

THE BENJAMITES . . . who found sanctuary in a cave
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(Judges 20:44-47)

It was horrible; it was disgustingly revolting, and the conscience of the nation was up on arms. Crowds thronged the market places of the cities, for there in full view of the public was a piece of flesh human flesh. Again and again the story was told, and the constant reiteration only added to the gruesome details. The Benjamites had transgressed; they had committed an unpardonable sin; they had forfeited the right to be known as children of God. They should die! "Then all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was gathered together as one man, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, with the land of Gilead, unto the Lord in Mizpeh four hundred thousand footmen that drew sword" (Judges 20:1, 2). They meant business.

The Great Sin

And all the while, a silent sombre man remembered the tragic night when his concubine had been ruthlessly dragged away into the darkness. Flaming passions, unrestrained evil had claimed a defenceless victim, and all through a night of terror, hell's fury had fallen on a poor woman. At dawn they left her broken in body and soul, and alone, upon hands and knees, she wearily crawled homeward. She had been a great sinner, but mercy cried aloud as that pitiable object struggled along the street. "And her lord rose up in the morning, and opened the door of the house, and went out to go his way: and, behold, the woman his concubine was fallen down at the door of the house, and her hands were upon the threshold. And he said unto her, Up, and let us be going. But none answered. Then the man took her up upon an ass. . . and gat him unto his place . . . and he took a knife . . . and divided her . . . and sent her into all the coasts of Israel. And it was so, that all that saw it said, There was no such deed done nor seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt unto this day: consider of it, take advice, and speak your minds" (Judges 19:27-30).

The Great Danger

A mighty host, the avenging army went forth to battle, and civil war came to the land. The remaining Benjamites refused to deliver the guilty men, and rallying all their fighting strength, they prepared to resist the invaders. Their lips curled in insolent arrogance—they would teach their interfering cousins to mind their own business! The battle proceeded, and slowly righteousness triumphed. Lured from their stronghold to pursue an apparently beaten enemy, the defenders suddenly discovered that they were caught between two armies, and as their men were mown down, the realization of impending disaster gripped every survivor. They were in deadly danger. Eighteen thousand Benjamites lay dead or dying on that gruesome battlefield, and unless some respite could be gained, every defender would be slain. "And they turned and fled toward the wilderness unto the rock Rimmon" (v. 45), but even as they ran, their relentless adversaries attacked on the flanks, and another seven thousand despairing men went down fighting.

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The Great Refuge

When someone shouted, "The rock Rimmon," it
seemed like a message from heaven; and instantly the
remaining men fled for their lives to nature's stronghold.
The great cave was so fashioned that it could be held
against a multitude. It was very spacious and very safe,
so . . . six hundred men turned and fled to . . . the rock
Rimmon, and abode in the rock Rimmon four months"

(v. 47). And only thus was the guilty tribe saved from
complete annihilation. How great their sin! How great
their shelter! How great their safety! They escaped
death by inches—a death they had richly deserved. We
wonder if the New Testament writer had this scene in mind
when he wrote his enchanting text in Hebrews 6:18, "We

who have fled for refuge." Perhaps the hymnist was
also acquainted with our story when he wrote—

Oh, safe to the Rock that is higher than I,
My soul in its conflicts and sorrows would fly;
So sinful, so weary, Thine, Thine would I be;
Thou blest Rock of Ages, I'm hiding in Thee.

However much we deplore the hatefulness of the Ben-
jamite story, the final details will beget a warm response
in our souls. Spiritual need always leads a man to Christ.

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