

Judges 20: Learning to Trust God Even When We Don't Understand

In Judges 20, we see how the people of Israel reacted when they heard about the terrible crime committed in Gibeah. The Levite had sent parts of his concubine's body to the twelve tribes, and the shock of such a horrible act united them in outrage. They gathered together to confront the tribe of Benjamin, demanding justice. But instead of acknowledging the wickedness in their midst, the Benjamites refused to turn over the guilty men, choosing instead to fight against their fellow Israelites.

A Nation in Conflict

The Israelites, 400,000 strong, prepared for battle. They asked God who should go first, and He told them to send the tribe of Judah. But to their surprise, the Benjamites—though much smaller in number—fought fiercely and killed 22,000 Israelites on the first day.

Confused but determined, the Israelites sought God again. Should they fight once more? God said yes. But the next day, they suffered another heavy loss—18,000 men died.

Now, at this point, we might wonder: *If God told them to go, why did they lose?* That's a hard question. Sometimes, even when we pray and seek God's direction, things don't go the way we expect.

But notice what happened next. After two defeats, Israel didn't just ask God for permission to fight—they humbled themselves. They fasted, wept, and brought offerings before the Lord. They truly sought Him, not just for victory, but from a place of brokenness. And this time, God gave them a battle plan.

A Change in Strategy

The third time, instead of charging in head-on, they set an ambush. When the Benjamites attacked, Israel pretended to retreat. Thinking they had won again, the Benjamites pursued them—but this was part of Israel's plan. Once the enemy was drawn away from the city, Israel's hidden forces attacked, setting Gibeah on fire.

When the Benjamites saw their city burning, they panicked. The battle turned, and the Israelites finally won, nearly wiping out the entire tribe of Benjamin—only 600 men survived by escaping into the wilderness.

Personal Application: Trusting God in Life's Battles

This chapter teaches us many lessons about obedience, perseverance, and trusting God even when things don't make sense.

1. Obedience to God does not always mean immediate success.

- The Israelites sought God's guidance but still experienced losses. Sometimes, even when we follow God, we face setbacks. Maybe you've prayed about something—your job, a relationship, or a difficult decision—and things didn't turn out as you expected.

But setbacks don't mean God isn't working. Sometimes He allows trials to shape us, teach us, or bring us to a place of greater dependence on Him.

2. True victory comes when we humble ourselves before God.

- The first two times, Israel asked for direction but didn't truly humble themselves. The third time, they fasted, prayed, and worshiped. When we come before God with a sincere heart, rather than just asking Him to bless our plans, He moves in a powerful way.

3. God's ways are higher than ours.

- The battle didn't go the way Israel expected. At first, it seemed like God was letting them fail. But He was teaching them perseverance, humility, and reliance on Him. Sometimes, when we don't understand why God allows certain things, we must trust that He sees the bigger picture. As Isaiah 55:8 says, ***"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord."***

4. Sin, when not confronted, leads to destruction.

- The tribe of Benjamin could have avoided this war if they had just dealt with the wickedness in their midst. But their refusal to acknowledge sin led to their downfall. In our own lives, ignoring sin doesn't make it go away—it only allows it to grow. When we let pride, bitterness, or compromise take root, it can bring destruction. That's why God calls us to repent and turn back to Him.

Choosing Faith Over Understanding

This chapter reminds us that following God is not about having all the answers—it's about trusting Him even when things don't make sense. Maybe right now, you're facing a situation where you've prayed, sought God, and yet things aren't going as planned. Don't give up. Like Israel, keep seeking Him with humility. Keep trusting that He knows what He's doing.

Victory doesn't always come immediately, but it does come when we surrender to God's will. Let's choose to trust Him, even when the battle seems long, knowing that He is in control and His plans are always good.