

A Hero Will Rise

The Book of Judges

Text

Judges 20:1-48

Topic

When the Israelites unite to discipline the wicked men of Gibeah, the tribe of Benjamin breaks ranks and defends them, precipitating a bloody civil war

Title

"The Curious Case of Benjamin Betrayal"

If your life were a movie, which one would it be?

I took one of those quizzes that randomly populate your page on Facebook. After answering twenty-nine penetrating personality questions, I found out that if my life were a movie, it would be *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

You can't argue with social science.

Let's ask the question differently. If your life were one of the original *Star Wars* trilogy, which one would it be?

I'd like my life to always be the third movie; maybe the first; never the second.

With a title like, *The Empire Strikes Back*, we should have been ready for Darth Vader to triumph, and for the evil empire to rally.

The rebel base was destroyed; Han Solo was captured then frozen in a block of carbonite; Luke's hand was severed from his arm; and, worst of all, Luke discovered that Darth Vader was his father.

Christians are engaged in battle with an evil empire. We're told that our spiritual warfare is against "principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*" (Ephesians 6:12). Those are names describing a hierarchy of evil beings bent on our harm.

Their leader, Satan, is called "the god of this world," and "the prince of the power of the air."

Jesus defeated Satan and his malevolent forces on the Cross. He triumphed over them (Colossians 2:15). But our Lord has not yet returned to claim His victory, and in the mean time, life on earth could be described as the evil empire striking back.

You and I are soldiers in this supernatural fight. If I'm being honest, I must admit that I am sometimes defeated. Since I belong to Jesus, I can't lose the war, but I can, and I do, lose battles.

In chapter twenty of Judges, the Israelites join together to execute justice upon the perverted men of the city of Gibeah. Their cause is righteous, and they seek the Lord. Nevertheless they are twice defeated in battles before they break through to victory the third time.

I think those of us who suffer defeats will be able to see ourselves in them. More than see ourselves - we'll be encouraged to fight on.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Report For Battle With Every Expectation Of Victory, and #2 Return To Battle After Every Experience Of Defeat.

#1 Report For Battle
With Every Expectation Of Victory
(v1-11)

I can think of several movies in which the heroes think they are hired as actors to play their famous parts, but in fact end up engaged with genuine enemies.

In one, the former cast of a cult television space-adventure series, *Galaxy Quest*, spend most of their days attending fan conventions.

During a convention, the captain is approached by a group calling themselves the Thermians who request his assistance. He agrees, thinking this is a fan event.

He doesn't realize that he is transported to an actual spaceship, which he believes to be a set, nor that the Thermians are really aliens. Hoping to get it over with quickly, he provokes Sarris, an evil alien general and enemy of the Thermians, before asking to be returned home, unaware of the consequences of his actions.

In the end, the cast rises to the occasion, and saves the universe.

As a Christian, you are called a soldier of Christ. It's not a part you act; **you really are a soldier.** Every waking moment you are to report for battle.

In chapter twenty, just like today, battles will be fought; and lost; and won.

Jdg 20:1 So all the children of Israel came out, from Dan to Beersheba, as well as from the land of Gilead, and the congregation gathered together as one man before the LORD at Mizpah.

Jdg 20:2 And the leaders of all the people, all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand foot soldiers who drew the sword.

Jdg 20:3 (Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.) Then the children of Israel said, "Tell *us*, how did this wicked deed happen?"

The tribes of Israel were gathering for war because of what had happened in chapter nineteen. We'll see what happened in answer to the question, "Tell us, how did this wicked deed happen?"

Note that the tribe of Benjamin was conspicuously absent. That's because the "wicked deed" happened in Benjamite territory.

Jdg 20:4 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.

Jdg 20:5 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 ravished my concubine so that she died.

The men of Gibeah were described as “perverted.” They initially demanded that the old man who was lodging the traveling Levite send him out so they could rape him. Instead, they sexually assaulted his concubine throughout the night.

The Levite left out the part about giving him being the one who gave her to them to save himself. He didn’t admit that he slept through the night while she was being abused. Or that he planned on leaving her behind, except that she was on the doorstep, dead or unconscious, when he arose to leave.

The children of Israel would still have been obliged to punish the perverts in Gibeah. But they should have known the whole story, accurately and without the spin the Levite put on it.

It may not be possible, but I’d counsel you to not give any advice, and make no judgments, unless or until you believe you know the entire story. For sure, ask the difficult questions.

Jdg 20:6 So I took hold of my concubine, cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of the inheritance of Israel, because they committed lewdness and outrage in Israel.

In *The Godfather*, the Corleone’s receive a package. In it is Luca Brasi’s vest and a dead fish. Tessio explains that it is a Sicilian message: “Luca Brasi sleeps with the fishes.”

The Levite sent just such a message. But I have to say, this was weird. He desecrated a body. Who does that? It should of at least been a cause for pause for those listening, to wonder what he hadn't told them.

Jdg 20:7 Look! All of you *are* children of Israel; give your advice and counsel here and now!"

Jdg 20:8 So all the people arose as one man, saying, "None of us will go to his tent, nor will any turn back to his house;

Jdg 20:9 but now this *is* the thing which we will do to Gibeah: *We will go up* against it by lot.

Commentators point out that they did not first seek the Lord, and that is why they will initially meet with defeat in their battles.

Maybe; but it's important to realize that no reason is given, and we therefore need to be very careful drawing conclusions about things we are not told.

God's Law was clear regarding wickedness and the crimes these perverted men were guilty of. They deserved to be punished. The Israelites were compelled to act. **The infraction did not require any seeking of the Lord because His Word already told them to act in discipline.**

I suggest there are some things you don't need to pray about. You know they are right... Or wrong... And you should act accordingly.

Jdg 20:10 We will take ten men out of *every* hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, a hundred out of *every* thousand, and a thousand out of *every* ten thousand, to make provisions for the people, that when they come to Gibeah in Benjamin, they may repay all the vileness that they have done in Israel."

They did not take time to return home, to take even one night's rest in their houses, or attend to their business or to any affair of life, however urgent. They were reporting for duty.

The army had no provisions. No problem. Ten men were to provide food for ninety, and one hundred men, and so on. They were either to go to their own tribes and homes, or to the towns and cities adjacent, to procure food for this large army.

Jdg 20:11 So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united together as one man.

The first point I'm making is simply this: They immediately reported for battle. Whatever they had been doing when the call went out, they left it, and gathered together. Whether they had been farming, or building, or vacationing, they were first and foremost soldiers, reporting for duty.

One author descriptively wrote, "The fatally wounded kingdom of darkness still reigns upon the earth." The outcome of the war has been settled, but there are still significant battles to be fought.

The famous soldier passage for us is Second Timothy 2:3-4,

2Ti 2:3 You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

2Ti 2:4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of *this* life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

Every morning, when you awake for devotions, you are reporting for military service.

The second point is this: **Expect to be victorious.** But, wait; didn't I say we might lose battles?

I did. When I say expect victory, it's because our enemies are fighting from a place of defeat. We are overcomers, and more than conquerors.

We *will* lose battles along the way; we'll see that in a moment. If we lose a battle, His mercy and forgiveness and compassion and comfort will see us through. Our very endurance, as soldiers, is a victory.

#2 Return To Battle After Every Experience Of Defeat (v12-48)

Matthew Henry is the only commentator I read on these verses who was honest about our sometimes suffering defeat. He wrote:

God would hereby teach us not to think it strange if a good cause should suffer defeat for a while, nor to judge of the merits of it by the success of it. The interest of grace in the heart, and of religion in the world, may be foiled, and suffer great loss, and seem to be quite run down, but judgment will be brought forth to victory at last... We are foiled in a battle, but not in the whole campaign. Right may fall, but it shall arise.

If you don't like the word "defeat," because it sounds unspiritual, substitute the word "setback" for it every time I use it.

Whether you say *defeat* or *setback*, what we see here is that we can, in fact, be foiled, and suffer great loss, in the battles we are called upon to fight.

Jdg 20:12 Then the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What *is* this wickedness that has occurred among you?"

Jdg 20:13 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 brethren, the children of Israel.

Jdg 20:14 Instead, the children of Benjamin gathered together from their cities to Gibeah, to go to battle against the children of Israel.

Jdg 20:15 And from their cities at that time the children of Benjamin numbered twenty-six thousand men who drew the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, who numbered seven hundred select men.

Jdg 20:16 Among all this people *were* seven hundred select men *who were* left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair's *breadth* and not miss.

Jdg 20:17 Now besides Benjamin, the men of Israel numbered four hundred thousand men who drew the sword; all of these *were* men of war.

Benjamin had a greater tribal patriotism than they did a national one. They decided to defend Gibeah from the eleven tribes.

Their skill with the sling was going to make this a bloody conflict.

Jdg 20:18 Then the children of Israel arose and went up to the house of God to inquire of God. They said, "Which of us shall go up first to battle against the children of Benjamin?" The LORD said, "Judah first!"

Their cause was right, and they consulted the Lord. There was high expectation of victory.

Jdg 20:19 So the children of Israel rose in the morning and encamped against Gibeah.

Jdg 20:20 And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin, and the men of Israel put themselves in battle array to fight against them at Gibeah.

Jdg 20:21 Then the children of Benjamin came out of Gibeah, and on that day cut down to the ground twenty-two thousand men of the Israelites.

We didn't see that coming. And this is where commentators (other than Matthew Henry) have problems. They start suggesting all sorts of reasons why the Israelites were defeated, e.g., God was first punishing them for their sin.

Maybe He was - **but we are not told**. Those who suggest that see no possibility of defeat so long as you are right with the Lord.

I think the bare facts do more to minister to us: Sometimes even a right cause, rightly approached, by a righteous believer, is defeated in spiritual warfare.

Example: The apostle Paul desired to revisit the believers in Thessalonica. He was physically prevented by the devil, who he said blocked the way (First Thessalonians 2:18).

To put it in military terms, the evil empire destroyed the road leading to Thessalonica. Satan blew-up the bridge, as it were, in an apparent victory. Paul wanted to return, to further supply the troops; but he was defeated in his efforts.

Here's a mind-boggling setback in the spiritual realm. The prophet Daniel is told by the angel Gabriel that he was dispatched by God in answer to Daniel's prayer. Gabriel was, however delayed in a skirmish with an opponent. For twenty-one days they fought - until the archangel Michael came to Gabriel's aid, freeing him to continue his mission (Daniel 10:12-13).

Jdg 20:22 And the people, that is, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves and again formed the battle line at the place where they had put themselves in array on the first day.

Jdg 20:23 Then the children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until evening, and asked counsel of the LORD, saying, "Shall I again draw near for battle against the children of my brother Benjamin?" And the LORD said, "Go up against him." Expecting victory, but dealt defeat, they sought the Lord, and it seems they did so with great sincerity. The Lord told them to "Go."

In the end, you're going to have to **encourage yourself** to rejoin the battle. Don't wait for, or depend upon, others. Seek the Lord, as they did, then return in His strength.

Jdg 20:24 So the children of Israel approached the children of Benjamin on the second day.

Jdg 20:25 And Benjamin went out against them from Gibeah on the second day, and cut down to the ground eighteen thousand more of the children of Israel; all these drew the sword.

These Benjamites were fierce. I think we can see them as typical of our own supernatural foes. The devil and his forces were defeated by Jesus, and we have everything we need to overcome them. But they are fierce, relentless, and continue to gain ground all around us.

We're in a real fight, not an exhibition. If anything, knowing they are headed for the Abyss and, after that, the Lake of Fire, our supernatural enemies want to inflict as much damage to our lives as is possible.

Jdg 20:26 Then all the children of Israel, that is, all 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 offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.
Jdg 20:27 So the children of Israel inquired of the LORD (the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days,
Jdg 20:28 and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days), saying, "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?" And the LORD said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand."

Trying to make sense of their two previous defeats, commentators suggest that, until now, the Israelites had not properly sought the Lord. Maybe... But it borders on superstition to say that. If His help depends upon saying the right words, the right way... That's more like magic than a relationship.

Do any of us properly seek the Lord? By that, I mean to remind us that we all are works in progress, struggling against the flesh, without perfect knowledge of Jesus.

If our victory depends on getting everything just right, we're in trouble, because that's never going to be true this side of the rapture.

If we just take the story at face value, and let it minister to us, we see that it is possible to lose, at least for a time, our spiritual battles.

Think Job. That righteous guy was doing everything right when, *Whamo!* Disaster struck. Would you honestly say that while he sat on the ash heap scraping his boils with pottery shards that it was a victory? No, I think Matthew Henry got it right, saying, "The interest of grace in the heart, and of religion in the world, may be foiled, and suffer great loss, and seem to be quite run down..."

Sure, Job's victory was assured, ultimately. But Job was suffering a defeat, and it went on for at least a few months.

To say that their two defeats were somehow the fault of the Israelites is to be like Job's friends, who said his defeat was his fault. It was not.

Jdg 20:28 and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days), saying, "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?" And the LORD said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand."

Jdg 20:29 Then Israel set men in ambush all around Gibeah.

Jdg 20:30 And the children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and put themselves in battle array against Gibeah as at the other times.

Jdg 20:31 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 the other times, in the highways (one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah) and in the field, about thirty men of Israel.

Jdg 20:32 And the children of Benjamin said, "They *are* defeated before us, as at first." But the children of Israel said, "Let us flee and draw them away from the city to the highways."

Jdg 20:33 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.

Jdg 20:34 And ten thousand select men from all Israel came against Gibeah, and the battle was fierce. But *the Benjamites* did not know that disaster *was* upon them.

Jdg 20:35 The LORD defeated Benjamin before Israel. And the children of Israel destroyed that day twenty-five thousand one hundred Benjamites; all these drew the sword.

Were they victorious because they finally discovered the Lord's strategy? **We're not told that this strategy came from the Lord.** All that is recorded coming from Him is that He would grant victory this third time out.

The things we suggest to explain their initial defeats, and eventual victory, reveal things we believe about God. If we exclude the possibility of defeat, we'll be even more defeated, thinking God was against us, too.

Jdg 20:36 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 in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah.

Jdg 20:37 And the men in ambush quickly rushed upon Gibeah; the men in ambush spread out and struck the whole city with the edge of the sword.

Jdg 20:38 Now the appointed signal between the men of Israel and the men in ambush was that they would make a great cloud of smoke rise up from the city,

Jdg 20:39 whereupon the men of Israel would turn in battle. Now Benjamin had begun to strike *and* kill about thirty of the men of Israel. For they said, "Surely they are defeated before us, as *in* the first battle."

Even in victory, there were casualties. Thirty men died to make the Benjamites think they were once again going to prevail, and to mask the ambush.

You and I don't always emerge from spiritual battles unscathed. I'd bet that Job had scars from scraping his boils. I know he had emotional pain from losing his initial family; wouldn't you?

Jdg 20:40 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.

Jdg 20:41 And when the men of Israel turned back, the men of Benjamin panicked, for they saw that disaster had come upon them.

Jdg 20:42 Therefore they turned *their backs* before the men of Israel in the direction of the wilderness; but the battle overtook them, and whoever *came* out of the cities they destroyed in their midst.

Jdg 20:43 They surrounded the Benjamites, chased them, *and* easily trampled them down as far as the front of Gibeah toward the east.

Jdg 20:44 And eighteen thousand men of Benjamin fell; all these *were* men of valor.

Jdg 20:45 Then they turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon; and they cut down five thousand of them on the highways. Then they pursued them relentlessly up to Gidom, and killed two thousand of them.

Jdg 20:46 So all who fell of Benjamin that day were twenty-five thousand men who drew the sword; all these *were* men of valor.

Jdg 20:47 But six hundred men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and they stayed at the rock of Rimmon for four months.

Jdg 20:48 And 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. They also set fire to all the cities they came to.

Victory at last. Even then, it was bittersweet. It was victory over their own brothers. They nearly eliminated an entire tribe, creating a problem they will attempt to resolve in chapter twenty-one.

I'm not trying to glory in defeat. I'm not saying that defeat can't be the result of my own sin and disobedience, brought upon me as a loving discipline from God; it certainly can.

I'm saying that there are times when, even though I am in the right, pursuing a right cause the right way, **I can suffer a defeat.**

Sure, every spiritual defeat is only temporary, in that Jesus has guaranteed us ultimate victory.

But that doesn't change the fact I'm on an ash heap (like Job), scraping. Or hindered from doing something good and godly (like

Paul). Or that in the unseen realm, principalities and powers aren't hindering angels on their missions to help me.

These are the spiritual facts given to encourage us: Though in the right, the Israelites twice suffered defeats, and in victory suffered losses. But by enduring, they prevailed in the end.

Like these Israelites, even though I suffer a defeat, I must return to battle. I must keep on seeking the Lord. I must keep on serving Him. I'm His soldier, reporting for duty.

Here is where the rubber meets the road: You have been, or you currently are, or you one day will be - Defeated. You'll be on the losing side of a spiritual battle. You may never know why.

- **It might be your fault** - something your lack of readiness or your disobedience or your sin, set you up for.
- **It might not be your fault** - you might have done everything right, in a right cause.

The empire will *always* strike back. "We **are** foiled in a battle, but *not* in the whole campaign. Right **may** fall, *but it shall arise.*"