

## Judges 20:48

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the men of Israel turned again upon the children of Benjamin, and smote them with the edge of the sword, as well the men of every city, as the beast, and all that came to hand: also they set on fire all the cities that they came to.

## Analysis

**The men of Israel turned again upon the children of Benjamin, and smote them with the edge of the sword, as well the men of every city, as the beast, and all that came to hand** (מְמֻתָּם עַד־בָּהֶמֶת עַד פָּלָגָמֶצָּא)—total destruction: men, animals, everything. **Also they set on fire all the cities that they came to** (בָּאשׁוּן הַמְּבָאָרִים בְּנְמִצְאֹת שְׁלֹחוֹ בְּאַשׁ)—complete devastation of Benjamin's territory. This scorched-earth policy mirrors the herem (חֶרֶם, devoted destruction) commanded against Canaanite cities (Deuteronomy 7:2; 20:16-17).

Israel's treatment of Benjamin as if they were Canaanites under the ban demonstrates the chapter's tragic trajectory: righteous judgment against Gibeah's Sodom-like crime escalates to genocidal rage against the entire tribe. The distinction between punishing guilty parties and destroying an entire people blurs in the fury of warfare. This verse reveals how vengeance, even when initially righteous, can exceed proper bounds and become sin itself. Israel's actions ensure that Benjamin's near-extinction will require extraordinary measures (chapter 21) to prevent permanent loss of a tribe. The chapter ends with this disturbing image: covenant brothers destroying covenant brothers with the same totality commanded only against pagans. When 'everyone does what is right in his own eyes' (17:6; 21:25), even covenant justice becomes indistinguishable from pagan warfare.

## Historical Context

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The application of herem (devoted destruction) to Benjamin violated covenant provisions for treating brother Israelites. Deuteronomy 20:10-15 prescribed such complete destruction only for Canaanite nations, not fellow tribes. Israel's rage, though rooted in righteous indignation at crime resembling Sodom, exceeded proper bounds—leading to Benjamin's near-extinction and the desperate wife-stealing measures of chapter 21.

## Related Passages

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**Revelation 20:12** — Judgment according to deeds

**Romans 2:1** — Judging others

## Study Questions

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1. How does righteous anger escalate beyond proper bounds to become sinful vengeance?
2. When do you treat covenant brothers with the same totality reserved for enemies?
3. What safeguards prevent justice from becoming indistinguishable from revenge?

## Interlinear Text

בְּנִימָן	בָּנִי	אֶל	שׁ בּוּ	יִשְׂרָאֵל	וְאֵשׁ
And the men	of Israel	turned again	H413	upon the children	of Benjamin
H376	H3478	H7725		H1121	H1144
עַד	מִתְמָמָן	קָעֵר יִם	קָרְבָּן	לְפִי	וְעַם
as	as well the men	all the cities	of the sword	them with the edge	and smote
H5704	H4974	H5892	H2719	H6310	H5221
בְּהַמְּמַתָּה	כָּל גּוּם	כָּל גּוּם	בְּנִמְצָא וְתַ	בְּנִמְצָא וְתַ	בְּנִמְצָא וְתַ
the beast	as	all the cities	and all that came to hand	and all that came to hand	the beast
H929	H3605	H5892	H4672	H4672	H5704
בְּאֵשׁ	שָׁלַח וְ	שָׁלַח וְ	בְּנִמְצָא וְתַ	בְּנִמְצָא וְתַ	בְּנִמְצָא וְתַ
and all that came to hand	also they set	on fire			
H4672	H7971	H784			

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