

# 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' (מִלְבַּד בִּנְיָמִן, 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

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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

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**Romans 10:9** — Confession and belief for salvation

**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

## Study Questions

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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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אֶל יִשׁ	יִשְׂרָאֵל ל	הִתְּפָקֶד ו	לְבַד	מִבְּנֵימ ׀	אַרְבַּ ע	
And the men	of Israel	were numbered	H905	beside Benjamin	four	
H376	H3478	H6485		H1144	H702	
מֵא וֹת	אֶל לָף	אֶל יִשׁ	שׁ לָף	חַ רֶב	כָּל הַ	אֶל יִשׁ
hundred	thousand	And the men	that drew	sword	H3605 H2088	And the men
H3967	H505	H376	H8025	H2719		H376
מִלְחָמָה:						
of war						
H4421						

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