

Judges 20:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the chief of all the people, even of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand footmen that drew sword.

Analysis

The chief of all the people, even of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God—the Hebrew emphasizes comprehensiveness: kol-ha'am (כָּל-הָעָם, 'all the people'), kol-shivtei yisra'el (כָּל-שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, 'all tribes of Israel'). This national assembly at Mizpah represents one of the few times in Judges when Israel acts in unity. **Four hundred thousand footmen that drew sword**—an enormous military force demonstrating the gravity of Gibeah's crime and Israel's corporate response.

The phrase **assembly of the people of God** (קֶהָל עַם הָאֱלֹהִים, qehal am ha'elohim) ironically highlights that God's covenant people gathered to address sin among themselves. This is simultaneously encouraging (they recognize covenant obligation to maintain holiness) and troubling (the assembled mass will proceed with incomplete consultation of God). The chapter reveals that even righteous causes pursued without proper dependence on God lead to disaster. Numbers don't guarantee divine approval—zealous multitudes can be corporately wrong. Israel's unity in outrage contrasts sharply with their fragmentation throughout Judges, yet unity around the wrong approach (trusting in numbers rather than seeking God's full counsel) proves nearly as destructive as the original crime.

Historical Context

Mizpah ('watchtower'), located in Benjamin's territory, served as a gathering place for national assemblies (1 Samuel 7:5-6; 10:17). The 400,000 warriors represents the largest military mobilization mentioned in Judges. While some scholars question this number's literal accuracy, it emphasizes the unprecedented scale of response. Archaeological evidence confirms this period saw significant population in the central hill country.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How do large numbers, popular consensus, or organizational unity sometimes substitute for genuine dependence on God?
2. When has your righteous indignation about others' sins led you to act without fully seeking God's wisdom?
3. What distinguishes godly corporate action from mob mentality dressed in religious language?

Interlinear Text

וַתִּצַּב ו	פַּנּוֹת	כָּל	עַם	כָּל	שְׁבֵט י
presented	And the chief	H3605	of all the people	H3605	even of all the tribes
H3320	H6438		H5971		H7626
לְיִשְׂרָאֵל	בָּקְהָ ל		עַם	הָאֱלֹהִים	אַרְבָּע
of Israel	themselves in the assembly		of all the people	of God	four
H3478	H6951		H5971	H430	H702
מֵאֹת	אֶלֶף	אֲנָשִׁים	בָּגָל י	שֶׁלֶף	חֶרֶב:
hundred	thousand	footmen	H7273	that drew	sword
H3967	H505	H376		H8025	H2719

Additional Cross-References

Judges 8:10 (Word): Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor, and their hosts with them, about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of all the hosts of the children of the east: for there fell an hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword.

Judges 20:15 (Word): And the children of Benjamin were numbered at that time out of the cities twenty and six thousand men that drew sword, beside the inhabitants of Gibeah, which were numbered seven hundred chosen men.

Judges 20:17 (Word): And the men of Israel, beside Benjamin, were numbered four hundred thousand men that drew sword: all these were men of war.