

Judges 20:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the men of Israel, beside Benjamin, were numbered four hundred thousand men that drew sword: all these were men of war.

Analysis

The men of Israel, beside Benjamin, were numbered four hundred thousand men that drew sword: all these were men of war (אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה, *ish milchamah*, 'men of war')—Israel's coalition fielded 400,000 combat-ready warriors, outnumbering Benjamin 15-to-1. The phrase 'beside Benjamin' (מלבד, *millevad* binyamin) emphasizes exclusion: all Israel united except the accused tribe.

The massive numerical advantage should have guaranteed swift victory, yet the following verses reveal two devastating defeats before Israel prevails. This demonstrates a crucial biblical principle: numerical superiority doesn't ensure success when spiritual preparation is inadequate. Israel's forces were vast, experienced, and unified, yet these advantages meant nothing against God's ordained outcome. The LORD used Benjamin's tiny army to humble Israel's pride and teach dependence. Israel's eventual victory (after 40,000 casualties) proved far more costly than Benjamin's initial surrender would have been. When both parties in a conflict are guilty—Benjamin for defending criminals, Israel for inadequate consultation of God—the resulting warfare becomes mutually devastating. The verse sets up the chapter's central lesson: trust in numbers, strategy, and unity fails without complete submission to God's will.

Historical Context

Four hundred thousand warriors represents a staggering military force—larger than most ancient Near Eastern empires could field. For context, the Assyrian Empire at its height mobilized approximately 120,000-200,000 troops. Israel's ability to field 400,000 from tribal militia demonstrates both the land's substantial population and the seriousness with which they took covenant violation. However, the lack of centralized command or standing army meant their coordination depended on tribal cooperation.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. When do you trust in superior resources, numbers, or organizational strength rather than seeking God's direction?
2. How has God used unexpected defeats to humble your pride and teach dependence on Him?
3. What does it mean that righteous causes pursued without adequate spiritual preparation lead to devastating costs?

Interlinear Text

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|--------------------|------------------|----------------------|------------------|--------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| אַרְבָּעָה | מִבְּנִים | לִבְדֵּי | הַתִּפְאֵד | וְיִשְׂרָאֵל | אַיִלְלָה | וְאַיִלְלָה |
| And the men | of Israel | were numbered | | | beside Benjamin | four |
| H376 | H3478 | H6485 | H905 | | H1144 | H702 |
| מֵאַת | לְאַלְפַּי | וְאַיִלְלָה | וְאַיִלְלָה | וְאַיִלְלָה | וְאַיִלְלָה | וְאַיִלְלָה |
| hundred | thousand | And the men | that drew | sword | | And the men |
| H3967 | H505 | H376 | H8025 | H2719 | H3605 | H2088 |
| מִלְּחָמָה | | | | | | |
| of war | | | | | | |
| H4421 | | | | | | |

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