

Judges 20:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men lefthanded; every one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss.

Analysis

Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men lefthanded (אֲטֵר יָד־יְמִינָו, itter yad-yemino, literally 'restricted in his right hand')—whether naturally left-handed or trained ambidextrously, these 700 represented elite specialists. **Every one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss** (קָלָע בָּאָבָן אֶל־הַשְׁעָרָה וְלֹא יִחְטֹא, qole'a ba'even el-hassa'arah velo yachati)—extraordinary accuracy: hitting a hair's breadth without missing. The verb 'miss' (חַטָּא, chata) is the standard Hebrew term for 'sin,' creating a wordplay: they never 'miss' their targets, yet they're fighting for those who 'sinned' catastrophically.

The irony is profound: Benjamin's military excellence contrasts with their moral bankruptcy. Their elite troops display remarkable skill defending remarkable evil. This demonstrates that competence, discipline, courage, and skill are morally neutral—they can serve either righteousness or wickedness. Benjamin's 700 left-handed slingers recall another Benjamite, Ehud the left-handed judge who delivered Israel (3:15-30), but here the comparison highlights decline. Where Ehud used his skill to free Israel from oppression, these slingers use their skill to defend rapists and oppose covenant justice. The verse warns that talent without righteousness, skill without wisdom, and courage without truth ultimately serve evil. Their accuracy in slinging stones matches their accuracy in missing moral truth.

Historical Context

Left-handedness held special significance in Benjamin's tribe (the name 'Benjamin' means 'son of the right hand'). Judges 3:15 identifies Ehud as 'a Benjamite, a man lefthanded.' Ancient slingers were formidable warriors—skilled slingers could achieve velocities over 100 mph and accurately hit targets beyond bow range. David's later victory over Goliath with a sling (1 Samuel 17:49) demonstrates the weapon's lethality. Benjamin's 700 left-handed slingers represented an elite special forces unit.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How do you use your talents, skills, and competencies—in service of righteousness or to defend wrong?
2. What does it mean that courage, discipline, and skill are morally neutral and must be directed by wisdom?
3. Where are you displaying remarkable competence while defending remarkable evil?

Interlinear Text

מִכְלָא	בָּעֵם	בָּזָה	שָׁבָע	אַיִשׁ	מִאֲזָת
H3605	Among all this people	H2088	there were seven	hundred	men
	H5971		H7651	H3967	H376
בָּרָא	יָמִין	כָּל	בָּחַר	לְלָע	בָּאָבִן
chosen	lefthanded	H3027	H3225	H3605	every one could sling
H977	H334			H2088	H7049
					stones
					H68
אֵל	בְּשָׁעֵר	הַ	אֵל	מִטְאָה:	
H413	at an hair	H3808	breadth and not miss	H2398	
	H8185				

Additional Cross-References

Judges 3:15 (Parallel theme): But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded: and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab.

1 Chronicles 12:2 (Parallel theme): 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.