

## Introduction

**Opening Scripture:** [James 5:19-20](#) “19 My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, 20 let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”

**Context:** [Judges 17-21](#) is likely not chronologically at the end of the period of Judges. This section is a collection of overlapping events that highlight how bad Israel declined before seeking a king. [Judges 17:6](#) “6 In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” [Judges 18:1](#) “1 In those days there was no king in Israel...” [Judges 19:1](#) “1 In those days, when there was no king in Israel...” [Judges 21:25](#) “25 In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

In [Judges 19](#), a city in Benjamin (Gibeah) raped and killed the concubine of a visiting Levite. He cut her into twelve pieces and sent those pieces throughout Israel. [Judges 20-21](#) describe the response to that event.

After we see how Israel responded when one of the tribes rebelled against God, we will reflect on what the New Testament teaches concerning how the church should respond when a member lives in unrepentant sin.

## War against Benjamin

The reason for war

***Israel came together to confront the sin of Gibeah.***

[Judges 20:1-3](#) “1 Then all the people of Israel came out, from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, and the congregation assembled as one man to the Lord at Mizpah. 2 And the chiefs of all the people, of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, 400,000 men on foot that drew the sword. 3 (Now the people of Benjamin heard that the people of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.) And the people of Israel said, “Tell us, how did this evil happen?””

*Where did the people of Israel gather?* They all came to Mizpah. Mizpah was north of Gibeah (about 3 miles), where the Levite’s concubine had been killed. Mizpah (and Gibeah) were cities in Benjamin.

[Judges 20:4-7](#) “4 And the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, “I came to Gibeah that belongs to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to spend the night. 5 And the leaders of Gibeah rose against me and surrounded the house against me by night. They meant to kill me, and they violated my concubine, and she is dead. 6 So I took

hold of my concubine and cut her in pieces and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel, for they have committed abomination and outrage in Israel. 7 Behold, you people of Israel, all of you, give your advice and counsel here.””

*Why had the Levite sent pieces of his concubine throughout Israel? The people of Gibeah (Israelites) had “committed abomination (a shocking sin).*

[Judges 20:8-11](#) “8 And all the people arose as one man, saying, “None of us will go to his tent, and none of us will return to his house. 9 But now this is what we will do to Gibeah: we will go up against it by lot, 10 and we will take ten men of a hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and a hundred of a thousand, and a thousand of ten thousand, to bring provisions for the people, that when they come they may repay Gibeah of Benjamin for all the outrage that they have committed in Israel.” 11 So all the men of Israel gathered against the city, united as one man.”

*What is meant by the repetition of the phrase “as one man” (20:1, 8, 11)? This highlights the unity of Israel standing against sin. However, Benjamin is missing.*

### Benjamin’s response

#### ***Benjamin sided with Gibeah.***

[Judges 20:12-17](#) “12 And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, “What evil is this that has taken place among you? 13 Now therefore give up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and purge evil from Israel.” But the Benjaminites would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the people of Israel. 14 Then the people of Benjamin came together out of the cities to Gibeah to go out to battle against the people of Israel. 15 And the people of Benjamin mustered out of their cities on that day 26,000 men who drew the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, who mustered 700 chosen men. 16 Among all these were 700 chosen men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss. 17 And the men of Israel, apart from Benjamin, mustered 400,000 men who drew the sword; all these were men of war.”

*What did Israel ask Benjamin to give them? Israel asked Benjamin to give up the guilty men of Gibeah. They **should** side with Israel on this matter.*

*How did Benjamin respond? They raised an army of 26,000 men, plus 700 men from Gibeah. What was unique about 700 men who fought for Benjamin? They were left-handed and experts with a sling. This tradition continued beyond Judges. David has similar soldiers. [1 Chronicles 12:1-2](#) “1 Now these are the men who came to David at Ziklag, while he could not move about freely because of Saul the son of Kish. And they were among the mighty men who helped him in war. 2 They were bowmen and could shoot arrows and **sling stones** with either the **right or the left hand**; they were **Benjaminites**, Saul’s kinsmen.”*

## Israel's defeat

### ***Initially, Israel was defeated by Benjamin.***

[Judges 20:18-21](#) “18 The people of Israel arose and went up to Bethel and inquired of God, “Who shall go up first for us to fight against the people of Benjamin?” And the Lord said, “Judah shall go up first.” 19 Then the people of Israel rose in the morning and encamped against Gibeah. 20 And the men of Israel went out to fight against Benjamin, and the men of Israel drew up the battle line against them at Gibeah. 21 The people of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and destroyed on that day 22,000 men of the Israelites.”

*What did Israel do before going into battle?* They asked God who should lead the battle against Benjamin. They gathered at Bethel, which was north of Mizpah.

*Who did God say should lead the battle? Why did God choose Judah to lead them?* This was the same instruction in [Judges 1:1-2](#) “1 After the death of Joshua, the people of Israel inquired of the Lord, “Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?” 2 The Lord said, “Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand.” Judges is preparing for the appointment of David, from Judah, who foreshadows Jesus.

*How many men of Israel died in the battle?* Israel lost 22,000 men. This section does not specify how many of Benjamin died, but the implication is that it was a sweeping victory for Benjamin.

[Judges 20:22-25](#) “22 But the people, the men of Israel, took courage, and again formed the battle line in the same place where they had formed it on the first day. 23 And the people of Israel went up and wept before the Lord until the evening. And they inquired of the Lord, “Shall we again draw near to fight against our brothers, the people of Benjamin?” And the Lord said, “Go up against them.” 24 So the people of Israel came near against the people of Benjamin the second day. 25 And Benjamin went against them out of Gibeah the second day, and destroyed 18,000 men of the people of Israel. All these were men who drew the sword.”

*What did Israel call the people of Benjamin?* They acknowledged Benjamin was their brother. *How many men of Israel died in the second battle?* The second day, 18,000 men of Israel died.

## Israel's victory

### ***God eventually gave Israel victory.***

[Judges 20:26-28](#) “26 Then all the people of Israel, the whole army, went up and came to Bethel and wept. They sat there before the Lord and fasted that day until evening, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. 27 And the people of Israel inquired of the Lord (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, 28 and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, ministered before it in those days), saying, “Shall

we go out once more to battle against our brothers, the people of Benjamin, or shall we cease?” And the Lord said, “Go up, for tomorrow I will give them into your hand.””

*What was at Bethel where Israel made sacrifices and prayed?* The Ark of the Covenant was at Bethel. The Ark was kept in the inner room of the Tabernacle. Throughout Joshua-Judges, the ark was at Shechem, Shiloh, and Bethel.

*Who inquired of God’s will for Israel?* Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, inquired on Israel’s behalf. Phineas was is first mentioned (narratively) in [Numbers 25](#). Aaron died a couple of years later and Eleazar became the priest. The Bible does not record when Phinehas became high priest; however, [Joshua 24](#) describes Eleazar’s death, so Phineas likely became high priest near the end of Joshua or beginning of Judges. The book of Judges lasts 250+ years. This suggests that the events of [Judges 19-21](#) occur near the beginning of the book.

[Judges 20:29-32](#) “29 So Israel set men in ambush around Gibeah. 30 And the people of Israel went up against the people of Benjamin on the third day and set themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times. 31 And the people of Benjamin went out against the people and were drawn away from the city. And as at other times they began to strike and kill some of the people in the highways, one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah, and in the open country, about thirty men of Israel. 32 And the people of Benjamin said, “They are routed before us, as at the first.” But the people of Israel said, “Let us flee and draw them away from the city to the highways.””

*What did Israel do differently on the third day?* Israel set up an ambush around Gibeah, separate from the main army.

*How did the people of Benjamin expect the battle to turn out?* They had very decisive victories before. They expected the same outcome again.

[Judges 20:33-35](#) “33 And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place and set themselves in array at Baal-tamar, and the men of Israel who were in ambush rushed out of their place from Maareh-geba. 34 And there came against Gibeah 10,000 chosen men out of all Israel, and the battle was hard, but the Benjaminites did not know that disaster was close upon them. 35 And the Lord defeated Benjamin before Israel, and the people of Israel destroyed 25,100 men of Benjamin that day. All these were men who drew the sword.”

*How many men of Benjamin died that day?* Benjamin lost 25,100 people that day. *How many men did they bring into battle (20:15)?* They brought 26,700 people into the war.

[Judges 20:36-41](#) “36 So the people of Benjamin saw that they were defeated. The men of Israel gave ground to Benjamin, because they trusted the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah. 37 Then the men in ambush hurried and rushed against Gibeah; the men in ambush moved out and struck all the city with the edge of the sword. 38 Now the appointed signal between the men of Israel and the men in the main ambush was that when they made

a great cloud of smoke rise up out of the city 39 the men of Israel should turn in battle. Now Benjamin had begun to strike and kill about thirty men of Israel. They said, “Surely they are defeated before us, as in the first battle.” 40 But when the signal began to rise out of the city in a column of smoke, the Benjaminites looked behind them, and behold, the whole of the city went up in smoke to heaven. 41 Then the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were dismayed, for they saw that disaster was close upon them.”

*What was the signal that the main army should stop retreating and turn to fight? When smoke rose out of the city, they were to turn back and fight. This battle is very similar to Israel’s battle against Ai in [Joshua 8](#). The major distinction is that Ai was a city of foreigners; Gibeah was an Israelite city. The Levite made this same distinction when he was deciding where to spend the night. This was an internal war.*

[Judges 20:42–48](#) “42 Therefore they turned their backs before the men of Israel in the direction of the wilderness, but the battle overtook them. And those who came out of the cities were destroying them in their midst. 43 Surrounding the Benjaminites, they pursued them and trod them down from Nohah as far as opposite Gibeah on the east. 44 Eighteen thousand men of Benjamin fell, all of them men of valor. 45 And they turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon. Five thousand men of them were cut down in the highways. And they were pursued hard to Gidom, and 2,000 men of them were struck down. 46 So all who fell that day of Benjamin were 25,000 men who drew the sword, all of them men of valor. 47 But 600 men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon and remained at the rock of Rimmon four months. 48 And the men of Israel turned back against the people of Benjamin and struck them with the edge of the sword, the city, men and beasts and all that they found. And all the towns that they found they set on fire.”

*What did Israel do to the cities of Benjamin? Israel burned all of the cities in the region. Other than the 600 men who escaped, this was a total loss.*

## Benjamin’s near-extinction

### Israel’s oath

***Israel had made an oath that threatened the loss of Benjamin.***

[Judges 21:1–3](#) “1 Now the men of Israel had sworn at Mizpah, “No one of us shall give his daughter in marriage to Benjamin.” 2 And the people came to Bethel and sat there till evening before God, and they lifted up their voices and wept bitterly. 3 And they said, “O Lord, the God of Israel, why has this happened in Israel, that today there should be one tribe lacking in Israel?””

*What had Israel sworn before the war against Benjamin? They swore a curse on anyone who would give a wife to a man of Benjamin. What did they lament after the war against*

*Benjamin?* They lamented the near-destruction of Benjamin and their oath that would completely eliminate Benjamin.

[Judges 21:4-7](#) “4 And the next day the people rose early and built there an altar and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. 5 And the people of Israel said, “Which of all the tribes of Israel did not come up in the assembly to the Lord?” For they had taken a great oath concerning him who did not come up to the Lord to Mizpah, saying, “He shall surely be put to death.” 6 And the people of Israel had compassion for Benjamin their brother and said, “One tribe is cut off from Israel this day. 7 What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since we have sworn by the Lord that we will not give them any of our daughters for wives?””

*What oath had Israel made concerning those who did not help fight against Benjamin?* They had vowed to kill anyone who did not join them in battle against Benjamin.

### Jabesh-gilead

***Israel provided wives by attacking Jabesh-gilead.***

[Judges 21:8-12](#) “8 And they said, “What one is there of the tribes of Israel that did not come up to the Lord to Mizpah?” And behold, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh-gilead, to the assembly. 9 For when the people were mustered, behold, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead was there. 10 So the congregation sent 12,000 of their bravest men there and commanded them, “Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword; also the women and the little ones. 11 This is what you shall do: every male and every woman that has lain with a male you shall devote to destruction.” 12 And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead 400 young virgins who had not known a man by lying with him, and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.”

*What city had not helped fight against Benjamin?* Jabesh-gilead did not join them. Jabesh-gilead was on the east side of the Jordan River, in the tribe of Manasseh. There seems to be a relationship between Jabesh-gilead and Benjamin. **First**, Manasseh was Joseph’s son. Joseph and Benjamin shared a mother (Rachel). **Second**, Saul (from Benjamin) had a special relationship with Jabesh-gilead. He delivered them from the Ammonites ([1 Sam 11](#)) and they buried Saul and his sons ([1 Sam 31:11-13](#)).

*What did Israel do to the city of Jabesh-gilead?* They killed everyone in the city except 400 virgin girls, whom they would give to the men of Benjamin. *Was this attack on Jabesh-gilead justified?*

[Judges 21:13-15](#) “13 Then the whole congregation sent word to the people of Benjamin who were at the rock of Rimmon and proclaimed peace to them. 14 And Benjamin returned at that time. And they gave them the women whom they had saved alive of the women of Jabesh-gilead, but they were not enough for them. 15 And the people had compassion on Benjamin because the Lord had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.”

*How many men were at the rock of Rimmon (20:47)?* There were 600 men of Benjamin, who had escaped, at the rock of Rimmon. *How many wives did Israel provide for them from Jabesh-gilead?* Israel provided 400 wives from Jabesh-gilead for the men of Benjamin.

## Shiloh

***Israel allowed Benjamin to kidnap wives.***

[Judges 21:16–21](#) “16 Then the elders of the congregation said, “What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?” 17 And they said, “There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, that a tribe not be blotted out from Israel. 18 Yet we cannot give them wives from our daughters.” For the people of Israel had sworn, “Cursed be he who gives a wife to Benjamin.” 19 So they said, “Behold, there is the yearly feast of the Lord at Shiloh, which is north of Bethel, on the east of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah.” 20 And they commanded the people of Benjamin, saying, “Go and lie in ambush in the vineyards 21 and watch. If the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in the dances, then come out of the vineyards and snatch each man his wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin.”

*How did the elders tell the remaining men of Benjamin to get wives?* They instructed them to kidnap wives from Shiloh.

[Judges 21:22–24](#) “22 And when their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, we will say to them, ‘Grant them graciously to us, because we did not take for each man of them his wife in battle, neither did you give them to them, else you would now be guilty.’ ” 23 And the people of Benjamin did so and took their wives, according to their number, from the dancers whom they carried off. Then they went and returned to their inheritance and rebuilt the towns and lived in them. 24 And the people of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family, and they went out from there every man to his inheritance.”

*How did Israel bypass their oath?* The men of Shiloh did not **give** wives to the men of Benjamin. However, they did not **stop** them from kidnapping wives.

[Judges 21:25](#) “25 In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

*What was the result of having no king in Israel?* Everyone did what was right in their own eyes. *Who should be the king of Israel?* God should be their king. When Israel asked Samuel for a king, God said in [1 Samuel 8:7](#) “7 And the Lord said to Samuel, “Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.”

*What king did God provide for Israel?* Israel’s first king was Saul. Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin. Saul was eventually rejected by God as Israel’s king. Israel’s second king was

David. He was the prototypical king and God promised that David's descendent would rule God's kingdom forever ([2 Sam 7:12-17](#)).

## Church Accountability

[Judges 20-21](#) shows Israel confronting sin within the nation. Gibeah (of Benjamin) sinned. Israel, led by Judah, gathered to judge the men of Gibeah. Benjamin defended Gibeah rather than giving them over to Israel.

Benjamin took a wrong stance. They defended the sinners, rather than giving them over to right judgment. Israel took the right stance, but not necessarily in the right way. They made oaths that nearly eliminated an entire tribe.

*How often do modern churches address sin within the church?* The New Testament gives clear instructions how churches should address sin.

**First**, the church should strive for holiness. [2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1](#) “14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 17 Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, 18 and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.” 1 Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.” The church belongs to God and should be kept holy.

**Second**, churches should address sin privately, then publicly. [Matthew 18:15-17](#) “15 “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” (1) If you can help someone repent of sin, there is often no need for the matter to go beyond that conversation. (2) If someone continues in sin, the church should regard him as an unbeliever.

**Third**, churches should remove unrepentant men/women from church membership. [1 Corinthians 5:1-5](#) “1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. 2 And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. 3 For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. 4 When you are assembled

in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” **Notice** that it is the assembled church ([1 Cor 5:4](#)) that should remove the unrepentant man. The context is clear that churches are responsible for **judging** those **within** the church. [1 Corinthians 5:12-13](#) “12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? 13 God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.” God will judge unbelievers, but the church is responsible for removing those who are unrepentant.

**Fourth**, the goal of addressing sin **and** removing from membership is repentance and restoration. [Matthew 18:15](#) “15 “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.” [2 Corinthians 2:5-8](#) “5 Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. 6 For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, 7 so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8 So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him.” If someone repents, the church should restore him and love him.

Confronting sin in the church and removing someone from the church is difficult. However, churches should never sacrifice holiness for unity because unity without faithfulness to Christ is not biblical unity.

**Closing Scripture:** [Galatians 6:1-2](#) “1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”