the root cause. And the root cause is always the same. It's when we act in the energy of the flesh.

That's when all of this occurs. And that's why we need spiritual men, spirit filled men, men who know what it is to walk in the spirit. And when we do acts like discipline, it has to be carried out by spiritual men.

And it has to be, as it were, understood by spiritual saints, why this is happening, what's behind it all. And so again, could we pray earnestly for one another that our assemblies would be places where the spirit of God dominates rather than the flesh dominates, because it's always devastating. You mentioned the outline was very simple, really.

We had in verses one through seven, the explanation of the Levites. They want to know why he has sent this very unusual parcel post throughout Israel of this woman's body cut in pieces. And so he gives his explanation.

Of course, they don't get corroboration or anything like that. They just immediately take his word for it without hearing any other side of the story. But nevertheless, they take his place and they accept what he says.

And he asked for advice and counsel. And then the problem escalates because they do go and they speak to Benjamin and they say, okay, hand over the offending brethren. And so that's verses eight through 14.

They failed to do that. And now in verse 15 through 17, we want to look at the extent of the armies. We get a sense of how massive this has become.

And often these problems, they start out small, but if they're not dealt with properly, they just get bigger and more and more people get involved and they become huge. And again, one of the things we must try to do when we're dealing with certain issues is try and contain it and keep it as small as we possibly can, because when it spreads, lots of people get involved and there's a lot of damage that is done. And then verse 18 through 46, we're going to look at the engagements with Benjamin.

And then our final little section is verse 47 and 48, the effect of the slaughter. So we're thinking of the extent of the armies, just who all is going to be involved in this conflict. And so verse 15 says, the children of Benjamin were numbered at that time out of the cities, 20 and 6,000 men that drew sword beside the inhabitants of Gibeah, which were numbered 700 chosen men.

So 26,700. Now we're also told in verse 16, that 700 of them, now we're not, it's not clear, maybe the 700 are the men of Gibeah, because we already saw in verse 15, that the inhabitants of Gibeah, which were numbered were 700 chosen men. The very next verse talks about 700 chosen men again.

And it says, among all this people, there were 700 chosen men left handed. Everyone could sling stones at a hair breadth and not miss. So they had some very skilled warriors.

And if it was the 700 were the men of Gibeah, you can understand in one sense why they didn't want to hand them over, because it would be handing over their most cracked troops, who are very skilled in battle. But again, we can't be dogmatic about that. But many do believe that the men of Benjamin must have been supremely confident to defeat their opponents, because we realize they're going up against

400,000 men, as we see in verse 17.

26,700 against 400,000 doesn't look like good odds. But if it is, as they suspect, that the men of Gibeath may well have been their secret weapon, be left handed men who could use this slingshot. However, although they never missed their target, what we could say is the men of Benjamin were missing the mark here.

They were they were refusing to deal with sin amongst them. And they went to war against their brethren, rather than humbly submitting to divine discipline. So even though they didn't miss when they fired their weapon, they were missing the mark.

And again, we might ask ourselves, because what really is happening here is they're actually fighting against God in refusing to allow the discipline that was required. And sometimes, could our misplaced loyalty to loved ones who maybe do need discipline for their own benefit for so that they do come to restoration, but but you know, they're kith and kin. And so we're going to stand with them no matter what.

And, and we're going to take sides against the other brethren, because these are our brothers, could it be that this misplaced loyalty, we're actually fighting against God, and what he wants to do in the person's life, we've got to be really careful, got to really search our own hearts. In all these situations, am I fighting against God in refusing to allow this discipline to take place. Certainly, the men of Benjamin had a good reputation as excellent soldiers.

And of course, Jacob, old Jacob predicted this, when he gave his prophecies concerning his brethren back in Genesis 49 is his offspring. And Genesis 49, we have something interesting that's told us about the men of Benjamin, Genesis 49, and we're going to see how it resonates through the Word of God that they were indeed lived up to the prophetic statement concerning them by their father. And so verse 27, it says, Benjamin, this is Genesis 49, verse 27, Benjamin shall raven as a wolf.

In the morning, he shall devour the prey and at night, he shall divide the spoil. And so clearly, he's going to be a successful hunter, so to speak. And he's going to get what he aims at getting and devour the prey.

And so we see that putting to good use at a later time in Israel's history. If we look at First Chronicles, in chapter eight, I'm going to look at just a couple of references in Chronicles about the prowess of the men of Benjamin in their skill as warriors. It says, verse 40, it says, the sons of Ulam were mighty men of valor, archers, and had many sons and sons, sons, and 150.

All these are the sons of Benjamin, mighty men of valor, archers. And where are they from? Well, they're the men of Benjamin. Chapter 12 of First Chronicles, verse two, it says, they were armed with bows and could use both the right hand and the left in hurling stones and shooting arrows out of a bow, even of Saul's brethren of Benjamin.

Amazing. They could use both the right hand and the left hand in hurling stones and shooting arrows out of a bow, even of Saul's brethren of Benjamin. So they're ambidextrous.

They can use both hands and do it well and hit the target. So again, they're certainly skilled. And perhaps because of their superior skill, it was expected that they would be able to offset the numerical advantage of other tribes.

And sometimes if you do have crack troops, even though you're up against a much larger number, it can, as it were, tip the scales or maybe certain type of weaponry. I remember the wars between England and France, they had a hundred year war. And the thing that made the difference was the English longbow.

The English longbow was much more deadly and accurate than the French crossbow. And so even though the English forces, as they invaded France and they took huge territories of France at that time, they were certainly outnumbered, but they, again, they had the advantage because of technology. And certainly that can be the case.

So we say that the Benjamites, they had a great skill. And as we think about this slinging stones, it talks about, they were able to do this. They were able to use the slingshot well.

I just want you to kind of get a sense of this. Scholars tell us that each rock would weigh about one pound in weight that would be thrown out of a slingshot, which is about 0.45 kilograms for those that speak a different language. Released from the sling at 90 miles an hour or 145 kilometers per hour.

Now imagine getting hit by a pound weight that hits you at 145 kilometers an hour or 90 miles an hour. That will give you a headache for sure, at the very least, right? Very damaging. I remember when we lived in Georgia getting attacked by hornets and they're tiny little things, but they hit you at tremendous speed.

Oh, and the pain of being hit by a hornet was pretty severe. So imagine being hit by a pound weight of 0.45 kilograms. So these men could be deadly in battle and we're going to see that that's exactly what is going to happen.

We also saw that the men of Israel, it says in verse 17, beside Benjamin were numbered 400,000 men that drew sword. So again, the drew sword, but the tragedy is who are they drawing the sword against? Who were Benjamin using this sling? It's against their brethren. Now it's wonderful that we should know how to use our weapons.

In fact, as Christians, we're told, right? Second Corinthians 10 verse four, weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. And we have tremendous weapons. We have indeed a double edged sword that is very sharp.

It's called the word of God. We also have the wonderful weapon of believing prayer coming into the presence of God, depending on him. And we do need to know how to use our weapons and they're not carnal, but they're mighty through God, but they're not to be used against one another.

That's not the purpose of them. They're used to fight the real enemy. And oh, how we need to be excellent swordsmen.

And certainly those who can use specific targeted prayer and use it well, but use it against the real enemy. Certainly David also knew how to use a slingshot, didn't he? But he didn't miss the target right in the middle of Goliath's forehead, but it was against the real enemy, not against his brethren. And oh, again, may God help us to know how we can use our weapons in an effective way against the real enemy, not against one another.

And so in verse 17, these men of Israel, they were coming up against Benjamin. But the amazing thing is there's a lot of self-conceit on both sides here. On the one hand, Benjamin are supremely confident as they go to battle because of the skills that they have, and especially these 700 crack troops.

On the other hand, here's Israel. They are coming and they're supremely confident because they've got larger numbers, but nobody has confidence in the right place. And that is in the Lord.

It's all in either their size of numbers, or their particular skills, but not in the Lord. And it's going to be great lessons because as we move into the next section from verse 18 and the engagements with Benjamin, we're going to see that a lot of this that is taking place is really done in self-confidence without real seeking the Lord's mind, expressing dependence on him. And so we have to be very careful as Israelites in verse 18, it says the children of Israel arose and they went to the house of God.

Well, that's good that they seem to be doing the right thing. They're going to the right place, the house of God to Bethel and ask counsel of God. Well, that's good too.

It's good to seek counsel of God, but notice what they ask. They ask counsel of God and said, which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin? And the Lord said, Judah shall go up first. They didn't say, Lord, should we attack our brethren? They didn't say, you know, what strategy should we employ? All they asked was who's going to go up first.

It was, they'd already made the decision, we're going to do this. They'd already made the decision that we're going to fight our brethren. And now they're just seeking the Lord's kind of his, as it were, stamp on their decision.

And, oh, by the way, show us which one shall go first. And so often when we pray, we've already made our mind up what we're going to do. And we simply come and say, Lord, here's my plans.

I think they're wonderful plans. Would you mind just kind of stamping my ideas? That's not prayer. It really isn't.

And it really should begin with this. Lord, what do you want? What's your will in this matter? What would you have me to do? And so we've got to be so, so careful about when we come to prayer. Instead of coming and saying, Lord, there's two options, this one and this one, show me which one.

Let's come and say, Lord, maybe there are things I'm not even thinking of. I'm not that smart. I don't know all the parameters.

Do you have something that I need to do that I'm not even thinking about? George Muir, on his tremendous little work on discerning the will of God, he says, the first thing that you have to do if you want to know God's will is to have no will of your own on the matter. Boy, that's the hardest place to be, isn't it? Have no will of your own, because when we want something, I've already said, this is what I want, Lord. And I wouldn't maybe so brazen as to say that, but I'm coming.

I've already made my mind up. I just want his approval rather than, Lord, what do you want? The only uncertainty in this whole matter of going up against Benjamin was related to a matter of procedure. Who do you want to go first? It wasn't, should we go? It wasn't, how should we go? But it's just procedure.

Who's going to go first? And so they come to the house of God and they say, whichever shall go first. And the Lord very graciously tells them who should go first. He said, Judah shall go first.

What's interesting is that they, I believe, they think they have a just cause and they have strength of numbers. And so it brought them to a place where they had no doubt that success would be automatic.

And this is a mere formality going to the house of God.

And sometimes when we're involved in discipline, we may have a just cause and we may have the vast majority on our side, but it doesn't mean that we don't move forward prayerfully and dependently and asking that he would make sure that our attitudes are right, that we're doing this in love, that we're doing everything the way that he would have us to do it. And so sometimes when we've got this just cause, we just kind of, well, it's right. Let's just, let's just do it.

And we're maybe not as prayerful and dependent on the Lord as we ought to be. And so they just felt success is automatic. I mean, sure, Benjamin, you know, they, they defended the indefensible, they're clearly in the wrong and Lord, let's just, let's just get this done.

Who do you want us to go up first? And so there's, it's just brimming with self-confidence. And so the Lord says, Judah shall go up first. Now, again, I want to just kind of stop here because I love this thought because Judah means praise.

And I love that because I do believe praise is very important and maybe it's something lacking amongst us. And if you look back to the chapter, first chapter of the book of Judges, you have a very similar situation as they're going to wipe out the Canaanites. Now, this is not their brethren, but it's the Canaanites.

It says in verse two, the Lord said, Judah shall go up. Behold, I have delivered the land into his hand. And again, the same question was asked in verse one, who shall go for us against the Canaanites to fight against them? The Lord said, Judah.

And so it's always the same that everything should begin from a position of praise. And just a psalm that I had read not too long ago that was such a blessing to my own soul. And I may have already shared it here, but if I haven't, I'm going to do it again because it's a wonderful psalm.

And again, helps us in this idea of recognizing the place of praise. Psalm 149 says, let the high praises of God be in their mouths and a two-edged sword in their hand. And so the idea is that as we go into the battle, and I love reading the story of Wesley and his veterans, and as they would go into a new city with the gospel, they knew that there'd be riots.

They knew that there would be tumult. I mean, it just was a given, but before they would go in, they would sing a hymn together. They would praise the Lord before they went into battle.

And same as the Lord Jesus, as he's going towards Calvary, it says when they left the room, what does it say? It says they sang a hymn. He's about to face the battle of all battles on Calvary, but how does he go about it? Well, Judah must go first. He goes in praise.

And so we might ask ourselves, do we praise the Lord enough? Even in the midst of conflict, I think of Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail, and in the inner prison, and they're in stocks, and their backs are bleeding, and what do they do? Well, they have a praise meeting. Wow, that's radical, isn't it? And so can I ask you, just all of us on this meeting this morning, do we praise the Lord enough? Surely he's worthy. Surely it's something we should be doing more of.

The psalmist talks about he put a new song in my heart, even praise to our God, or that we'd be more of a praising people. So Judah must go first. And of course, there's lots of examples, Jehoshaphat marching

into battle with a choir singing praise to God against an overwhelming enemy.

And so just are we praising the Lord enough? And then notice too, that in this instance, as opposed to chapter one, the Lord doesn't say, Judah shall go first, and I have given them into your hands. He just says, they ask which one shall go, and he tells them, Judah shall go first, but no guarantee of victory at all given to them. Just answering their simple question, Judah shall go first.

And so we read that the children of Israel, verse 19, rose up in the morning and encamped against Gibeah, because they're going to the source of the problem. Gibeah is where this horrendous sin had taken place. And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin, and the men of Israel put themselves in array to fight against them at Gibeah.

And the children of Benjamin came forth out of Gibeah and destroyed down to the ground of the Israelites that day, 20 and 2,000 men. Now, certainly, this is not how they expected the battle to go. After all, they have a just cause.

After all, Gibeah have committed a horrendous sin. And so certainly, this dents their pride and challenges their complacency. Do we learn the lessons that God wants us to learn? Because you're going to see that even though when they go to seek the Lord next time, there's a bit more reality.

Yet nevertheless, they do the same thing again, and there's going to be the same results again. So sometimes when we experience defeat, it would be good for us to ask ourselves the question, why did this happen? I mean, surely, I had right on my side. How come this turned out to be such a disaster? Is there any lessons I can learn from this? And we need to be those that learn lessons.

Because if we don't, we make the same mistakes again. I loved when I went to Israel. I went up to Masada, and it's kind of quite an amazing place.

But in the past, the Jewish military would be, before they graduated, they would take them up to Masada. And of course, it was a horrendous tragedy. Of course, the Romans defeated them there.

Actually, they believe there were perhaps mass suicides on the top, because they didn't want to surrender to the Romans. But one of the things that the Israeli military would do is they would take them there, they would tell them the story of Masada, and then they would all make a covenant, never again. This is never going to happen to us again.

We're not going to let this happen. And I thought, well, what a good lesson. Maybe you've sinned and failed.

And isn't it good to have a Masada moment, and say, Lord, by your grace, never again, to learn from the lesson, and to kind of let it burn into your mind, Lord, never again, by your grace, never again. And so sadly, they didn't learn. And sometimes we're such slow learners, and we make the same mistakes over and over again.

So verse 22, it says the people of the men of Israel encourage themselves. Now notice it says they encourage themselves, but there's an important piece missing. Remember when David in 1 Samuel 30, we studied this together, we saw that it seemed like everything was going wrong for David, and even his own mighty men turned against him.

But it says in verse six, David was greatly distressed, for the people speak of stoning him. Now again, this is his own people speak of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters. But then it says this, but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.

But tragically here, it says that they encourage themselves, but it doesn't say they encourage themselves in the Lord. So it's kind of like, come on, guys, let's take heart, we can do this, we can do this. It's not, Lord, you're our encouragement to do this.

But it was in themselves. And so they encourage themselves and set their battle again in array in the place where they put themselves in array the first day. So they're doing exactly the same thing.

Still confident, self confident to do the same thing again, because they still have superior numbers. Yes, they may have suffered a tremendous loss of 18,000 men, but they still greatly outnumbered the enemy. And so they're still confident, as they put themselves in the battle array.

And verse 23 tells us a little bit about what took place before this second battle, it says the children of Israel went up and wept before the Lord until even so there is a sense of sorrow about losing 18,000 men, they asked counsel of the Lord saying, shall I go up again, to battle against the children of Benjamin, my brother, the Lord said, go up against them. And so again, they do, they do see that there's a bit more sensitivity here, there's a few tears. And they also acknowledge that, perhaps for the first time, that the battle is against Benjamin, my brother, and that they awfully sad words, shall I go up again, against Benjamin, my brother, in the wrong enemy, really, but they going up against their brother.

And so the Lord says, go up. And so verse 24, the children of Israel came near again, the children of Benjamin, the second day, verse 24, verse 25, Benjamin went forth against them out of Gibeah the second day, and destroyed down to the ground of the children of Israel again, 18,000 men, all these grew the sword. So we had 22,000 men the first day, and now 18,000 men.

Now, when I went to school, 22 and 18 is 40. I think it's still the same. And so that's 40,000 men out of 400,000 men.

10% of the army has been lost in two days. That's a pretty staggering loss, isn't it? 10% in two days. So what is the result? I want you to notice now there's a five fold response this time from the nation of Israel, we want to learn from this five things that the children of Israel did as a result of this second day's loss.

And so we break in verse 26 says, then all the children of Israel, and all the people went up and came to the house of God and wept and sat there before the Lord. So firstly, it says all the children of Israel, and all the people went up, just notice that all the children of Israel, and all the people went up. So now, we see there's total unity, they're all going up together in their quest to seek the mind of God, there's unity, Lord, we need your help.

And they're all involved. There's total unity, they're all together seeking God for this. Isn't it wonderful when the whole assembly is speaking, you know, when you have unity, and dependence on the Lord, you certainly everything changes.

And so, oh, how wonderful it is to have a united prayer meeting where the saints come together, and they're, they're united before the Lord in their desperation in their need. And that's where blessing often can come from, is when we're united together in prayer, you look at the book of Acts, they're one accord, they're one place, they're praying people, and the Lord blesses. And so, sometimes, you ask yourself, why

does it take us so long to get here to this place of united, dependent prayer? Why are we so slow? Why do we have to have such casualties? Why do we have to lose 10% of our of our army before we'll get to this place? Why are we so slow to get to this place of unity in the house of God, seeking God together? Well, they're there, they're in that healthy condition.

And we praise God for that. Notice, secondly, that as they go, they wept. So, and they sat before the Lord, again, in verse 26, all the children of Israel, all the people went up and came to the house of God, and wept and sat before the Lord.

And so, it's a wonderful place, tears flowed, they were deeply conscious of being in the presence of the Lord, they wept before the Lord, they know that he's there in their midst there, and they're conscious of his presence, and they're weeping because of their failure. And so, they're in a very good condition right now, where the Lord can help them. Thirdly, again, it says that they fasted.

Again, we see this in verse 26. It says, all the people went up, came to the house of the Lord, they wept, sat before the Lord, and fasted that day until evening. Now, again, remember this, they've just been fighting.

Now, I would suspect that fighting gives you an appetite. I know that, because it's very energetic, it's hard work. And remember the story of Jonathan, when he took the honey, and his eyes were enlightened, and the rest of the men had been fasting, put on a fast by Saul, and they were just weary.

And so, but yet, they recognize this needs the Lord to do something. And so, they do without legitimate things in their desire to see the Lord answer. And so, they're crying out to God, they're fasting that day till evening, even though it's potentially a battle day the next day.

And yet, they're seeking the Lord, and they're crying out to him. All natural desires are set aside, and there's an atmosphere of repentance that day. Fourthly, it tells us that they offered burn offerings and peace offerings.

And so, again, we notice that in the end of verse 26, they fasted that day till evening and offered burn offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. I find it interesting, the burn offering is kind of a wonderful offering, but part of it is, it's a picture of Christ's devotion to the will of his Father, even to death. And when the Israelite laid his hands on that, and that animal, that lamb that would be offered as a burn offering, what he's really saying is that I'm devoid of the qualities that are seen in this animal.

Just as the Lord Jesus loved the Lord with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength, well, I'm devoid of that. I have not loved him with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength like I should. And so, there's just this acknowledgement of my failure in devotion to God.

And I think they're being honest. We were confident in ourselves. We weren't devoted to the Lord in all of this.

And there's an acknowledgement of failure in their loving God with all their hearts, mind, soul, and strength. They hadn't done that. And then the peace offering, of course, it's a fellowship offering.

And of course, it's talking about the fact that we have communion together in our appreciation of the same person. But I think here they're saying, I failed in the area of loving my brother. Or does the Lord say the two great commandments are, love the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love my

neighbor as myself.

And so, in bringing these offerings, there's this consciousness of failure in these fundamental areas. I haven't loved God. I haven't loved my neighbor.

And so, there's this brokenness before the Lord. Now, there's a fifth one, but we have to wait till we get to verse 28 to see the fifth thing that comes about as a result of this. So, it says, verse 24, the children of Israel came near against the children of Benjamin.

I'm sorry, verse 27, the children of Israel inquired of the Lord for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days. And Phineas, the son of Eliezer, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days saying, shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin, my brother, or shall I cease? And the Lord said, go up for tomorrow. I will deliver them into thy hands.

The fifth thing is, based on their repentance and their restoration of communion to the Lord, they inquire of the Lord, but now they're even asking, should I even go up to battle against the children of Benjamin, my brother, or shall I cease? In other words, self-will has come to an end, has been broken down to such an extent that they're even prepared to cease and just walk away from it, if that's what the Lord wants. In other words, they're in a place where they just say, Lord, we want your will. We're not coming and saying, we're going to go up.

Who shall go up first? We're not saying we're going to do this. We're not going to do, what do you want us to do? We don't know what to do. And isn't it a wonderful place to be where we're just at the end of ourselves and say, Lord, I don't know what to do.

I don't know which way to turn, but my eyes are on you. What would you have me to do? And so they're brought to this low point where God can really help them. And at this point, the Lord is able to tell them, go up for tomorrow, I will deliver them into your hand.

He not only gave them the authority to go, but he reeled to them when they should go. Tomorrow is when you're going to do this, go up, and I'm going to give them into your hand. He guaranteed them a successful outcome.

It had been a painful process for them to reach this stage, but the Lord in his infinite grace and mercy had brought them to this place of total dependence. And now he said, okay, I've got you where I want you. Now I'm going to use you.

And why is it that it takes us so long to get ourselves in a position where the Lord can really use us, where all self-confidence has died down, when all our ideas have been whittled away and we're just prostrate in the presence of God and saying, God, what do you want? All I have to offer is myself. Lord, I just, I'm looking to you. My eyes are upon you.

What a wonderful place to be in. And notice too, there's a mention here of two other things that are very significant. Phineas, the son of Eleazar, verse 28, the son of Aaron stood before it in those days.

And the other significant thing is the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days. Mention of Phineas and mention of the ark. This of course tells us, as we've said all along, that this incident is very early on in the book of Judges, because Phineas is still alive.

And we know that even from this passage, he's the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron. So that gives us the day that it's very early on during the days of Phineas. And how appropriate to have Phineas to be there at that time, because Phineas was a man who knew how to deal with sin.

If you think back to the book of Numbers, I want you to go back there. Numbers, remember the council of Balaam, how he couldn't curse Israel. He couldn't curse the people that God had blessed.

And yet what he sought to do was corrupt them by their involvement with the Midianites and so the Moabites as well. So verse 25, verse one, Israel abode in Shittim and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And then if we look at verse 12, it says, well let me just back up.

So let's begin, let's look from verse six. Behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel who were weeping before the Lord of the tabernacle, the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And when Phineas, the son of Eliezer, the son of Aaron, the priest saw it, he rose up from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through the man of Israel and the woman through her belly.

So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel and those that died in the plague were 24,000. And the Lord spake to Moses saying, Phineas, the son of Eliezer, the son of Aaron, the priest have turned my wrath away from the children of Israel while he was zealous for my sake among them that I consume not the children of Israel in my jealousy. Wherefore say, behold, I give to him my covenant of peace and he shall have it and his seed after him even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood because he was zealous for his God and made atonement for the children of Israel.

So he is clearly set out as a man in scripture who hated sin and this brazen affront to God bringing this Midianite woman even into the very camp of God and doing evil things to her and this man would have none of it. And so no man in scripture was more noticed than Phineas for judgment of evil. He judged it unsparingly.

He was entirely apart from any human motives. He took the javelin in his hand in jealousy for his God, right? He is zealous for my sake. He had a zeal for God.

There was no natural indignation in him at all, but he was holy, he was priestly, and he was spiritual in his indignation. You might say if there had been more Phineases amongst us, there might be less devastation amongst the people of God. Men who were zealous for his God, zealous for his holiness, zealous for his house, zealous for the things that concern the heart of God.

And so not only is Phineas here, but also the ark of God is amongst the people because that was a symbol of the Lord dwelling in the midst of his people. And so it puts them in a place where they're in a much healthier position. They're right with God.

They've got a man who's going to lead now, who is clearly a man who is holy and hates sin, is not partial in any way. His zeal is for God and for his honor, and God is in their midst as well. So we're in a much healthier place.

So notice verse 29, it says, and Israel set liars in wait around about Gibeah. And the children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day and put themselves in array against Gibeah as at other times. Well, notice that they're using the same tactics, at least as far as the Benjamites are

concerned.

Looks like, well, these guys are crazy. They're doing the same thing again, but this time they weren't because they'd learned from them. And in fact, I wonder, did they have a Bible reading that night and read about Joshua at Ai in chapter eight of Judges, because they're going to use a lot of the same tactics.

They're actually going to flee like before, but then they've got these liars in wait that are going to set fire to the city. And it's almost identical to the story of the defeat of Ai. And so could it be that that night, as they were in before the Lord in his presence, the Lord has told them he's going to give them victory.

And yet that they're not irresponsible. They're not complacent now. He's going to give them victory, but they're not just going to go business as usual.

And they're seeking the mind of God, how they should do this. And maybe from the word of God, they get this glimmer of how it could be done. And so they follow the strategy that is found in Joshua chapter eight.

And they go up as if before, they allow the Benjamites to feel like they're winning, they get self-confident, all the rest of it. And so the whole point of it was to lull the Benjamites into a sense of false security. They couldn't believe their own eyes that the children of Israel were using the same tactic that had failed so miserably the previous two days.

And so their earlier successes would have increased their confidence, all the while not realizing they were being lured into a trap, and Israel were going to defeat them. So notice verse 31, it says, And the children of Benjamin went out against the people, and they were drawn away from the city. And they began to smite the people and kill as at other times in the highways of which one goeth up to the house of God, and the other to give you in the field about 30 men of Israel.

So again, there's there's some losses here. And it would seem that Israel were prepared to have a few losses in order for a long term victory. We need to recognize to where we're in a war, and there will be losses.

Soldiers get wounded and hurt. It's a battle. Talking to some people recently, and they were telling me about how badly they'd been hurt.

And I said, Well, what do you expect? You're in a war. I mean, I'm not trying to belittle it. But it comes with the territory, we realize we're in a conflict, we realize people get hurt in war.

And sometimes, a lot of people get hurt. And it's sad. But don't forget, brethren, that we might have some casualties here and there.

But in the long term, we are on the victory side. In the long term, there's a day coming when that enemy, the serpent, we are going to tread on his head, we're going to crush his head. He's a defeated foe.

And we need to recognize that. And so this is Israel recognizes, there's going to be a little bit of loss here. Just 30 men in this case.

But nevertheless, 30 lives that were lost. And so it says in verse 32, the children of Benjamin says they are smitten down before us, as at the first, for the children of Israel said, let us flee and draw them from the city into the highways. So the strategy is clearly, clearly working.

Verse 33, all the men of Israel rose up out of their place and put themselves in array at Baal Tamar. And the liars in way of Israel came forth out of their place, even of the meadows of Gibeah. And there came against Gibeah 10,000 chosen men out of all Israel and the battle was solved, but they knew not the evil was near them.

And the Lord smote Benjamin before Israel, the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjamites that day, 25,100 men, all these that drew sword. The same overconfidence that had led to their brethren's downfall in the two previous battles was now found in Benjamin. And they were drawn away from the city and they were slaughtered because of it.

And it's just good to remind ourselves that as we're in a war, one thing that we cannot afford is overconfidence and particularly self-confidence. We must have no confidence in self or in the flesh. The only place where we can have true confidence is in the Lord.

He alone is the one who will give us the victory. Thanks be to God that gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. It's not our cleverness.

It's not our smart ideas. It's not our anything to do with us. The victory belongs to the Lord and we must be people that are absolutely dependent on the Lord.

And so this first section we've given the kind of the battle in general, and this is so typical of the way Hebrew writers write that they'll often give us the general story and then they'll repeat the story from 36b onwards to the end of verse 46. We're going to get the same story, which we'll have to wait for next time to look at, the same story of how the battle was won, but a much more detailed with supplemental information to help us understand all that took place in this battle. But nevertheless, the Lord is showing us that sometimes we might have right on our side and we might have might on our side and we might still lose because we're not walking in humble dependence upon him.

So you might think you're right and you might have the majority with you and yet if the Lord is not with you, you don't have a hope. And so it's not might and even right, it's dependence on the living God as we enter into the conflicts of history. May God help us with these thoughts.

Amen.

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