

# 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** (מִמָּתָם עַד-בְּהֵמָה עַד כָּל-הַנֶּמְצָא)—total destruction: men, animals, everything. **Also they set on fire all the cities that they came to** (וְגַם שָׂרְפוּ כָּל-הָעָרִים הַנִּמְצָאוֹת שְׁלֹחוֹ בָּאֵשׁ)—complete devastation of Benjamin's territory. This scorched-earth policy mirrors the herem (הֶרֶם, 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

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וְאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל שָׁבוּ אֶל בְּנֵי יְבִימָן  
**And the men of Israel turned again upon the children of Benjamin**  
H376 H3478 H7725 H413 H1121 H1144

וַיִּכּוּ לָפִי חֶרֶב הָעָרִים כַּמֶּנּוּ וְעַד  
**and smote them with the edge of the sword all the cities as well the men as**  
H5221 H6310 H2719 H5892 H4974 H5704

כָּל עַד הַבְּהֵמָה הַנִּמְצָא וְכָל גֵּם הָעָרִים  
**the beast as and all that came to hand all the cities**  
H929 H5704 H3605 H4672 H1571 H3605 H5892

וְהַנִּמְצָא וְשִׁלְחוּ בָאֵשׁ  
**and all that came to hand also they set on fire**  
H4672 H7971 H784

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