

JUDGES

In the author's preface to his commentary on Judges (TOTC) Arthur E. Cundall aptly writes: "Few periods in Israel's eventful history are as important as the period of the judges. During these centuries the nation took the wrong turning that led to her downfall and near-destruction. The apostasy of the later generations has its origin in the early years of the settlement, and there is a clear line between the time when the nation first went after Baal and the dark age when the Jerusalem Temple itself was defiled with all the trappings of the Baal worship, not excluding cultic prostitutes (II Kings 23:4 – 7). There is much in Judges to sadden the heart of the reader; perhaps no book in the Bible witnesses so clearly to our human frailty. But there are also unmistakable signs of the divine compassion and long-suffering. It may be that the modern reader of Judges will hear the warning voice of the Spirit., 'This is *not* the way, walk ye *not* in it.' Or, as the lives of these lesser-saviors are considered, there may be a realization of the need in modern times of a greater Savior, of unblemished life, who is able to effect a perfect deliverance, not only in time but for eternity."

In the Septuagint (LXX) the name of the book is - **Κριται**. The Hebrew title is – **myjpX**. In the Vulgate the title is – **Judicum**. These judges were the 'saviors' or 'deliverers' of the people of Israel from their enemies. They were generally not real judges as we might think of them. They also were not considered in any way to be compared with the Eternal Judge. In fact, a different Hebrew word for Judge is used when such a judge is mentioned in the Book. The Eternal Judge went by a much greater name. These were people who felt they were called to bring about the end of persecution and terror for the people of Israel so life might have a semblance of peace and security.

These judges are presented as people with special qualities which were bestowed on them as a unique endowment from God. They seem to be destined to be people of special knowledge, having gifts of wisdom, leadership and morality.

In our Bibles we think of these judges as being a part of the history of the people of Israel but in the Hebrew Scriptures they are thought of as the 'former prophets.' Thus they are considered to be a part of the Deuteronomic portion of prophetic leaders which includes Joshua, Judges, I & II Samuel and I & II Kings. The responsibility of judges did not end until Saul was declared to be the king (I Samuel 15:13).

The time of the judges was a transitional time. The leadership of Moses had come to an end, as did the leadership of Joshua. The people of Israel had not yet completed the conquest of the land and thus were being attacked and oppressed by the many small nations that surrounded them. In theory they were to be ruled by a theocracy but they seemed more ready to turn to the religious concepts of their neighbors. Often these were joined with the concepts they had of God as had been given them by Moses, thus forming a strange blending of religious expressions. The writer of Judges writes over and over again “the people did what was right in their own sight.” The age of religious greatness seemed to be passed. Judges, however, called people back to the religious expressions which had been taught by Moses, saying that it was because of their unfaithfulness to God that the evils they were experiencing were taking place.

The people of Israel rejected the rule of the Canaanites who were still living in the land. The Canaanites were aggressive in opposing the Israelites in religious, political and social aspects.

These judges sought to create a new society based on the teachings of Moses as a sure way of obtaining the help of God so these surrounding nations could be subdued and the people ‘could live by their vineyard and under their fig tree.’ It was only then that they could feel themselves to be the loyal servants of God.

Some of these judges are merely mentioned, the activity of others is carefully detailed. Each sought to bring about peace and a proper understanding of the relationship of the Israelites with God. The ways in which they went about this are, at times, quite surprising.

One copy of Judges was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QJuda). The Septuagint (LXX) provides little textual help. Apparently when this book was being translated into Greek there were two recensions of the Hebrew text which were translated. Rahlfs Septuaginta presents these two translations as parallel texts. As a result there are very few comparisons with the LXX in this translation since to do so would more than double the length of this translation. While the Greek texts have been read they are rarely referred to in footnotes.

The basic outline is a simple one.

I. The incomplete conquest of Canaan. 1:1 – 2:5

II. Israel in the period of the Judges 2:6 – 16:31

III. Appendices 17:1 – 21:25

JUDGES

<CHAPTER 1>

I. The Invasion of Canaan 1:1 – 2:5

A. The Conquest of Judah and Simeon 1:1 – 21 I¹

¹ Following Joshua's death the people of Israel inquired of the Lord: "Who will be the first to go to fight against the Canaanites?" ² The Lord said, "The Tribe of Judah will go up first. Be assured that I will deliver the land in to their hand." ³ Judah spoke to the tribe of his brother Simeon: ³ "Join us in obtaining the territory allotted to us, for then we can be as one when we fight against the Canaanites, and I will be with you as we go into the territory that is also allotted to you." So it was that Simeon went with Judah. ⁴ [Then Judah went up and the Lord caused them to conquer the Canaanites, the Perizzites, for they were defeated ten thousand of them at Bezek.] ⁴ ⁵ They attacked the ruler, Adoni-bezek, and defeated the Canaanites and Perizzites. ⁶ Adoni-bezek fled but was pursued and captured and mutilated, cutting off ⁵ his thumbs and big toes. ⁷ Adoni-bezek said, "Seventy kings ⁶ whose thumbs and big toes had been cut off used to gather scraps under my table, ⁷ as I must now do so God has repaid me." He was brought to Jerusalem ⁸ where he died.

⁸ [The men of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it, killing many with their swords and burned the city. ⁹ ⁹ Later the men of Judah went down to attack the Canaanites who lived in the hill country of the Negab ¹⁰ and in the lowland. ¹⁰ Judah then assailed the Canaanites who were living in Hebron. ¹¹ (The name Hebron was formerly called Kiriath-araba.) They also destroyed Sheshi and Ahiman and Talmai.]

¹¹ From there they advanced against the inhabitants of Debir, ¹² the name of which formerly was Kiriath-sepher. ¹³ ¹² Caleb ¹⁴ said, "I will give my daughter Achsah as the

¹ These verses supplement the account in Joshua. Their concern is with the post-Joshua age. Some scholars feel the events in this chapter had already been planned by Joshua but not completed. The possession of the land by the Israelites was slow but powerful. The name "Canaanites" in the Book of Judges often means all those who were not Israelites but lived in the Promised Land.

² The tribes are personified by the name of the tribal ancestor. This remains consistent in the Book of Judges.

³ Judah and Simeon were blood brothers. Cf.: Genesis 29:32 – 35. The tribe of Simeon soon lost its identity and came to be included in the tribe of Judah.

⁴ The Canaanites seem generally to have preferred to occupy the valleys and the Amorites preferred the hills. The Perizzites were the people of Hurrian. Their origin is unknown. Bezek is possibly modern Khirbet Bezqu near Gezer. LXX: "Adoni-bezets." Some scholars feel this verse is a later interpolation.

⁵ MFT: "lopped off" here & in v. 7. This showed the strength of the 'lex talionis' in that day.

⁶ Very likely an exaggeration.

⁷ The Panammu Inscription states that royal captives picked up crumbs that fell from Adoni-bezek's table. Since he was helpless it was not difficult to return him to Jerusalem where some scholars thought he had been the ruler.

⁸ At this point Jerusalem had not yet been captured by the people of Israel. The Tell el Amrna letters wrote of Jerusalem that it (Jebus) was a city state.

⁹ Some scholars feel this is an explanatory gloss. Other scholars feel vs 8 – 10 are a later interpolation.

¹⁰ The Negeb would be the central highlands south of Jerusalem and the area called the Shephelah, the eastern portion of the area presently known as the Gaza Strip.

¹¹ 18 or 19 miles south of Jerusalem.

¹² 11 miles south west of Hebron.

¹³ The LXX adds, "the city of letters."

wife of anyone who attacks Kirath-sepher.”¹³ Othniel, the son of Kenaz,¹⁵ Caleb’s younger brother¹⁶ captured it and Caleb gave him Achsah, his daughter, to be his wife. 14 When she came to her father to ask him for a field, as she alighted from her donkey Caleb said to her, “What do you want?”¹⁷ 15 She answered, “Grant me a parting gift. Since you have sent me into the land of the Negab, also give me a parcel of land which is watered by a spring.” Caleb gave her the upper and lower springs (*or, Guilloth*).”

¹⁵ The people of Hobab,¹⁸ descendants of Moses; father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah, from the city of palms (Jericho) into the wilderness of Judah which lies in the Negab near Arad¹⁹ and they settled with the Amalekites.²⁰ 17 Judah joined his brother Simeon and they defeated the Canaanites who were inhabitants of Zephath, and razed the city.²¹ Then name of the city was called Hormah. 18 Judah also captured Gaza along with its territory and Ashkelon and its territory,²² and Ekron with its territory. 19 God was with Judah and therefore Judah was able to take possession of the hill country, but was unable to dislodge the people of the plain because they had iron chariots. 20 Hebron was given to Caleb as Moses had promised, and he drove out the three sons of Anak. 21 The people of the tribe of Benjamin did not dislodge the Jebusites who were living in Jerusalem, so the Jebusites still reside with the Benjaminites in Jerusalem at the time this writing.

B. Conquests of the Other Tribes 1:22-36

²² The house of Joseph also went to war, attacking Bethel. The Lord was with them. 23 The house of Joseph sent spies to scout out Bethel. (The name of the city was Luz in the past.) 24 The spies discovered a man coming out of the city and they conversed with him, saying, “Please show us the entrance into the city and we will deal kindly with you.” 25 He showed them the [*secret*] entrance to the city and when they attacked many were killed by their swords,²³ but they let the man and his entire family (*or, clan*) survive, untouched. 26 That man moved to the land of the Hittites²⁴ and built a city which was named Luz which is still its name today.²⁵

¹⁴ Cf.: Joshua 14:6 – 14; Numbers 13 – 14.

¹⁵ Cf.: Joshua 14:6 – 14.

¹⁶ Some mss and LXX have “nephew.”

¹⁷ NEB: “When she came to him, he incited her to ask her father for a piece of land. As she sat on her ass, she broke wind, and Caleb said, “What do you mean by that?” She replied, “I want to ask a favor of you. You have put me in this dry Negab; you must give me pools of water as well.” So Caleb gave her the upper pool and the lower pool.” LXX: “I plead with you – give me a blessing for you have sent me out to the Negeb and you will give me a ransom of water, and Caleb gave her her hearts desire, the upper and lower springs.”

¹⁸ Manuscripts vary, some reading: “Hobab” or “Jethro.” The Kenites were a branch of the Amlemites and were generally friendly toward the Israelites.

¹⁹ 15 miles south of Hebron.

²⁰ The meaning of the last phrase in Hebrew is uncertain. Some translators feel it should read “settled with the Amelekites.”

²¹ TAN: “proscribed it.” The name Hamath means “proscribed.”

²² These cities were on the coastal plain and were later known as Philistine cities.

²³ MFT: “they stormed it and gave no quarter.”

²⁴ At that time the Hittites were living in present day Turkey.

²⁵ I.e. at the time of the writing of Judges.

²⁷ Manasseh did not dispossess the residents of Beth-shean ²⁶ and its villages, nor could they dispossess the inhabitants of Taanach and its villages. ²⁷ or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages. ²⁸ Additionally they were unable to dispossess the inhabitants Ibleam and its dependencies, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its dependencies, but the Canaanites were able to resist the attacks and remain as dwellers in these cities. ²⁹ ²⁸ As Israel grew strong it was able to control the Canaanites, having them do forced labor (*or, labor gangs*) but was unable to drive them out of the land completely.

²⁹ Ephraim was unable to dispossess the Canaanites who lived in Gezer ³⁰ but the Canaanites and the people of Ephraim lived together in the city of Gezer.

³⁰ Zebulun ³¹ was unable to oust the residents of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol, but the Canaanites resided among them and were used as forced labor by the tribesmen of Zebulun.

³¹ Asher did not dispossess the inhabitants of Acco or the inhabitants of Sidon, Ahlab, ³² Achzib, Helbah, Aphik, or Rehob. ³² The Asherites lived among the Canaanites who were the inhabitants of the land for they were unable to drive them out.

³³ Naphtalai did not dispossess the residents of Beth-shemesh, nor the inhabitants of Beth-anath but they lived together with one another. The Canaanites, however, who lived in Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath became forced laborers.

³⁴ The Amorites drove the people of the tribe of Dan back into the hill country, not permitting them to cross the plain. ³⁵ The Amorites continued living in Harheres, Aijalon, and om Shaalbin, but the power of the people of Joseph ³³ pressed heavily on them and they became workers in labor gangs. ³⁶ [The border of the Amorites ³⁴ extended from the ascent of Akabbim, and Sela, and upward.] ³⁵

<CHAPTER 2> ³⁶

C. The Departure from Gilgal 2:1 – 5

¹ The angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim and said, “I brought you up from Egypt and brought you the land which I had promised to your ancestors when I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you. ³⁷ ² You are not to make any covenant with the people who now reside in this land. You are to destroy their altars.’ You, however, have not obeyed my command. ³⁸ ³ As a result I have resolved that I will not drive them out of your presence, but they will become your adversaries and your

²⁶ This was an important fortified city which was controlled by the Egyptians in the 3rd Century BCE. Ephraim and Manasseh were hemmed in by a circle of strong Canaanite fortresses.

²⁷ Taanach was so located that it controlled the exit from the Valley of Jezreel.

²⁸ Dor was located near the Mount Carmel promontory.

²⁹ The cities that are mentioned controlled the most important trade routes in Canaan. Cf.: ANET p. 26a.

³⁰ This was a strategic location on the Shephelah, 16 miles west of Jerusalem.

³¹ Cf.: Joshua 19:10 – 16.

³² This city was located north of Mount Carmel. These cities were under Phoenician influence.

³³ LXX: “Ammonites.”

³⁴ LXX: “Edomites.”

³⁵ Some scholars feel this is a later interpolation. These limits were south of Beer-sheba, from the pass just south of Beer-sheba to the Dead Sea.

³⁶ The writer clearly states his religious point of view in this chapter.

³⁷ This was the ardent hope of the people of Israel as they sought to establish themselves in the land which they felt God had promised to them.

³⁸ Literally: “You have not listened to my voice.”

servants.”³⁹ 4 When the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lamented loudly and wept. 5 They called the name of the place Bochim⁴⁰ and made a sacrifice to the Lord there.

II. Israel in the Period of the Judges 2:6 – 16:31

A. Introduction to the Story of the Judges 2:6: - 3:6

1, Joshua’s Death and the Rise of the New Generation 2:6 - 10⁴¹

6 When Joshua dismissed the people, the people of Israel went to their own homes and took possession of the land. 7 The people served the Lord during the lifetime of Joshua and during the time when those elders who outlived⁴² Joshua were still alive, having seen all the great work which the Lord had done on behalf of Israel. 8 Joshua, the son of Nun, who had served the Lord died at the age of one hundred ten. 9 He was buried within the inheritance which was to be his: Timnath-heres.⁴³ 10 That entire generation was gathered to their fathers (*or, died*) and a new generation arose which did not know the Lord or the work that the Lord had done for Israel.

2. Israel’s Apostasy, Punishment, and Deliverance 2:11 – 19

11 The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Ba’als.⁴⁴ 12 They forsook the Lord, the God of their ancestors, the God who had brought them out of the land of Egypt and they went after other gods who were being worshiped by the people who were already living in the land and were revered by them.⁴⁵ This provoked God to anger. 13 They forsook their God and worshiped the Ba’als⁴⁶ and the Astaroth.⁴⁷ 14 Therefore the anger of the Lord flared up against Israel and he handed them over to pillagers⁴⁸ (*or, raiders*) who looted them and sold them into their power of his enemies who lived in the vicinity and thus they were unable to withstand the power of their enemies. 15 Whenever they went out to engage in conflict God’s hand was against them, as he had declared would happen, and they were deeply distressed.⁴⁹

16 Then God raised up judges who rescued the Israelites from the power of those who plundered them. 17 In spite of this they did not listen to these judges, for they lusted after⁵⁰ other gods, worshiping them and then soon abandoned the way in which their ancestors worshiped and obeyed God’s commandments, ignoring their religious heritage.

³⁹ LXX: “I will not drive them out before you but they will be a source of distress for you. Also, you will be a source of offence for them.” REV: “they will entice you astray, and their gods will be a snare to you.” Literally: “They will be as a sister to you.”

⁴⁰ The LXX has “Bochim and Bethel to the house of Israel.” Bochim means “weepers.”

⁴¹ The unified campaign under Joshua had broken the back of the Canaanite resistance. Now individual tribes were expected to finish off the hot spots to complete the occupation.

⁴² Literally: “protracted days after.”

⁴³ This property also went by the name “Timnath-Serah.” Cf. Joshua 14:50. It was located 5 miles south of Shechem.

⁴⁴ Verses 11 – 19 are a summary of two centuries of history. Ba’als were various forms of the Canaanite gods. Other gods who were worshiped were the Astaroth (Astarte) a Canaanite goddess.

⁴⁵ Literally: “bowed down to them.”

⁴⁶ Ba’al was the son of El, the god who controls weather and vegetation. The worship of Ba’al was a sort of underground worship over all the years from this point until the Babylonian Captivity of the Israelites.

⁴⁷ Astaroth was the plural of the goddess Astarte (the consort of Ba’al). She was the goddess of fertility. The worship was combined with all sorts of lascivious practices. Cf. ANET: p. 259b

⁴⁸ LXX: “spoilers.”

⁴⁹ The failure to exterminate the Canaanites allowed the continuation of Ba’al worship – openly, or secretly. LXX: “εξεθλιψεν.”

⁵⁰ Literally: “played the harlot after other gods.”

18 Whenever God raised up a new judge for them the Lord was with that judge who saved them from their enemies. This continued in the time of the judges for God was moved with compassion because of the groaning of the people who were afflicted by the oppression and persecution by their enemies. 19 Upon the death of a judge they would relapse into even more corruption than the preceding generation, causing their way of life to be increasingly corrupt.⁵¹

3. *The Result of Canaanite Infidelity 2:20 – 23*

20 The anger of the Lord flared up against the people of Israel and he said, “Because this nation has violated my covenant which I had established with their ancestors and have not obeyed my message, 21 from this time on I will not drive out the nations that Joshua had left in this land when he died.” 22 (His purpose was that by them he would be able to test Israel to determine whether they walk in the way of the Lord, as their ancestors did. 23 So the Lord left the nations and did not drive them out at once, [and he did not give them over into the powerful hand of Joshua.])⁵²

<CHAPTER 3>

4. *Israel in the Midst of Nations 3:1 – 6*

1 These are the nations which the Lord left in order to test the people of Israel. This testing was intended for all those people within Israel who had no experience⁵³ in any war against Canaan. 2 (This was only to take place to train the generation of the people who had no previous knowledge of war that they might become versed in warfare.)⁵⁴ 3 These are the nations: the five principalities of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, the Hivites who live in the mountains of Lebanon from Mount Ba'al-hermon to the entrance of Hamath (*or, Lebo-hamath*). 4 Their presence was for testing the people of Israel by using them to determine whether the people of Israel would obey the Lord's commandments, which had been commanded by God and given to their ancestors through Moses. 5 Therefore the people of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amalekites, Perizzite, Hivites and Jebusites. 6 Intermarriage took place as the Israelites took the daughters from these national groups as their wives and gave their daughters to be the wives of those from other nations. They then began serving other gods.

B. *Israel's Deliverance by Othniel 3:7 – 11*

7 The people of Israel were disobedient to God, doing what God held to be evil, forgetting the Lord's house, and serving the Ba'als and Astaroth. 8 The anger of the Lord flared up and he sent them into the hands of king Cushan-rishatham⁵⁵ of Aram Naharaim (*Syria*), and the Israelites were the subjects of Cushan-rishatham for eight years. 9 When the Israelites cried out to God for a deliverer of the people from their subjugation and one was provided in the person of Othniel, the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. 10 The

⁵¹ The writer seems to reveal a progressive deterioration of the worship of the Lord God and greater apostasy – a move to even worse Ba'al worship.

⁵² Some scholars feel the last phrase is a later interpolation. The writer feels that every event is attributable to God's overseeing will.

⁵³ Literally: “know to teach them.” REV: “as a means of teaching all the Israelites who had not taken part in the battles for Canaan. The Lord left these nations 2 his purpose being to train succeeding generations of Israel in the art of warfare, or those at least who had not learned it in former times.”

⁵⁴ The Hebrew sentence structure of these first two verses is uncertain.

⁵⁵ There is no other historical reference to this king

spirit of the Lord enveloped him and he judged Israel, engaging in war against Cushan-rishatham, king of Mesopotamia ⁵⁶ conquering him for he was more powerful. ¹¹ In this way the Lord provided rest for the people of Israel for forty years. Then Othniel, the son of Kenaz died.

C. Israel's Deliverance by Ehud 3:12 – 30
1, the Moabite Oppression 3:12 – 14

¹² The people of Israel again did what was objectionable in the eyes of the Lord, and the Lord allowed King Eglon, the ruler of Moab, to gain the upper hand against the Israelites ⁵⁷ because of the evil they had done in the eyes of the Lord. ¹³ He aligned himself with the Ammonites and the Amalekites ⁵⁸ who together attacked and defeated Israel, taking the city of Jericho (the city of palms) as their possession. ¹⁴ The people of Israel served Eglon, king of Moab for eighteen years.

2. Ehud and Eglon 3:15 – 23

¹⁵ When the people of Israel pleaded with the Lord he raised up a deliverer in the person of Ehud, the son of Gera, a Benjaminite. He was left handed. ⁵⁹ The people of Israel sent their annual tribute through him to be brought to Eglon, king of Moab. ¹⁶ Ehud prepared a double edged dagger for himself which was a cubit in length. ⁶⁰ He had fastened this on his right thigh, under his outer garment. ¹⁷ Ehud presented the annual tribute to King Eglon of Moab. King Eglon was exceedingly obese. ¹⁸ When Ehud had finished presenting the tribute ⁶¹ he sent away the porters that had carried the tribute. ¹⁹ [*Having gone a short distance*] Ehud turned back at the Idols of Gilgal ⁶² and returned, saying to King Eglon, "I have a secret message for you, O king." The king ordered silence and all the royal attendants were sent from the area. ²⁰ Ehud came to the king who now was seated in his cool roof garden and said, "I have a message for you from God." Eglon then rose from his seat. ⁶³ ²¹ With his left hand Ehud reached under his outer garment, and taking the dagger from his right thigh he thrust it into the abdomen of King Eglon ²² so deeply that the hilt went in after the blade and he did not try to remove it for filth was already coming out. ⁶⁴ ²³ Then Ehud went out by way of a side room, ⁶⁵ closing and locking the doors to the roof garden.

⁵⁶ LXX: "Syria of the rivers."

⁵⁷ The location of Eglon's palace is uncertain. Presumably it was near the Moab / Israel border.

⁵⁸ These were desert tribes.

⁵⁹ Literally: "defective as to his hand." LXX: "who was ambidextrous."

⁶⁰ At this time a cubit was a "short cubit" which was the equivalent of the distance from the elbow to the knuckles of one's hand or 15 inches. In later years the 18 inch cubit was adopted.

⁶¹ Some scholars feel this tribute was in the form of agricultural produce. Others feel it was silver. Either way, a sizable amount of tribute must have been presented since Ehud had others whose duty it was to carry the tribute

⁶² Scholars feel this was about 1 ½ miles from Jericho. Some scholars feel this might have been a boundary stone between the countries. Other scholars feel it was a stone set up by Joshua to commemorate the crossing of the River Jordan.

⁶³ Cf.: ANET p. 61c.

⁶⁴ The Hebrew in this verse is uncertain. LXX: "the fat closed in over the dagger for he did not draw the dagger from his abdomen." TEV: "and it stuck out behind."

⁶⁵ The Hebrew word is a hapax legomenon. Some scholars translate the word as "vestibule" which is based on an Assyrian or Sumerian root word. JB: "then he went out through the window."

3. *Discovery of the Assassination 3:24 – 25*

²⁴ After Ehud had escaped the servants noticed that the doors of the roof garden were locked and thought, “He is relieving himself ⁶⁶ in the closet of the roof garden.” ²⁵ They waited until they finally became suspicious and when he had still not opened the door to the roof garden they took the key and opened the door and there lay their lord, dead, on the floor.

4. *Deliverance for Israel 3:26 – 30*

²⁶ Ehud escaped during the servants delay and passed by the Idols of Gilgal, ⁶⁷ and arrived safely in Seirah. ⁶⁸ ²⁷ Upon arriving there he blew the ram’s horn (*or, trumpet*) in the hill country of Ephraim. The people of Israel from the hill country accompanied him as their leader. ²⁸ He told them, “Follow me! ⁶⁹ The Lord has given your Moabite enemies into your hand!” They then followed him going down to the Jordan and seizing the Jordan ford from the Moabites, and did not allow any one to cross the Jordan there. ²⁹ In the battle they killed ten thousand Moabites, all of whom were highly trained warriors. None escaped. ³⁰ On that day Moab was subdued ⁷⁰ by the forces ⁷¹ of Israel and they had peace for eighty years.

D. *Shamgar and the Philistines 3:31*

³¹ [After Ehud, Shamgar, the son of Anath, killed six hundred Philistines with an ox goad, ⁷² and thus he also delivered Israel.] ⁷³

<CHAPTER 4>

E. *Deborah and Barak 4:1 – 5:31*

1. *The Canaanite Oppression 4:1 – 3*

¹ The people of Israel again disobeyed the will of God by doing evil following the death of Ehud, ⁷⁴ all of which was offensive to God. ² The Lord gave the people of Israel into the hands of Jabin, the king of the Canaanites who reigned in Hazor. ⁷⁵ The leading general of Jabin’s army was Sisera ⁷⁶ who lived in Harosheth-goiim. ³ The people then cried out to the Lord, pleading for help for Sisera’s army had nine-hundred iron ⁷⁷ chariots, and the people of Israel were oppressed by cruel violence for twenty years. ⁷⁸

⁶⁶ Literally: “covering his feet,” which is a euphemism.

⁶⁷ LXX: “quarries.”

⁶⁸ The location is uncertain. The name means “wooded hills.” Scholars question whether it was a village or just a wooded hilltop.

⁶⁹ The LXX has a simple imperative: “Follow!”

⁷⁰ LXX: “humbled.”

⁷¹ Literally: “hand.”

⁷² LXX: “a plow share which had been drawn by oxen.”

⁷³ Some scholars think this is a later interpolation.

⁷⁴ “Following the death of Ehud” is omitted in the LXX.

⁷⁵ Hazor was about four miles southwest of Lake Huleh. It is present day el Qedah. Hazor controlled the principal trade route, having an estimated population of 40,000. Extensive archaeological excavations have taken place on the site of Hazor.

⁷⁶ Sisera might have been the petty king of Harosheth, The city was about 12 miles northwest of Megiddo.

⁷⁷ JB: “plated with iron.”

⁷⁸ So: LXX. Hebrew: “many years.”

2. *Deborah 4:4 – 5*

⁴ Deborah was a prophetess who was the widow of Lappidoth. She was judging Israel. ⁷⁹ ⁵ She would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the people of Israel would come to her seeking guidance through her judgments.

3. *Barak 4:6 – 9*

⁶ She sent a summons to Barak, ⁸⁰ the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali saying, “Doesn’t the Lord, the God of Israel command you? Go and muster the men at Mount Tabor, taking ten-thousand men from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. ⁷ I will entice Sisera, the general of Jabin’s army with all its chariots and troops to meet your army at the river Kishon for I will help you overpower him.” ⁸ Barak’s response to her was “If you will accompany me I will go but if you will not accompany me I will not go.” ⁸¹ ⁹ She then said, “Be assured I will definitely go with you but you must understand that the road you will be taking will not lead to personal glory for you. The Lord will give Sisera over to a woman.”

4. *Defeat of the Canaanites 4:10 – 16*

¹⁰ Barak mustered the armies of Zebulun and Naphtali at Kadesh and ten-thousand men went to engage in battle, following Barak and Deborah who accompanied Barak.

¹¹ (Now Heber ⁸² the Kenite had detached himself from the clan of the Kenites who were the descendants of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as Elon-bezaananim which is Kedesh.)

¹² When Sisera was informed that Barak, the son of Abinoam, had gone to Mount Tabor ¹³ Sisera mustered all his chariots, nine-hundred, to come into his presence along with all of his followers from Harosheth-ha-goim at the Wadi Kishon. ⁸³ ¹⁴ Deborah told Barak, “This is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand. Doesn’t the Lord precede you?” Then Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten-thousand men following him. ¹⁵ The Lord routed Sisera and all of his chariots and his infantry were panic stricken before Barak’s onslaught. ⁸⁴ Sisera dismounted his chariot and fled on foot. ¹⁶ Barak pursued the chariots and the army of Harosheth-ha-goim. Sisera’s entire army was killed in battle.

5. *The End of Sisera 4:17 – 22*

¹⁷ Sisera fled on foot, going to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, for peace had been established between King Jabin of Hazor and the clan of Heber the Kenite. ¹⁸ Jael came out of her tent and said to Sisera, “Come in ⁸⁵ my lord! Do not be

⁷⁹ MFT: “At that time Israel was being managed by Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, who used to sit under the Deborah palm tree between Ramah and Bethel in the highlands of Ephraim, deciding cases brought to her by Israelites.”

⁸⁰ The name means “lightning.”

⁸¹ The LXX adds: “for I do not know on what day the Lord will come to his people.”

⁸² The name is found in the tribe of Asher. Cf.: Genesis 46:11; Numbers 26:45; I Chronicles 4:18

⁸³ In the dry season the Wadi (or, brook) Kishon was dry but if it rained it became a torrent. In Debora’s song (chapter 5) she sings of rain. This may be the key that the chariots would not maneuver in the mud of the valley in which the fighting took place for the valley narrowed giving no space for the chariots to move about in the mud causing much of Sisera’s army to become a hindrance in the battle.

⁸⁴ Literally: “at the edge of the sword before Barak.”

⁸⁵ Literally: “turn aside.”

fearful!” He entered her tent and she covered him with a blanket (*or, rug*).⁸⁶ 19 He spoke to her, saying, “Please give me a small drink of water, for I am thirsty.” She then gave him a drink of milk from a skin and then replaced the cover. 20 He asked her to stand at the door of the tent and if anyone would come by and ask, ‘Is anyone here?’ she should reply, ‘No.’ 21 However, Jael, the wife of Heber took a tent peg, and grasped the mallet after he had fallen asleep, for he was exhausted, and tip toed to him and drove the tent peg into his temple until it was down into the ground.⁸⁷ 22 As Barak was pursuing Sisera Jael went out to meet him and said to him, “Come! I will show you the man for whom you are searching.” So he went into the tent with her, and there lay Sisera – dead because of a tent peg through his temple.

23 On that day God subdued Jabin the king of the Canaanites in the presence of all of the people of Israel. 24 The pressure of the power of the Israelites increased against Jabin, king of the Canaanites until Jabin was destroyed.⁸⁸

<CHAPTER 5>

7, *The Song of Deborah* 5:1 - 31

a. *Introductory Note* 5:1

1 On that day Deborah and Barak, the son of Abinoam, sang a song.⁸⁹

b. *Invitation* 5:2 – 5

2 “When the locks were long in Israel,⁹⁰
the people dedicated themselves willingly.⁹¹

Bless the Lord!

3 Hear, O kings, listen, O princes, ‘
for I will sing to the Lord,’

I will make music to the Lord, the God of Israel.

4 “Lord, when you went far from Seir (*i.e. Sinai*),
as if you had removed yourself from the region,
the earth trembled,

and the heavens quaked,

the clouds gave out downpours of rain

5 The mountains shook before the Lord,

the God of Sinai,

who is the God of Israel.”

c. *Condition of Israel* 5:6 - 9

⁸⁶ The Hebrew word is a hapax legomenon.

⁸⁷ NEB: “His brains oozed out in the ground, his limbs twitched, and he died.” LXX: “and darkness fell on him and he died.”

⁸⁸ REB: “They pressed home their attacks upon him until he was destroyed.”

⁸⁹ This is possibly the first example of Hebrew poetry. Portions of the Song of Deborah are so difficult to understand that the LXX sometimes does not attempt to translate but simply transliterates the Hebrew words, or seemingly, has guessed what the meaning might be. Cf.; the introduction to Judges.

⁹⁰ RSV: “The leaders took the lead in Israel.”

⁹¹ TAN: “When the locks are untrimmed” (as a symbol of dedication.) Cf. Numbers 6:5. CB: “When locks were worn loose in Israel, when the people volunteered.”

6 “In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath ⁹²
in the days of Jael caravans no longer traveled, ⁹³
and those who normally used the trade routes
refrained from doing so.
7 Pleasantness ceased in Israel
until Deborah arose as a mother in Israel! ⁹⁴
8 When new gods were chosen, ⁹⁵
there were fights along the roads, ⁹⁶
no shield and spear was to be seen
among the forty thousand in Israel. ⁹⁷
9 My heart reaches out to the commander of Israel,
who answered the call
of those who are dedicated among the people.
Bless the Lord.”

d, Call to Rejoice 5:10 – 11

10 “All you who ride on tawny donkeys, tell it!
Rejoice all you who are seated on rich saddle rugs, ⁹⁸
and you who walk along the pathways.
11 The servants and mercenaries ⁹⁹ at the watering places,
commemorate the triumphs of the Lord;
and the triumphs of his peasants in Israel.

“At dawn the people of the Lord marched to the gates.”

e. Roll Call of the Tribes of Israel 5:12 – 18

12 “Awake, awake, Deborah!
Awake and raise a chant!
Arise, Barak, lead your captives away,
O son of Abinoam.
13 Then the remnant of the mighty marched.
It was the people of the Lord who marched:

⁹² Possibly: “Beth-anath.”

⁹³ NAB: “the days of slave caravans ceased.” An alternate possible translation is: “in those days the caravans no longer moved.”

⁹⁴ NRSV: “The peasantry prospered in Israel, they grew fat on plunder, because you arose, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel.” TAN: “Deliverance ceased...until you came.”

⁹⁵ The Hebrew is obscure. Some translators omit this line since it seems not to be understandable.

⁹⁶ Literally: “at the gates.”

⁹⁷ REV: “They chose new gods, they consorted with demons, not a shield was to be seen, nor a lance among forty thousand Israelites.” NEB: “they consorted with demons [*or satyrs*].” An example of the difference between the MT and the LXX: the LXX reads “They chose new gods. Then the city of rulers fought if there should be seen that there was not a single shield or spear among the forty-thousand in Israel.”

⁹⁸ JB: “with caparisons [*horse trappings*] beneath you.” The Hebrew word that has been translated as “saddle rugs” is not understandable.

⁹⁹ This Hebrew word is not understandable. Some scholars feel the Hebrew might mean “To the sound of thunder crashes.”

for it was the people of the Lord who were victorious.
 15 They went out from Ephraim into the valley,¹⁰⁰
 followed by their kinsmen, Benjamin.
 It was because of your kindness
 that the commanders came down from Machir¹⁰¹
 and from Zebulun,(those who carry the marshal's staff).
 15 The chiefs of Issachar came with Deborah,
 and Issachar was faithful to Barak.
 An army of warriors rushed behind them into the valley.
 The tribe of Reuben was divided into companies,
 coming after great discussions concerning loyalty.
 16 Why did you linger among the sheep-folds,¹⁰²
 to listen to the sound of the pipe among the flocks
 among the clans of Reuben)?
 (There truly was great heart searching!)
 17 Gilead remained beyond the Jordan,
 and Dan – why did Dan linger among the ships?¹⁰³
 Asher remained along the sea coast,
 lingering at the harbors.
 18 The people of Zebulun scorned death,
 as did Naphtali on the heights of the battle field.”

f. The Battle Scene 5:19 – 22

19 “The kings faced each other and engaged in battle,
 a battle against the kings of the Canaanites,
 which took place at Ta-anach at the waters of Megiddo.
 No silver spoils were to be found.¹⁰⁴
 20 From their sanctuaries in the sky,
 the stars in their constellations fought against Sisera,
 21 The torrent of Kishon swept them away,
 the raging torrent, namely Kishon.
 March on, my soul, with courage.

22 “Then the horses’ hoofs pounded loudly,
 galloping, galloping of the steeds.”¹⁰⁵

g. Meroz and Jael 5:23 - 27

23 “The angel of the Lord says, ‘Come, Meroz,
 bitterly curse its inhabitants,

¹⁰⁰ So: LXX. Hebrew: “Amalek.”

¹⁰¹ The exact location is uncertain. Some scholars feel it was the tribal land of little known group in the Negeb. The other was located east of the Jordan.

¹⁰² The Hebrew word is unclear. It might mean “saddle bags.”

¹⁰³ The Hebrew is uncertain. Possibly it is saying that the Danites were hired by the Phoenicians to be ship builders.

¹⁰⁴ I.e. they did not conquer. Cf.: ANET: p. 235c.

¹⁰⁵ Literally: “from the galloping; galloping of steeds.”

for they did not come to the aid of the Lord,
to help the Lord against (*or, among*) the mighty.’

24 “Jael is the most blessed of women,
the wife of Heber, the Kenite,
(one of the tent dwellers,) a woman most blessed!
25 He (*Sisera*) asked for water, and she gave him milk,
bringing him curds in a princely bowl.
26 Her left hand reached for the tent peg,
and her right hand for the workman’s mallet.
She struck Sisera with a blow,
crushing his head,
shattering and piercing his temple.
27 He sank, falling;
he lay still at her feet.
Sinking at her feet, he fell;
there he lay, dead, on the ground.”¹⁰⁶

h. Scene in the Palace of Sisera 5:28 – 30

28 “The mother of Sisera
peered out of the window,
gazing¹⁰⁷ through the lattice,
‘Why is his chariot so late to return?
Why are the hoof beats of his chariot not heard?
29 Her maids replied,
but she, herself had an answer in mind.
30 ‘They are surely dividing the spoils they have taken:
a maiden or two for every man,
dyed fabric for Sisera,
surely dyed and embroidered fabric,
even two pieces of dyed and embroidered fabric
to have around my neck.”¹⁰⁸

i. The Refrain 5:31

31 “May your enemies perish thus, O Lord.
May your friends be like the sun as it rises in its might.”

The land then had rest for forty years.

¹⁰⁶ TAB: “there he lay – destroyed.” Note the differences in the story. Cf. Chapter 4:17 – 22.

¹⁰⁷ Literally: “whining.” LXX: “gazing.”

¹⁰⁸ The Hebrew is rather unclear. Is it just fabric for Sisera’s mother or two pieces for each of the women.

<CHAPTER 6>

F. The Story of Gideon 6:1 – 9:35 ¹⁰⁹

1. Midianite Raids 6:1 - 6

¹ The people of Israel did what was offensive in the sight of the Lord and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian for forty years. ² The power of Midian dominated Israel and because of Midian the people of Israel were compelled to make dens for themselves in mountain caves and strongholds. ¹¹⁰ ³ When the people of Israel sowed seed the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east ¹¹¹ would come to attack. ¹¹² ⁴ They would invade the land of Israel and destroy the produce of the land. ¹¹³ These invasions extended across the entire country, as far as Gaza. The crops were completely destroyed so that there would be nothing even for a sheep, ox or donkey to eat. ⁵ They would arrive with their cattle and their tents like swarming locusts in number. They and their camels were too many to count. In this way they ravaged the land as they moved about. ¹¹⁴ ⁶ Israel was reduced to the verge of starvation because of Midian and the people of Israel cried out to the Lord.

2. Appearance of a Prophet 6:7 - 10

⁷ When the people of Israel pleaded with God because of the Midianites ⁸ the Lord sent a prophet to the people of Israel and he informed them: “This is the declaration of the Lord, the God of Israel! I led you up from Egypt, bringing you out of bondage. ⁹ In addition I delivered you from the power of the Egyptians and all of your oppressors. I drove these oppressors from this land, giving it to you. ¹⁰ I told you ‘I am the Lord your God. You are not to revere any of the gods of the Amorites in whose land you reside.’ However: you did not pay any attention to my words!”

3. The Call of Gideon 6:11 – 32

¹¹ The angel of the Lord (*or, God’s messenger*) came and seated itself under the Oak of Ophrah ¹¹⁵ which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, and his son Gideon was flailing wheat in the wine press, to hide it from the Midianites. ¹¹⁶ ¹² The angel of the Lord (*or, God’s messenger*) appeared to Gideon and said, “The Lord be with you, valiant warrior.” Gideon answered, “Please, sir, If the Lord is with us why has this misfortune burdened us? Also, where are all the wonderful deeds that had been told us by our ancestors? For example: the Lord leading the people of Israel out of Egypt. Now the Lord ignores us and has given us over into the hand of the Midianites.” ¹⁴ The Lord turned to him and said,

¹⁰⁹ Some scholars feel two strands of early tradition are combined for the Gideon story.

¹¹⁰ TEV: “hid themselves in caves and other safe places in the hills.”

¹¹¹ TAN: “Kedemites.”

¹¹² These attacks took place from seed time to harvest.

¹¹³ This could be done very simply. They would bring their livestock and let their animals graze on the fields that the Israelites had seeded in hopes of getting a harvest.

¹¹⁴ Cf.: ANET p. 144b.

¹¹⁵ This was a special place where the oracles of God were given to the people. The location has not been identified.

¹¹⁶ Flailing of wheat would normally be done where there would be a breeze. To flail in the wine press would hide the activity but would make it much more difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff. This is an illustration of the fear the people of Israel had for the Midianites.

“Go with this might of yours and deliver the Israelites from the power of the Midianites. I am sending you!”¹¹⁷ ¹⁵ He said to the Lord, “I ask of you, Lord, how am I able to deliver Israel? Look at my clan for it is the weakest within the entire tribe of Manasseh, and I am the most insignificant person in the entire tribe.”¹⁶ The Lord said to him, “I will accompany you and you will attack the Midianites in a united move.”¹⁷ He responded, “If I have received your favor, -- then show me a sign that it is you, the Lord, who is speaking with me. ¹⁸ Please do not leave here until I come to you with a gift to set before God and the messenger said, “I will remain here until you return.”

¹⁹ Gideon then went into the house and prepared a goat and unleavened bread from an ephah¹¹⁸ of flour. He placed the meat in a basket, and the broth was in a pot. He brought all the food to the messenger who was awaiting him under the oak and presented it to him. ²⁰ The angel of God said, “Take the meat and the unleavened bread and put them on this rock and then pour the broth over them.” Gideon then did what he had been told. ²¹ Then the angel of the Lord extended the staff he was holding and touched the tip of his staff to the meat and unleavened bread, fire flashed from the rock and consumed the meat and unleavened bread and the angel of the Lord vanished from sight. ²² Gideon then realized that this was an angel of the Lord and Gideon said, “Alas, O Lord God, I have actually seen the angel of the Lord face to face.” ²³ The Lord then spoke to him, saying, “Peace be with you! Do not be fearful. You will not die!” ²⁴ It was then that Gideon built an altar to the Lord and called it “The Lord is peace.”¹¹⁹ (This altar is still standing at Ohprah which is owned by the Abezrites at the time of this writing.)

²⁵ That night the Lord spoke to Gideon, saying, “Take your father’s young bull, the yearling, and use it to pull down the altar of Ba’al which your father had built, and cut down the Asherah¹²⁰ that is beside it. ²⁶ Build an altar to the Lord your God on the top of the level ground of the stronghold,¹²¹ with each stone laid in the proper position (*or, order*).¹²² Then take the yearling bull and offer it as a burnt offering, using the wood from the Asherah which you had cut down. ²⁷ Therefore Gideon ten men who were his servants and they did what the Lord had told him. However he was afraid of his family and all the townspeople, so he did not do this in the daytime but did it at night.

²⁸ When the townspeople arose early the next morning they discovered that the altar to Ba’al had been torn down and the Asherah beside the altar had vanished and that the yearling bull had become an offering on the [*new*] altar which had been built. ²⁹ They inquired of one another, “Who did this?” After they searched and inquired they said, “Gideon, the son of Joash has done this.”¹²³ ³⁰ Then the townspeople said to Joash, “Bring out your son! He is to be put to death! He pulled down the altar of Ba’al and tore down the Asherah beside it.” ³¹ Joash told the angry townspeople, “Must you contend for

¹¹⁷ TAN: “Herewith I make you my messenger.”

¹¹⁸ An Ephah was .542 bushel or about 30 quarts. This would be a huge gift in a time of scarcity.

¹¹⁹ “Adoni Shalom.” An alternate translation would be: “My Lord is well.” MFT: “Alls well, Eternal.”

¹²⁰ The Hebrew is unclear. There is a reference to 2 bulls. One is a year old, the other seven. Some scholars feel the seven year old bull was to be used to pull down the altar and the young bull was to be sacrificed. NRSV: “take your father’s young bull, the second bull, seven years old.” NEB: “Take a young bull of your fathers, the yearling bull.” The translation “the yearling” is based on a slight emendation.

¹²¹ The Hebrew is uncertain.

¹²² The reference is that the altar stones were to be laid in rows.

¹²³ With ten people knowing what had taken place (v. 27) this was no secret.

Ba'al? Will you defend his cause? ¹²⁴ Whoever contends for Ba'al will be dead by morning. Isn't Ba'al a god? Can't he defend himself because his altar has been pulled down?" ³² From that time on Gideon was called Jerubbaal which means 'Let Ba'al plead' because he had pulled down the altar of Ba'al.

4. Midianite Invasion 6:33 – 35

³³ The Midianites and the Amalekites and the people from the East ¹²⁵ merged their armies and crossed the Jordan and camped in the Jezreel Valley. ³⁴ The Spirit of the Lord enveloped ¹²⁶ Gideon and he sounded the ram's horn (*or, trumpet*) and the Abiezrites were called to follow him. ³⁵ He dispatched messengers to go through the entire tribe of Manasseh who were also called to follow him. Additionally he sent messengers to the tribes of Asher, Zebulum, and Naphtali, and all their warriors went up to follow Gideon.

5. The Fleece Test 6:36 – 40

³⁶ Gideon then said to God, "If you will empower Israel by my action, as you have said, ¹²⁷ ³⁷ I am laying a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece but the ground is dry I will be assured that you will empower Israel through my leadership as you have said." ³⁸ That is exactly what happened. When Gideon discovered this the next morning he squeezed the fleece, and wringing it out he had enough water to fill a bowl. ³⁹ Then Gideon said to God, "I beg of you, do not become angry with me. Let me speak once more about the fleece. Let the fleece be dry and let the ground be wet with dew." ⁴⁰ God did exactly that. The fleece was dry and there was dew on everything else.

<CHAPTER 7>

G. Preparations Against the Invaders 7:1 – 8

¹ Then Jerubbabal (that is Gideon) ¹²⁸ and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped near En Harod ¹²⁹ while the Midianites were encamped to their north, in the valley near the Hill of Morath. ¹³⁰

² The Lord told Gideon, "There are too many troops with you for me to give the Midianites into their hand. They would take credit for the victory, ¹³¹ saying, 'Our hand rescued us.' ³ Speak to the people (*or, warriors*) and say, 'Whoever is fearful or doubtful ¹³² is permitted to go home.'" Through this test by Gideon twenty-thousand returned to their homes, ¹³³ while ten-thousand remained.

⁴ The Lord then told Gideon, "There are still too many warriors. Take them to the water and I will test them. Do whoever I might say, 'This one must go with you' he is to

¹²⁴ NAB: "Do you intend to act in Ba'al's stead, to be his champion?" MFT: "are you going to fight Ba'al's battles? ... If he is a god, let him fight for himself." This has been forgotten by some Christians who feel they must defend God as if God is unable to speak for and defend himself.

¹²⁵ Cf.: footnote 110. Cf.: ANET p.66b.

¹²⁶ Literally: "clothed."

¹²⁷ Gideon's faith was not always constant. It knew moments of uncertainty and heights of greatness.

¹²⁸ Cf.: 6:32.

¹²⁹ I.e. "the Spring of Herod" which was located near Mount Gilboa.

¹³⁰ These two armies were less than five miles apart.

¹³¹ Literally: "glorify itself against me."

¹³² Literally: "shaking."

¹³³ Literally: "and let him depart from Mount Gilboa," An emendation of 2 Hebrew letters which almost look alike: "r" and "d" would give a more plausible translation. This reduction in the size of the army was based on morals.

go with you. Those about whom I will say, ‘This one must not go with you,’ is to go home.”⁵ Therefore Gideon brought his army to the water so see what would happen in the light of what the Lord had said to him. The Lord added, “Whoever laps water with his tongue, like a dog,¹³⁴ you will separate into one group. Do the same with all those who get down on their knees to drink.”¹³⁵ ⁶ The way in which some scooped up water and drank it from their hands as over against those who knelt down to drink marked the difference and determined those who would leave and go back to their homes. ⁷ The Lord then said to Gideon, “I will deliver a victory over the Midianites, using these three-hundred who drank water from their hands,¹³⁶ Let all the others go to their own homes.”⁸ Then Gideon took the three hundred who drank water from their hands, and he blew the ram’s horn (*or, trumpet*) and all the other warriors of Israel were sent back to their homes but he retained the three-hundred to attack the camp of the Midianites that was in the valley.

7. *Spying Out the Camp of the Midianites 7:9 – 15*

⁹ On that very night the Lord said to Gideon, “Rise and attack the camp for I have given you the victory, ¹⁰ but if you are fearful, go down to spy out the camp with your servant Purah, ¹¹ and you will discover what they say, and after that you will be strengthened to attack the camp.” Then he went down to an outpost of the armed camp¹³⁷ with Purah, his servant. ¹² The Midianites and the Amalekites and the people from the East were as numerous in the valley as a multitude of locusts and their camels were so numerous they were beyond counting, like the sand on the sea shore.¹³⁸ ¹³ When Gideon came, it happened that a man was telling his companion of a dream he had. “I dreamed that a cake (*or, loaf*) of barley bread tumbled down into the Midian camp. It came to a tent and struck it so hard that the tent fell, it turning upside down and lying flat.”¹⁴ His companion replied, “This is exactly the message of Gideon, the son of Joash, a man of Israel for his God has given Midian and the entire land into his hand.”¹³⁹

¹⁵ When Gideon overheard this conversation and its interpretation he worshiped and he returned to the camp of Israel. He then said, “Rise! The Lord has given the huge army of Midian into our hands!”

8. *Gideon Attacks and Routs the Midianites 7:16 - 22*

¹⁶ Gideon divided the three-hundred men of his army into three companies. All carried ram’s horns (*or, trumpets*) and they all had an empty jar with a torch in the jar.¹⁴⁰ ¹⁷ He said to them, “Watch me and do whatever I do once I draw near to the camp. Then do exactly what I do!”¹⁴¹ ¹⁸ When I blow the ram’s horn (*or, trumpet*) I and everyone who

¹³⁴ Actually the test was taking water into their hands and bringing it to their mouths. This gave the similarity to a dog lapping up the water.

¹³⁵ This reduction of the size of the army was based on alertness.

¹³⁶ Literally: “lapped water from their hands.”

¹³⁷ Literally: “extremity of the battle array.”

¹³⁸ Cf.: ANET p. 144b.

¹³⁹ TAN in a footnote says: “The loaf of bread symbolizes the agricultural Israelites. The tent signifies the nomadic Midianites.” Some scholars feel that since barley bread was the cheapest bread this was an additional ‘slur’ of the Midianites.

¹⁴⁰ In those days one soldier in 500 or 1000 would carry a ram’s horn (*or, trumpet*) and the same could be said about torches. When the Midianites see 300 torches and hear 300 ram’s horns they think they are being attacked by 150,000 or as many as 300,000 troops. This resulted in panic for the Midianites and they felt everyone else was an enemy and in the darkness they fought one another.

¹⁴¹ Literally: “it shall come about that just as I do you shall do.”

is attacking with me will blow their trumpet on every side of the enemy camp. Then everyone will shout: 'For the Lord and for Gideon.'”

¹⁹ Then Gideon and the three-hundred men who were in his army moved toward the edge of the camp just at the beginning of the middle watch, they blew their trumpets and smashed the jars they were holding. ²⁰ All three companies blew their trumpets and broke the jars, holding the flaming torch in their left hands and in their right hand the ram's horn (*or, trumpet*) to blow and shouted, “A sword for the Lord and for Gideon.” ²¹ Every man stood in his appointed place around the camp and the entire (*Midianite army*) ran, crying out and fleeing. ²² When the three-hundred trumpets were blown the Lord caused everyone (*in the Midianite army*) to fight against one another and then the army began to flee, fleeing as far as Beth-barah, toward Zeratah (*or, Zereda*), as far as the border of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath.

9. The Pursuit of Midian 7:23 - 35

²³ The men of Israel were called out from Naphtali and from Asher and from all of Manasseh, and they pursued the Midianites.

²⁴ Gideon then sent messengers through all the hill country saying “Come down and fight against the Midianites and seize the access to any water supply, and the Jordan river as far as Beth-barah. ²⁵ They also captured two Midianite generals (*or, princes*) Oreb and Zeeb. ¹⁴² Oreb was killed at the Rock of Oreb and Zeeb was killed at the wine press of Zeeb while the pursuit of the Midianites was taking place. The heads of both Oreb and Zeeb were brought to Gideon while he was beyond the Jordan.

<CHAPTER 8>

10. Ephraim and Gideon 8:1 – 3

¹ The men of Ephraim ¹⁴³ said to Gideon, “What have you done to us, by not calling us when you were fighting with Midian?” The men reproached Gideon fiercely. ² He replied, “What have I done that is comparable to your actions? Are not the gleanings of Ephraim better than the entire vintage of Abiezer? ³ God has given you the two generals (*or, princes*) Oreb and Zeeb into your hands. What have I done that is comparable with what you have done?” Following those remarks their anger was abated.

11. Gidionites Request Supplies 8:4 – 9

⁴ Gideon arrived at the Jordan and having crossed the Jordan he and the three-hundred men who followed him were exhausted yet kept on pursuing. ⁵ He said to the men of Succoth ¹⁴⁴ “Please give some loaves of bread to those people who are following me, for they are faint from pursuing Zeba and Zalmunna, the kings of the Midianites.” ¹⁴⁵ ⁶ The leaders of Succoth said: “Are Zeba and Zalmunna already in your hands so that we must give bread to your army?” ⁷ Gideon then responded, “When the Lord has given Zeba and Zalmunna into my hands I will return and I will thrash ¹⁴⁶ your flesh with thorns from the wilderness and briers.” ⁸ From there he went to the men of Peniel ¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Oreb means “raven” and Zeeb mean “wolf.”

¹⁴³ Ephraim was in the central highlands of Israel. The great sanctuary at Shiloh was in Ephraim.

¹⁴⁴ The present name is Tell Deir-‘alla.”

¹⁴⁵ Gideon assumes that many gifts would be given to those who are victorious. Some scholars feel the names are not reported correctly but rather are given in a mocking fashion by distorting the pronunciation.

¹⁴⁶ The Hebrew word can be translated as “thrash” or “trample.”

¹⁴⁷ The spelling is that of the Hebrew word. The correct spelling would be “Peniel.” “Peniel” means “the face of God.”

where he asked the same question and received the same answer as was received in Succoth. ⁹ He then said to the men of Penuel, “When I return in victory I will destroy your tower.”

12. The Capture of the Midianite Kings 8:10 – 12

¹⁰ Zeba and Zalmunna were in Karkor ¹⁴⁸ with their armies, which numbered fifteen-thousand men who were all that remained from the army of the people of the East, for one-hundred and twenty thousand had been killed in battle. ¹¹ Gideon [*and his army*] marched forward along the caravan route east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and attacked the army of the Midianites when they were off guard. ¹² Zebah and Zalmunna fled but Gideon pursued them and captured the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna. This caused the entire Midian army to panic, which resulted in the entire army disappearing.

13 The Punishment of Succoth and Penual 8:13 – 17

¹³ Gideon, the son of Joab, returned from the battle by the ascent of Heres. ¹⁴⁹ ¹⁴ He caught a young man from Succoth and questioned him. The young man then wrote down the names of the officials and elders of Succoth -- seventy seven names in all. ¹⁵ He came to the men from Succoth who were listed and said, “Look! Here are Zeba and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me, saying ‘Are Zeba and Zalmunna already in your hands that we must give bread to your army? Why should we give any bread to your men who are faint?’ “ ¹⁶ He took the elders of the city, beating them ¹⁵⁰ with thorns from the wilderness, and briers and in that way trampled the people of the city of Succoth. ¹⁵¹ ¹⁷ He also destroyed the tower at Penuel, and killed the city’s men.

14. The Slaughter of Zeba and Zalmunna 8:18 – 21

¹⁸ Gideon spoke with Zeba and Zalmunna, “Where are the men you killed in Tabor?” ¹⁵² They replied, “They looked like you, resembling the sons of a king.” ¹⁹ He said, “They were my brothers, sons of my mother. Just as surely as the Lord lives, if you had saved them and let them live, I would not kill you.” ²¹ He then spoke to Jether, his first born, “Rise and kill them.” But Jether was young and did not draw his sword, for he was fearful since he was still a youth. ¹⁵³ ²¹ Then Zeba and Zalmunna said, “Rise yourself and kill us for as the saying says, ‘As a man, so is his strength.’” Gideon rose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, taking the crescents ¹⁵⁴ that were on their camel’s necks.

15. Gideon’s Refusal to Rule 8:22 – 23

²² The men of Israel spoke to Gideon, saying, “Rule over us. Establish a dynasty: you, your son, your grandson, for you have freed us from being ruled by the Midianites.” ²³ Gideon replied that he would not rule -- neither he, his son nor his grandson. He declared: “The Lord will rule!”

16, Gideon and the Ephod 8:24 – 28

¹⁴⁸ Karkor was east of the Dead Sea.

¹⁴⁹ The location is unknown.

¹⁵⁰ An emendation would read, “thrashing them.”

¹⁵¹ CEV: “Gideon made a whip from thorn plants and used it to beat the town’s officers.”

¹⁵² The Hebrew is unclear. Was this a question? What were they like? Or Where are they? Literally : “like the form of sons.”

¹⁵³ It was the intention of Gideon to insult these kings by having a youth kill them.

¹⁵⁴ These were like amulets, usually of gold, which were not only worn by camels but similar crescents were worn by men and women.

24 Gideon said to the people: “Let me make a request of you: each of you give me an earring ¹⁵⁵ that you have obtained as booty. (The enemy (*the Midianites, the Amalekites, and the people of the East,*) had golden earrings because their background was Ishmaelite, and as desert people wore earrings.) 25 They answered, “We will gladly give them!” A garment was spread out and every man tossed earrings taken as spoil on the garment. 26 The weight of the gold exceeded one thousand-seven hundred shekels of gold. ¹⁵⁶ There was additional gold from crescents and pendants and purple garments that had been worn by Midianites and the collars that were worn by camels. All this was contributed by the people who had taken spoils from the Midianites. ¹⁵⁷ 27 Gideon made an ephod of these spoils and placed the ephod in his home town in Ophrah, ¹⁵⁸ but the people were disloyal to God ¹⁵⁹ and it became a trap to Gideon and his family. 28 Midian was subdued before the people of Israel and they no longer were haughty. The land had rest for forty years – through Gideon’s lifetime.

17. *The House of Gideon* 8:29 – 32

29 Jerubbaal (*or, Gideon*), the son of Joash, went to live in his own home. 30 Gideon had seventy sons as his direct descendants ¹⁶⁰ for he had many wives. 31 His secondary wife (*or, concubine*) lived in Shechem and gave birth to his son who was named Abimelech. ¹⁶¹ 32 Gideon, the son of Joash, died at a ripe old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash at Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

18. *Israel’s Apostasy* 8:44 – 35 ¹⁶²

33 As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel became unfaithful to the Lord and they turned to the Ba’als and adopted Ba’al-berith ¹⁶³ as their god. 34 The people of Israel forgot about the Lord their God who had rescued them from all the enemy nations that surrounded them. 35 They did not show kindness to the family of Jerubbaal (*or, Gideon*).

<CHAPTER 9>

G, Abimelech, King of Shechem 9:1 – 6 ¹⁶⁴

1 Abimelech, the son of Jerubbaal, (*or, Gideon*) went to Shechem, ¹⁶⁵ to his mother’s relatives and told them, and the entire clan of his mother’s family, 2 “Report this in the hearing of the entire citizenry of Shechem: ‘Which is better for you? That all seventy sons of Jerubbaal rule over you, or that one rules over you? In addition, bear in mind that I am of your flesh and blood.’” ¹⁶⁶ 3 His maternal relatives reported all these

¹⁵⁵ The Hebrew is a bit unclear. Is it one earring or two earrings?

¹⁵⁶ The weight would be about 40 to 43 pounds.

¹⁵⁷ In part all this gold and the garments served as amulets but they were also symbols of wealth.

¹⁵⁸ The nature and purpose of the ephod is unclear. The ephod became an idol but Gideon had intended it to be a reminder of the power of God.

¹⁵⁹ Literally: “played the harlot.”

¹⁶⁰ Literally: “from his own loins.”

¹⁶¹ The name means “Melech is my father.”

¹⁶² Some scholars believe this is a later interpolation.

¹⁶³ The name means “Ba’al of the Covenant.”

¹⁶⁴ Gideon had rejected the offer to become king. His son, Abimelech, seeks that opportunity. Abimelech is the son of Gideon and his secondary wife (*or, concubine*). Cf.: 8:31.

¹⁶⁵ Shechem had been a Canaanite community which was included in the tribal structure of Israel. The Tell el Amarna letters note that Shechem fell into the hands of the ‘Habiru’ in the 4th Century BCE. The capture of Shechem is not mentioned in Joshua.

¹⁶⁶ Literally: “bone and flesh.”

things in the hearing of the people of Shechem, and their consensus was that they follow Abimelech, for they said, “He is our brother.”¹⁶⁷ 4 They presented him with seventy pieces of silver,¹⁶⁸ which came from the house of Ba’al-berith, which Abimelech used to hire some some worthless scoundrels¹⁶⁹ who followed him. 5 He then went to his father’s home town of Ophrath, and killed¹⁷⁰ his seventy brothers, the sons of Jerubbaal (*or, Gideon*) on one stone,¹⁷¹ but Jotham, the youngest of Jerubbaal’s children, escaped, hiding himself. 6 All the citizens of Shechem gathered at the Beth-millo¹⁷² and it was there that they made Abimelech king on the pillar¹⁷³ of Shechem.

2. *Jotham’s Fable 9:7 – 15*

7 When Jotham learned of this he stood at the top of Mount Gerazim¹⁷⁴ and called loudly to the people, saying: “Listen to me, O men of Shechem, that God might listen to you!

8”The trees once went out to find a king to rule over them,
and they said to the Olive, ‘Rule over us.’

9 The Olive tree, however, said to them,
‘Do you expect me to stop producing my rich oil
which is honored by gods and people,
to rule¹⁷⁵ over the trees?’

10 The trees then spoke to the fig tree, saying,
“Come over to us and rule us.’

11 The fig tree replied,
‘Do you expect me to stop producing my sweet fruit
which is exceedingly delicious,
and go to rule over the trees?’

12 The trees spoke to the vine, saying,
‘Come and reign over us.’

13 However, the vine said to them,
‘Should I stop producing my wine
which cheers both gods and mortals
and go to rule over the trees?’

14 So the trees said to the bramble,
‘Come and rule over us.’

15 The bramble then told the trees,
‘If you anoint me to be your king
in good faith,
then come and take refuge in my shade,
but if you do not do this,

¹⁶⁷ In this way the people are saying that they are ready to accept Abimelech as their king.

¹⁶⁸ This gift would amount to about 1 ¾ pounds of silver.

¹⁶⁹ NAB: “shiftless men and ruffians.” NIV: “reckless adventurers.”

¹⁷⁰ REB: “butchered his brothers.”

¹⁷¹ This was possibly a place used for animal sacrifice.

¹⁷² This may have been a location that lay apart from the city of Shechem, It was a fortification for the city of Shechem.

¹⁷³ The meaning is uncertain.

¹⁷⁴ Many mss have “Mount Carmel.”

¹⁷⁵ Literally: “go to sway over” which was a way of saying “to rule.” So here and in verses 11 - 13.

let fire come out of the bramble
and destroy the cedars of Lebanon.”

3. Application of the Fable 9:16 - 21

16 “Now therefore: If you acted in good faith and honor when you made Abimelech king and if you have dealt honorably with Jerubbaal (*or, Gideon*) and his house, and have honored him as he justly deserved,¹⁷⁶ 17 then remember that my father fought for you and he risked his life¹⁷⁷ and rescued you from the hands of the Midianites, 18 but today you have risen up against my father’s house, and have killed¹⁷⁸ his sons --- seventy men on one stone,¹⁷⁹ and have made Abimelech, the son of his slave girl,¹⁸⁰ king over the dwellers of Shechem because he is your kinsman. 19 If you, today, acted in good faith and honor with Jerubbaal, (*or, Gideon*) and with his house, then rejoice in having Abimelech and let him rejoice in you also. 20 But: on the other hand, if you have not acted in good faith, let fire come from Abimelech and devour you, the citizens of Shechem and Beth-millo, and let fire come from Shechem and from Beth-millo and destroy Abimelech.” 21 Then Jotham ran, fleeing to Beer, where he remained since he was afraid of his brother Abimelech.

4, The Shechemites Quarrel with Abimelech 9:22 – 25

22 Abimelech ruled over Israel for three years.¹⁸¹ 23 God sent an evil spirit¹⁸² that intervened between Abimelech and the men of Shechem and they dealt treacherously¹⁸³ with Abimelech 24 (This took place so that the violence in the killing of the seventy sons of Jerubbaal (*or, Gideon*) might recoil against Abimelech, and on the people of Shechem who had abetted him in the murder of his brothers.) 25 The men of Shechem prepared an ambush¹⁸⁴ to rob travelers Abimelech of any fees which would normally be his, by virtue of his being king, on the trade route used by caravans which passed on the mountain tops.

5. Gaal’s Call for Rebellion 9:26 – 29¹⁸⁵

26 Gaal,¹⁸⁶ the son of Ebal moved into Shechem with his relatives and the men of Shechem had confidence in him. 27 When they had gone out into the field and gathered grapes from their vineyards and when they had their vintners festival¹⁸⁷ they went into the house of their god and drank. They also reviled Abimelech. 28 Gaal, the son of Ebal, said, “Who is this Abimelech? What is there about those of us who live in Shechem that we should serve him? Did not this son of Jerubbaal (*or, Gideon*) and his overseer Zebul serve the men of Hamor, the father of Shechem? Why should we serve him?”¹⁸⁸ 29 If the

¹⁷⁶ Literally: “according to the dealing of his hands.”

¹⁷⁷ Literally: “cast his soul in front.”

¹⁷⁸ REB: “butchered.”

¹⁷⁹ Cf.: footnote 169.

¹⁸⁰ This is a deliberate slur. The slave girl had become a secondary wife (*or, concubine*).

¹⁸¹ While this sentence is in the MT, in actuality he only ruled over Shechem and Beth-millo.

¹⁸² TAN: “a spirit of discord.”

¹⁸³ NEB: “played him false.”

¹⁸⁴ Literally: “lay in wait.”

¹⁸⁵ Some scholars feel verses 26 - 41 are a later interpolation from a different written source or oral tradition.

¹⁸⁶ LXX: “Γαλααβ υιος Ιωβηλ.”

¹⁸⁷ Literally: “rejoicing.”

¹⁸⁸ The Hebrew in this sentence is uncertain. W. F. Albright says Hamor means “donkey.” A donkey was sacrificed to the local deity of Shechem, Ba’al-berith. (the god of the covenant). Gaal set himself up as the

people would support me I could remove Abimelech. I would tell Abimelech “Increase your army and come out for battle.”

6. *Abimelech is Told of Gaal’s Move 9:30 – 33*

³⁰ When Zebul, the overseer of the city heard the words of Gaal, the son of Ebal, he became very irate. ³¹ He sent a messenger ¹⁸⁹ to Abimelech at Arumah who said, “Gaal, the son of Ebal, and his relatives have come to Shechem, and they are stirring up ¹⁹⁰ the city against you. ³² Now, be advised, you and the men who accompany you should go by night and lie in wait in the fields, ³³ Then in the morning, just as the sun is rising, be ready and rush in an attack on the city. When Gaal and his men who are with him come out in a counter attack ‘Do to them what ever the occasion might warrant.’

7. *Gaal is Driven Out 9:34 – 41*

³⁴ Abimelech and his followers rose up and went to Shechem and attacked the city of Shechem, divided into four companies. ³⁵ Gaal, the son of Ehud, went out and stood at the entrance gate of the city and Abimelech and the men with him rose up from their ambush. ³⁶ When Gaal saw the men he said to Zebul, “Look! Men are coming down from the mountain tops.” Zebul replied, “You are seeing shadows on the mountain tops that appear to look like men.” ³⁷ Then Zebul spoke again, saying, “Look! Men are coming down from the center of the land, ¹⁹¹ and some men are coming from the direction of Elon’neonem (*or, the Diviner’s Oak*.)” ³⁸ Then Zebul said to Gaal, “Where is your big mouth (*or, your boasting*) now? You were the one who said, ‘Who is Abimelech that we should serve him?’ Are these not the men whom you despised? Go out and fight them now.” ³⁹ Gaal went out, leading the men of Shechem and they fought with Abimelech. ⁴⁰ Abimelech fought against Gaal and chased him as he fled. Many fell, wounded as they neared the gate of the city. ⁴¹ Abimelech lived in Arumah ¹⁹² and Zebul expelled Gaal and his relatives so they no longer resided in Shechem.

8. *Destruction of Shechem 9:42 – 45*

⁴² On the next day the men went out into the fields (*to do battle with Abimelech*). Abimelech was informed of this. ⁴³ He took his men and divided them into three companies, and lay in wait in the fields, and he saw men. ⁴⁴ Abimelech and the company ¹⁹³ that were with him rushed forward, standing at the gate to the city while two companies attacked everyone who was in the fields, killing them. ⁴⁵ Abimelech fought against the city that entire day and when he conquered it he massacred the people who were in it and razed the city. Not a single soul survived and he spread salt on the city. ¹⁹⁴

9. *The Tower of Shechem is Burned 9:46 – 49*

⁴⁶ When all the people of the Tower of Shechem ¹⁹⁵ entered the stronghold of the house of El-berith, ⁴⁷ Abimelech was informed that all the people of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. ⁴⁸ Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the

supporter of the ancient faith as a reason to drive out the upstart Abimelech. Since the population of Shechem was predominantly Canaanite he was able to get a following.

¹⁸⁹ REB: “resorted to a ruse by sending a messenger.”

¹⁹⁰ Literally: “besieging.”

¹⁹¹ Literally: “navel of the land.” This might have been some natural landmark.

¹⁹² Arumah is called Tormah in verse 31 in Hebrew.

¹⁹³ So: versions. Hebrew: “companies.”

¹⁹⁴ This is a symbol of desolation. Salt made the ground barren.

¹⁹⁵ The Tower of Shechem is no doubt also called “Beth-millo.” TAN: “the tunnel of the temple of El-beith.” El-berith is also called Ba’al-berith. Some translators use “the crypt of the temple of El-berith.”

men who accompanied him, and Abimelech seized an axe and cut a bundle of wood ¹⁹⁶ and carried it on his shoulder, telling his men who were with him, “Hurry and do the same as I have done.” ⁴⁹ Each one of the men cut a bundle of wood and followed Abimelech who placed his wood against the stronghold in the underground passage and set fire to it which resulted in the death of all the people who numbered about a thousand men and women.

10. The Campaign Against Thebez 9:50 - 55

⁵⁰ Abimelech then went to Thebez and besieged the city and conquered it. ⁵¹ There was a strong tower, however, within the city and all the people fled to it, all the men and women, had shut themselves in it. They went up on the roof of the tower. ⁵² Abimelech came to the tower, as he fought against it, and as he came near the door of the tower to set it on fire, ⁵³ a certain woman threw an upper millstone ¹⁹⁷ on Abimelech’s head and crushed his skull. ¹⁹⁸ ⁵⁴ He then called out quickly to the young man who was his armor bearer saying, “Draw your sword and kill me! If you don’t do it people will say, ‘A woman killed him.’” The young man thrust his sword through him, and he died.

11. The Moral of the Story 9:56- 57

⁵⁶ It was in this way that God requited the crime of Abimelech which he had committed against his father by killing his seventy brothers. ⁵⁷ God also made all the wickedness of the men of Shechem return to them, ¹⁹⁹ and the curse of Jotham, the son of Jerubbaal (*or*, Gideon) fell on them.

<CHAPTER 10>

H. Tola 10:1 – 2

¹ After Abimelech a deliverer came to Israel, named Tola, the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of the tribe of Issachar, who resided in Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim. He rose to deliver Israel. ² He judged Israel for twenty-three years. He died and was buried in Shamir.

J. Jair 10:3 – 5

³ Jair the Gileadite followed Tola and he judged Israel for twenty-two years. ⁴ He had thirty sons, ²⁰⁰ who rode thirty (*or, thirty-two*) donkeys and they had thirty (*or, thirty-two*) cities, which even now are called Havvoth-jair, ²⁰¹ all of which are in the land of Gilead. ⁵ Jair died and was buried in Kamon. ²⁰²

K. Jephthah 10:6 – 12:7

1. Introduction 10:6 - 18

⁶ The people of Israel again did things that were looked upon by the Lord as evil and they served the Ba’als, Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the god of Sidon, the god of Nob, the gods of the Ammonites, the gods of the Philistines, and thus forgot the Lord and did

¹⁹⁶ TAN: “cut a branch.”

¹⁹⁷ An upper millstone usually was about three inches thick and eighteen inches in diameter.

¹⁹⁸ Cf.: II Samuel 11:21; I Samuel 31:4.

¹⁹⁹ Literally: “fall on their heads.”

²⁰⁰ LXX: “thirty-two sons.”

²⁰¹ Cf.: Numbers 32:11. The cities might be described as “the encampment of Jair” or “the tent villages of Jair.”

²⁰² This city was located about 12 miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee. Its present day name is perhaps Qumin.

not serve him. ²⁰³ 7 The Lord became incensed with Israel and his anger blazed and as a result he sold the people of Israel into the hand of the Philistines and the Ammonites. 8 They harassed (*or, crushed*) ²⁰⁴ and oppressed the children of Israel for eighteen years and sought to eliminate any Israelites who lived on the east bank of the Jordan, ²⁰⁵ in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. 9 The Ammonites then crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah and Benjamin as well as the house of Ephraim: causing Israel to be severely oppressed.

¹⁰ The people of Israel cried out to the Lord, saying, “We have sinned against you because we have forsaken our God and have served other gods.” ¹¹ The Lord told the people of Israel: “I have rescued you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites, the Ammonites and from the Philistines, haven’t I? ¹² I also rescued you from the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites, ²⁰⁶ all of whom oppressed you and you cried to me. I then delivered you from their domination over you. ¹³ Yet you have forsaken me and have served other gods. Therefore I will not deliver you again. ¹⁴ Go and cry out to gods whom you have chosen. Let them deliver you from your hour of woe.” ²⁰⁷

¹⁵ The people of Israel spoke to the Lord: “We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems to be good, but please, deliver us today!” ¹⁶ The people then put away ²⁰⁸ their gods from their midst and served the Lord: and he became sensitive to their suffering ²⁰⁹ and the misery of Israel.

¹⁷ Then the Ammonites were mustered for war and they encamped in Gilead. The Israelites also mustered their army and they were encamped at Mizpah. ²¹⁰ ¹⁸ The people of Gilead and their commanders said to one another, “Whoever strikes the first blow against the Ammonites will rule over all the inhabitants of Gilead.”

<CHAPTER 11>

2. *The Man Jephthah 11:1 – 3*

¹ Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior. He was, however, the son of another woman. ²¹¹ His father’s name was Gilead. ² Gilead’s wife also gave birth to sons, and when his wife’s sons grew older they drove Jephthah away from his home, saying, “You will never inherit any of our father’s possessions since you are the son of another

²⁰³ There is a seven fold idolatry in verse 6. There is a seven fold oppression in verses 11 - 12.

²⁰⁴ TCB: “they beat and bullied.”

²⁰⁵ The Hebrew is uncertain.

²⁰⁶ The Maonites were a much later enemy of Israel. Cf.: I Chronicles 4:41; II Chronicles 20:2, 26:3. Some scholars feel this was a scribal error for the Midianites, which is what the LXX translators chose.

²⁰⁷ God seems to be indifferent to the please of his people with the intent of having them see the error of their ways.. God then reverses his decision for God is gracious.

²⁰⁸ REB: “banished the foreign gods.”

²⁰⁹ Literally: “his soul was short with the misery.”

²¹⁰ The name means “watchtower.”

²¹¹ The Hebrew word “*zonah*” is described in the Targum as a strong woman who was not a professional prostitute. If his mother were a professional prostitute he would not have been raised in his father’s house. Possibly she was a non-Israelite.

(or, strange) woman.²¹² ³ Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob²¹³ where he was joined by worthless fellows²¹⁴ who together made raids.²¹⁵

3. Recall of Jephthah 11:4 – 11

⁴ Some time later the Ammonites made war against Israel. ⁵ When the Ammonites made war against Israel the elders of Gilead went to bring Jephthah from the land of Tob. ⁶ They said to Jephthah, “Become our leader! Then we will be enabled to fight against the Ammonites.”²¹⁶ ⁷ His reply to the elders of Gilead was, “Wasn’t it you who rejected me and drove me out of my father’s house? Why have you come to me, now that you are in trouble?”²¹⁷ ⁸ The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, “That is the exact reason why we have come to you, that you might join us and fight against the Ammonites, becoming our leader and head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.” ⁹ Jephthah then answered the elders of Gilead, “If you bring me home in order to fight against the Ammonites and the Lord grants me a victory, I will be established as your leader!”²¹⁸ ¹⁰ Then the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, “The Lord will be our witness²¹⁹ and we will carry out exactly what we have declared.”²²⁰ ¹¹ Jephthah then went with the elders of Gilead and the people made him the chief commander and Jephthah spoke publicly in the presence of the Lord at Mizpah.²²¹

4. Defense of Israel’s Right to Trans-Jordan 11:12 - 28

¹² Then Jephthah sent envoys to the king of the Ammonites who said, “What do you have against me that you have come to fight against my land?” ¹³ The king of the Ammonites answered Jephthah’s envoys with these words: “Because Israel, when coming from Egypt, took away my land between the Arnon to the Jabbok to the Jordan. Now I want you to restore this land peacefully.” ¹⁴ Jephthah again sent envoys to the king of the Ammonites, ¹⁵ who informed him, saying: “This is the declaration of Jephthah: Israel did not take away the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites, ¹⁶ but when they came up from Egypt Israel went through the wilderness, through the Red Sea²²² and came to Kadesh. ¹⁷ Then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, ‘Please permit us to pass through your land’ but the king of Edom would not permit it. They also send messenger to the king of Moab, but he also would not consent.²²³ As a result Israel remained in Kadesh²²⁴ ¹⁸ Then they journeyed through the wilderness, going around the land of Edom and the land of Moab and arrived on the east side of the land of Moab. They camped on the other side of the Arnon, but did not enter the territory of Moab, for

²¹² TAN: “an outsider.”

²¹³ The location is possibly fifteen miles from Ramoth-gilead. This would be a desolate area just outside the boundary of Israel.

²¹⁴ TAN: “men of low character.” LB: “malcontents as followers, living off the land as bandits.”

²¹⁵ TCB: “were his posse.”

²¹⁶ Jephthah must have established a name for himself as he leader of his brigands.

²¹⁷ An alternative translation might be “Didn’t you hate me and drive me from my father’s house? Why have you come to me, now when you are in trouble?”

²¹⁸ REB: “then I will become your leader.”

²¹⁹ Literally: “be a hearer.”

²²⁰ Literally: “according to your word.” Cf.: ANET: p. 201a.

²²¹ The Ammonite kingdom was east of the Jordan, extending from the Jabbok to the Arnon rivers. Its capital was Rabbah which was twenty-five miles north east of Jericho.

²²² Literally: “the Sea of Reeds.”

²²³ One LXX mss has: “he did not take to letting Israel cross over his territory.”

²²⁴ Present day Ain Qedeis.”

the Arnon was the boundary of Moab. ¹⁹ Israel then sent messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites, king of Heshon, and Israel requested, “We implore you for permission to pass through your land that we might enter into our country.” ²⁰ Sihon did not trust Israel’s passing through his territory, so Sihon mustered his army and encamped at Jahaz and fought with Israel. ²¹ Then the Lord the God of Israel gave Sihon and all his people into the hands of the house of Israel, and they were defeated and that entire land was then occupied by Israel which had been inhabited by the Amorites. ²² Israel took possession of the land that had been held by the Amorites, from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. ²³ Then the Lord, the God of Israel dispossessed the Amorites from the land held by the people of Israel. Do you intend to take possession of that land? ²²⁵ ²⁴ Will you possess what Chemosh, ²²⁶ your god, gives you to possess? ²²⁷ Shouldn’t we possess all the land that the Lord our God has conquered for our benefit? ²⁵ I ask you: Are you better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever enter into conflict with Israel, or go to war with them? ²⁶ While Israel lived in Heshbon and its dependant villages and Aroer and its dependant villages or the cities that are along the banks of the Arnon for three hundred years, why did you not try to reclaim them then? ²⁷ It is not I who have sinned against you, but you are the one who is wronging me by waging war against me. Let the Lord, who is our judge, determine today in favor of the Israelites or the Ammonites.” ²⁸ However, the king of the Ammonites did not heed ²²⁸ the message that had been sent to him by Jephthah.

5. Defeat of the Ammonites 11:29 – 33

²⁹ It was then that the spirit of the Lord came down on Jephthah and he passed through Mizpah to Gilead and on from Mizpah of Gilead he passed on to the Ammonites. ³⁰ Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, “If you will give me power over the Ammonites, ³¹ the first creature that comes out of the door of my house to meet me, when I return victoriously from battle against the Ammonites, will be the Lord’s. I will offer that one as a burnt offering.” ³² So Jephthah [*and his army*] crossed over to fight against the Ammonites and conquered them. ²²⁹ ³³ The army attacked from Aroer to the region of Minnith, twenty towns, and advanced as far as Abel-keramim. The Ammonites were soundly defeated by the army of Israel.

6. Fulfillment of Jephthah’s Vow 11:34 – 40

³⁴ Jephthah then came to his house at Mizpah and his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and dancing. She was his only child. He had no other sons or daughters. ³⁵ When he saw her he tore his clothes, saying, “Alas! My daughter, you have made me exceedingly sad! What you have done is a source of great trouble to me! I have made a vow ²³⁰ to the Lord which I am unable to repudiate (*or, retract*).” ³⁶ She responded, “My father, you have vowed to the Lord, therefore do to me according to

²²⁵ NRSV: “do you intend to take their place?”

²²⁶ Chemosh was the chief god of the Ammonites. He was also called “Moloch” or “Milcam.” He received burnt offerings, including the sacrifice of humans.

²²⁷ An alternative translation would be “Don’t you possess what Chemosh, your god has given you? Whatever the Lord our God has given we will possess.”

²²⁸ Literally: “listen to the words.”

²²⁹ Human sacrifice was rejected by Hebrew law but it found its way into Hebrew culture through the influence of the Canaanites who surrounded them. Archaeologists have found such evidence on several occasions.

²³⁰ Literally: “opened my mouth to the Lord.”

what you vowed, ²³¹ since the Lord has given you vengeance against your enemies., the Ammonites.” ³⁷ Then she added, “Let this thing be done to me, but permit me to be alone for two months that I may go wandering ²³² in the mountains to lament my virginity with my companions.” ²³³ ³⁸ Jephthah said “Go” He then sent her away for two months. She left with her companions, being away for two months, and she bewailed her virginity on the mountains. ³⁹ At the end of two months she returned to her father, who then carried out what he had vowed. ²³⁴ She died a virgin. Thereafter it became a custom in Israel ⁴⁰ that the girls in Israel went, year after year, to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite for four days each year. ²³⁵

<CHAPTER 12>

7. Jealousy of the Ephraimites 12:1 - 7

¹ The men of Ephraim were asked to join in warfare and they crossed to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, “Why did you cross over [*the Jordan*] and fight the Ammonites, and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house down with you in it.” ²³⁶ ² Jephthah answered, “My people and I had a great feud against the Ammonites, and when I summoned you, you did not save me from their power. ²³⁷ ³ When I saw that you would not save us, I risked my life ²³⁸ and advanced against the Ammonites, and God gave them into my hand. Why do you approach me today? Is it your intention to fight against me?” ⁴ Then Jephthah mustered all the men of Gilead and fought Ephraim because they had said, ‘You are deserters from Ephraim. ²³⁹ and Manasseh -- in the heart of Ephraim and Manasseh.’ ²⁴⁰ ⁵ The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan in their opposition to the Ephraimites. When any of the fugitives of Ephraim said, “Let me go over,” the men of Gilead would say to him, “Are you an Ephraimite?” When the answer was “No,” ⁶ they would say to him, “Say shibboleth” ²⁴¹ since at this time the Ephraimites were unable to pronounce “shibboleth” correctly. If the word was mispronounced they would then seize him and slaughter him. at the ford of the Jordan. Two thousand Ephraimites were killed there.

²³¹ Literally: “according to what has proceeded from your mouth.”

²³² Hebrew: “go down.”

²³³ For a woman to be married and bear children was a source of pride. To be childless was regarded as a misfortune. Jephthah’s daughter mourned that she would die before she could bear children.

²³⁴ Scholars question whether the writer gave approval to the vow and its results. It is written very carefully and as a result some scholars feel the writer did not agree.

²³⁵ This four day expression of sympathy for Jephthah’s daughter is not mentioned again in the Hebrew Scriptures. Jephthah must have realized the error in making his vow but he felt a sacred obligation that his vow must be fulfilled. The Hebrew story teller treats the story with powerful sympathy.

²³⁶ The Ephraimites felt not being called was an infringement on their honor. They demanded an immediate explanation and issued a threat – to burn Jephthah’s house and thereby also kill him. They wanted to take vengeance on the upstart Jephthah.

²³⁷ Literally: “and my people had a controversy with the Ammonites which was great.” One of the LXX recensions has “My people and I had a controversy when the Ammonites humbled us greatly.”

²³⁸ Literally: “put my life into my own hands.”

²³⁹ NIV: “you are fugitives and renegades from Ephraim and Manassah.”

²⁴⁰ The Hebrew is obscure.

²⁴¹ The meaning of the word was incidental. It meant “a head of grain.” The problem was the inability of the Ephraimites to say a Hebrew “Shin.” **X** As time went on the “Shin” could be pronounced in two different ways, determined by a dot over the right or left top corner of the letter. At this time the Ephraimites could not say “Shin” but would say “Sin.”

⁷ Jephthah led (*or, judged*) Israel for six years after which he died and was buried in the city of Gilead.

L. Ibzan 12:8 – 10

⁸ Following Jephthah, Ibzen of Bethlehem judged Israel. He had thirty sons and thirty daughters who were given in marriage ²⁴² outside the clan and thirty girls were brought into the clan to be married to the sons. ¹⁰ Then Ibzan died and was buried in Bethlehem. ²⁴³

M. Elon 12:11 – 12

¹¹ After Ibzan, Elon the Zebulunite became the judge of Israel and judged for ten years. ¹² Then Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried in Aijalon in the land of Zebulun. ²⁴⁴

N. Abdon the Pirathonite 12:13 – 15

¹³ Abdon, the son of Hillel, the Pirathonite judged ¹⁴ He had forty sons and thirty grand-sons. These rode seventy donkeys. He judged Israel for eight years. ¹⁵ Then Abdon the son of Hillel, the Pirathonite, died and he was buried at Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites. ²⁴⁵

<CHAPTER 13>

O, The Samson Tales 13:1 – 16:41 ²⁴⁶

1. Editorial Introduction 13:1

¹ The people of Israel did what the Lord saw to be evil and the Lord caused them to be dominated by the Philistines for forty years. ²⁴⁷

2. Samson's Origin 13:2 – 25

A. The Angelic Visitation 13:2 - 7

² There was a certain man from Zorah, ²⁴⁸ of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. His wife was unable to become pregnant, thus having no children. ³ The angel of the Lord appeared to the woman saying to her, “Be assured, though you have been unable to become pregnant, you will conceive and have a son. ⁴ Now be careful! Do not drink any wine or other intoxicant ²⁴⁹ or eat anything that is unclean, ⁵ for you will conceive and bear a son. No razor is to be used to cut his hair for the boy is to be a

²⁴² Literally: “sent outside the clan for marriage.”

²⁴³ This was a town in the south west corner of Zebulun, 10 miles from Megiddo, not the birthplace of Jesus. Cf.: Joshua 19:15.

²⁴⁴ The LXX has the name of the city in which he was buried as “Elon.”

²⁴⁵ The last phrase is not understandable. The translation is an attempt to deal with a difficult text.

²⁴⁶ It might be well for the reader of the Samson Tales to ask what might have been achieved if his enormous potential had been matched by spiritual qualities.

²⁴⁷ Scholars feel that the Philistines had begun to live in the Shephilah (the coastal plain – now called the Gaza Strip) shortly before the time of Samson. In part this was the reason for the Danites to seek a new area for their tribe, moving to the extreme north of the territory usually called Palestine. The scholars feel this migration of the Philistines from Cyprus took place from 1200 – 1160 B.C.E. Other scholars feel prior to 1500 B.C.E. was the date. Both groups of scholars feel their date also corresponds with the approximate date of Samson. The Philistines tried to make peace with their new neighbors through intermarriage. Samson's home, Zorah, was near the Israel - Philistine border.

²⁴⁸ Zorah was about 14 miles west of Jerusalem, on the original border of Dan. Cf. the previous foot note.

²⁴⁹ Drink made of juice, grain or honey.

Nazirite ²⁵⁰ from birth and he will deliver Israel from the domination of the Philistines.”
²⁵¹ 6 Then the woman came and told her husband, “A man of God came to me: his countenance being like the countenance of an angel of God, very awe inspiring. I did not ask him who he was, nor did he tell me his name 7 but he told me ‘You will conceive and give birth to a son, therefore drink no wine or other intoxicant or eat anything unclean nor cut his hair from birth until his death.’” ²⁵²

B. Manoah's Prayer 13:8

8 Manoah then entreated the Lord, saying, “O Lord, I pray to you, permit this man of God who had been sent by you to come again and give us information as to what we are to do on behalf of this boy who is to be born.”

C. Answer to Manoah's Request 13:9 – 14

9 God was attentive to the prayer of Manoah, and the angel of God came to the woman again as she was sitting in the field. But her husband, Manoah was not with her. 10 The woman ran to her husband and told him, “Look! The man of God who came to me the other day has again appeared to me.” 11 Manoah followed his wife and when he came to the man of God he said, “Are you the same man who spoke to this woman?” The man replied, “I am.” 12 Manoah then said, “When what you have said comes true, what are to be the boy's rules for his life? What is he to do?” 13 The angel of the Lord told Manoah, “All the instructions that had been given to his mother are to be followed by him. 14 She is not to eat anything that comes from the vine, nor drink any wine or intoxicating beverage, or eat anything that is unclean. She is to observe all that I have commanded!”

D. Manoah's Sacrifice 13:15 – 23

15 Manoah said to the angel of God, “Please stay and let us prepare a young goat for you.” 16 The angel of the Lord told Manoah, “If you want me to stay that is fine, but I will not eat your food, but you can prepare a burnt offering, and offer it to the Lord.” 17 Manoah then asked the angel, “What is your name? Then when your words come true we will honor you!” 18 The angel of the Lord replied, “Why are you asking my name? It is beyond comprehension.” ²⁵³ 19 Manoah then took a young goat along with an appropriate offering ²⁵⁴ and offered this on these rock, to the Lord for it is the Lord who works wonders. ²⁵⁵ 20 When the flame ascended toward heaven the angel of the Lord, ascended in the flame as Manoah and his wife watched. They then knelt down with their faces to the ground.

21 The angel of the Lord never appeared to Manoah and his wife again. What had taken place caused Manoah to know that this truly had been an angel from the Lord. 22

²⁵⁰ The KJV transliterated the word ‘Nazarite.’ Properly it should be transliterated as ‘Nazirite.’ A Nazirite is a person who has dedicated his / her life to God. Usually this is for a specific amount of time though in the case of Samson it was to be for his entire life. Cf.: Numbers 6. 4QJuda “a Nazirite for ever, all the days of his life.”

²⁵¹ NEB: “He will strike the first blow to deliver Israel from the power of the Philistines.

²⁵² Requirements for a Nazirite were no intoxicating beverages, permitting the hair to grow – uncut, and no physical contact with the dead. These requirements were, in this case, for life. Samson seemed only to be concerned about his hair. In the later chapters he is described as carousing, and deliberately having contact with the dead.

²⁵³ The Hebrew word is unique. “secret, wonderful, unknowable, mysterious, mystery, not to be uttered” are all attempts by translators to convey the concept. In the Middle East one's name was important. The name, it was felt, reflected the character of the one who bore the name.

²⁵⁴ The appropriate offering would normally be a cereal offering.

²⁵⁵ The Hebrew adds “while Manoah and his wife watched.”

Then Manoah said to his wife, “We will surely die! We have seen the Lord!”²³ His wife answered, “If the Lord had intended to cause our death he would not have accepted the burnt offering (and the cereal offering)²⁵⁶ which we prepared, or shown us these things, or announced such things as he has done.”

E. Birth and Inspiration of Samson 13:24 – 25

²⁴ The woman gave birth to a son and the boy grew and received the blessing of the Lord. ²⁵ The spirit of the Lord began to stir him, while he lived in Mahanehdan, which was located between Zorah and Eshtaol.

<CHAPTER 14>

3. The Women of Timnah 14:1 – 20

A. Samson’s First Love 14:1 – 4

¹ Samson went down to Timnah²⁵⁷ and there he discovered a Philistine girl²⁵⁸ ² so when he returned home he told his parents, “I saw one of the Philistine girls and I want you to get her for my wife.” ³ His father and mother²⁵⁹ said, “Is there no girl among our relatives²⁶⁰ here who would be a suitable wife? Must you go over to the uncircumcised Philistines to find a wife?” Samson told his parents: “Get her for me! She pleases me.”²⁶¹

⁴ His parents did not understand that this was the Lord’s doing, and he was using this girl as a pretext that he might go against the Philistines, for at that time the Philistines were ruling Israel.

B. Slaying of the Lion 14:5 – 9

⁵ Samson then went down to Timnah with his parents.²⁶² As Samson came to the vineyard of Timnah he saw a young lion which roared at him. ⁶ The Spirit of the Lord encompassed him and he tore the lion apart, only using his hands, as one might tear a young goat.²⁶³ ⁷ Then he went down [to Timnah] and spoke with the girl. She was the one Samson wanted.²⁶⁴ ⁸ Some time later²⁶⁵ he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion as well as combs of honey. ⁹ He scraped the honey out with his hand²⁶⁶ and then continued on, eating honey as he went, and when he reached his parents he also gave them some honey which they ate. However, he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the carcass of the lion.

²⁵⁶ Some scholars feel this is a later interpolation.

²⁵⁷ Timnah was about 4 miles south west of Samson’s home town. It was on the opposite side of the valley that also was near Samson’s home town. At this time there must have been trade and communication between the Israelites and the Philistines.

²⁵⁸ TCB: “A Philistine woman caught his eye.”

²⁵⁹ “And mother” is considered by some scholars to be a later interpolation.

²⁶⁰ REB: “among your cousins.” Literally: “brothers.”

²⁶¹ Literally: “she looks good to me.” This seems to be a disobedience of the commandment “Honor your father and your mother.” The reason for this apparent disobedience is explained in the next verse.

²⁶² The translation “his parents” is possibly a later interpolation. An unusual word is used in Hebrew.

²⁶³ CB: “So he split it open as one might split a kid, although he had nothing at all in his hands.”

²⁶⁴ Literally: “was right in Samson’s eyes.”

²⁶⁵ This must have been a considerable time later to have a swarm of bees have a comb of honey formed in the carcass of the lion.

²⁶⁶ Literally: “palm.”

C. *The Marriage of Samson 14:10 – 20*

¹⁰ His parents went down to the girl and Samson provided a feast, for this had been customary for the groom to do. ¹¹ When the people [*or, the Philistines*] saw him they brought thirty companions ²⁶⁷ to be with [*or, to watch*] him. ¹² Samson said to them, “Let me propose a riddle and if you can tell me its explanation during the period of this feast I will give you thirty linen belts (*or, cummerbunds*) ²⁶⁸ and thirty changes of festive garments. ¹³ However, if you are unable to give me its explanation during the period of this feast, you will give me thirty linen belts and thirty changes of festive garments.” They responded: “Propose the riddle, that we may hear it!” ¹⁴ Samson then said,

“Something to eat came out of the eater,
Something sweet came from the strong.”

They were unable to arrive at a solution to the riddle. ²⁶⁹

¹⁵ On the fourth day ²⁷⁰ they spoke to Samson’s wife, saying, “Coax your husband to explain his riddle. If you do not do that we will burn down your father’s house. Have we been invited here so that we should become impoverished?” ²⁷¹¹⁶ Samson’s wife cried when they were together and said, “You really don’t love me. You have given a riddle to my friends ²⁷² and haven’t even whispered the explanation to me.” He said, “I have not even told my parents. Yet you expect me to tell you.” ¹⁷ She wept ²⁷³ for each of the seven days and was so persistent that on the seventh day he finally told her the explanation. She then reported to her friends (*or, countrymen*). ¹⁸ On the seventh day the men of the city said to him, just as the sun was going down, ²⁷⁴

“What is sweeter than honey?
What is stronger than a lion?” ²⁷⁵

Then Samson replied, “If you had not plowed with my heifer you would not have found the explanation of my riddle.” ²⁷⁶ ¹⁹ The Spirit of the Lord again encompassed ²⁷⁷ Samson and he went down to Ashkelon ²⁷⁸ and killed thirty men of the town and took the spoils (*ie, the festal garments and lengths of linen*) from the bodies of those he had killed, giving them, in the heat of anger, to the thirty men. He then went home, to his father’s house. ²⁷⁹ ²⁰ Samson’s wife was given to the best man ²⁸⁰ as his wife. ²⁸¹

²⁶⁷ One of the two recensions of the LXX adds: “for they feared him.”

²⁶⁸ NEB: “thirty lengths of linen.” These lengths of linen were used as belts to bind the flowing garments close to the body so it would not be in the way and thus more comfortable. This linen belt could be folded in such a way that it would be a safe place to carry small items, thus making it a valued addition to the items of clothing that would be worn.

²⁶⁹ Cf.: ANET p. 231c.

²⁷⁰ So: LXX. Hebrew: “seventh day.”

²⁷¹ This sentence is found in several Hebrew mss and in the Targum.

²⁷² Literally: “countrymen.”

²⁷³ JB adds: “on his neck.”

²⁷⁴ NIV: “before he went into the bridal chamber.”

²⁷⁵ CEV: “The lion is the strongest. The honey is the sweetest.”

²⁷⁶ CEV: “The answer you have given me doubtless came from my bride.”

²⁷⁷ Literally: “rushed upon.”

²⁷⁸ Ashkelon was one of the five main Philistine cities, the farthest one from Timnah.

²⁷⁹ This was a “visiting marriage” without permanent cohabitation. A visiting husband was known, in Hebrew as “*joz musarrib*.” or, “visiting husband.”

²⁸⁰ Literally: “his companion.”

²⁸¹ CB: “to his rival who had been a rival to him.”

<CHAPTER 15>

4. Samson's Return 15:1 – 8

¹ After some time, at the time of the wheat harvest, ²⁸² Samson went to visit his wife, bringing a young goat, ²⁸³ and he said, “I will go in to my wife in the bedroom.” ²⁸⁴ However, her father would not permit Samson to enter. ² Her father said, “I sensed that your feeling toward her was truly hostile and so I gave her to your best man (*or, companion*). Her younger sister is even more beautiful, isn't she? Please take her instead.” ²⁸⁵ ³ Samson said, “This time I will be blameless when I do mischief against the Philistines!” ²⁸⁶ ⁴ Samson then went out and caught three-hundred foxes (*or, jackals*) ²⁸⁷ and tied the tails of pairs foxes together along with a burning torch. ⁵ Then he released them, allowing them to run through the ripe grain that was standing in the fields of the Philistines, burning the shocked and standing grain as well as the olive orchards [*and other trees*]. ²⁸⁸ ⁶ Then the Philistines said, “Who has done this?” They determined that it must have been Samson, the son-in-law of the Timinite, because he had taken Samson's wife and given her to Samson's best man (*or, companion*). It was then that the Philistines burned their house, and burned the bride of Samson and her father to death. ²⁸⁹ ⁷ Then Samson said to them, “If this is the way you act, I vow, I will wreak vengeance on you until my revenge is complete.” ²⁹⁰ ⁸ Samson killed Philistines with all his might. ²⁹¹ He stayed in the cleft of the rock Etam.

5. Samson's Arrest and Retribution 15:9 – 20

⁹ The Philistines then made a foray, making a raid on Lehi, and established a camp for their army in Judah. ¹⁰ The men of Judah said, “Why have you invaded us?” The reply was, “We have come to capture Samson and to treat him the way he has treated us.” ¹¹ Three-thousand men of Judah then went down to the cleft of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, “Are you not aware that the Philistines rule over us? ²⁹² What are you doing here? What have you done to us?” He answered, “As they have done to me – so I do to

²⁸² Wheat harvest in Israel would be the end of May or early June.

²⁸³ The gift of bringing the young goat was not just a device to remove resentment but a prescribed offering to be made by a husband in this kind of marriage.

²⁸⁴ This kind of marriage was called a “*Sadiga marriage*” since the bride remained in her parental home with visits from time to time by her husband. Cf. also footnote 279.

²⁸⁵ This is an admission by the girl's father of Samson's right to go into the bedroom, and also an admission of his guilt in giving Samson's bride to another man. The offer of the sister is perhaps because the parents realize that they acted in a hostile and improper manner, or that they were fearful of Samson's possible revenge.

²⁸⁶ TAN: “Now the Philistines can have no claim against me for the harm I shall do them.” TCB: “No one can blame me now for being ready to bring down trouble on the Philistines.”

²⁸⁷ The Hebrew word can refer to either foxes or jackals. Since foxes travel alone it would be quite difficult to capture three-hundred in a relatively brief time. Jackals travel in family groups and might be much easier to catch in larger numbers. NEB & REB both use “jackals.”

²⁸⁸ “And other trees” is added by the Targum. Burning a ripe crop was a common method of retaliation. Cf.: II Samuel 19:28 – 31. The wanton cruelty to animals cannot be understood.

²⁸⁹ It was easier to wreak vengeance on the girl and her father than to try to wreak vengeance on, or capture Samson.

²⁹⁰ TAN: “If that is how you act, I will not rest until I have taken revenge on you.”

²⁹¹ Literally: “hip and thigh.” The meaning is uncertain. CEV: “then Samson started hacking them to pieces with his sword.”

²⁹² MFT: “are our over-lords.”

them.”²⁹³ ¹² They said to him, “We have come to capture you that we may turn you over to the Philistines.” Samson replied, “Swear to me that you are not going to kill me.” ¹³ They said, “No. We will bind you with ropes and give you over into Philistine hands. We will not kill you.” So they bound him with ropes and brought him to the Philistines.

¹⁴ When Samson arrived at Lehi the Philistines shouted triumphantly as they met him. The Spirit of the Lord encompassed him powerfully, and the ropes that bound him became like flax that had been burned (*or, like tow*) and seemed to melt from his hands.

¹⁵ Samson found the fresh jawbone of a donkey²⁹⁴ and reached out to seize it and used it to kill one thousand men. ¹⁶ Samson said,

“With the jawbone of a donkey
heaps on heaps
for with the jawbone of a donkey
I have killed a thousand men.”²⁹⁵

¹⁷ When he had finished speaking he threw the jawbone away. That location is now called Ramath –lehi.²⁹⁶

¹⁸ He had become very thirsty and he called out to the Lord, saying, “You have granted me great deliverance by the hand of your servant, and now I will die of thirst, and then fall into the hands of these uncircumcised Philistines. ¹⁹ God caused a split to form in the hollow of a rock at Lehi, and water ran out. Having drunk some water his spirit revived. Because of this the name that has been given to this site is Em-hakkore,²⁹⁷ which is still its name at the time of this writing. ²⁰ He judged Israel during the days of the Philistines for twenty years.

<CHAPTER 16>

6. *The Prostitute of Gaza* 16:1 - 3

¹ Samson went to Gaza²⁹⁸ and seeing a prostitute and went in to her. ²⁹⁹ ² The residents of Gaza were informed: ³⁰⁰ “Samson has come here.” (The people of Gaza surrounded the place and lay in wait for him at the gate of the city all night long.)³⁰¹ They kept watch all night, saying, “We will wait and as soon as morning dawns we will kill him.” ³ Samson was with her until midnight, when he arose and as he was leaving the city he took hold of the doors of the city gate, hoisting them up, bar and all, and putting them on his shoulders and he carried them to the top of the hill which is near Hebron.³⁰²

²⁹³ In the fullest sense of the term the Philistines never ruled over Israel. They held an iron monopoly, since the Philistines were already in the Iron Age while the Israelites were still in the Bronze Age.

²⁹⁴ A fresh jawbone would be heavy and strong. A jawbone that had been subjected to the elements would become brittle and fragile.

²⁹⁵ There is a play on words in Hebrew with the words translated as “donkey” and “thousand men.”

²⁹⁶ The name means “Hill of the Jawbone.”

²⁹⁷ I.e.: “the spring of him who called.”

²⁹⁸ Gaza was the southern most city of the five Philistine cities. It was located 38 miles south of Zorah.

²⁹⁹ Samson’s strength was great but his morals were low.

³⁰⁰ Literally: “warned.”

³⁰¹ Some scholars feel this is a later interpolation.

³⁰² This would be a distance of 38 miles, mostly up hill.

7, *Samson and Delilah* 16:4 – 22

a, *The First Attempt* 16:4 - 9

4 After this he loved a woman who lived in the valley of Sorek, ³⁰³ whose name was Delilah. ³⁰⁴ 5 The tyrant rulers (*or, lords*) of the Philistines came to her and said, “Coax (*or, Seduce*) him and find out what the source of his great strength is. Then we will be able to overpower and subdue him, (*or, that we may reduce him to helplessness*) and we will each personally give you eleven hundred pieces of silver.” ³⁰⁵ 6 Delilah said to Samson, “Please tell me what the source of your great strength is, and how you can be bound and subdued.” ³⁰⁶ 7 Samson replied, “If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings ³⁰⁷ which have not yet been dried, I will become weak and be like any other man.” 8 The tyrant rulers (*or, lords*) of the Philistines brought her seven fresh bowstrings which had not been dried, and she bound him with them. 9 Delilah had men lying in wait in an inner room. She then called Samson, saying, “The Philistines are coming to capture you.” He snapped the bowstrings as easily as if they were tow that has touched ³⁰⁸ fire. As a result the secret of his strength was not revealed.

b. *The Second Attempt* 16:10 – 12

10 Delilah then said to Samson, “How shameful that you have mocked me and told me a lie! Please tell me in truth, wherein your strength lies, and how you might be bound.” 11 He then told her, “What is needed to bind and subdue me is that I be bound with new ropes that have never been previously used. ³⁰⁹ That will cause me to be like other men.” 12 Delilah then took new ropes and having bound him with them, said, “Samson, the Philistines are coming to capture you.” Men were again lying in wait in an inner room. Samson snapped the ropes as if they were a thread.

c. *The Third Attempt* 16:13 – 15

13 Delilah said to Samson, “So far you have just mocked me and told me lies! Now tell me about how you can be bound.” Samson said, “If you weave seven locks of my hair into the web and make it tight with a pin, ³¹⁰ I will become weak, as weak as any one.” 14 While he was asleep Delilah took seven locks of Samson’s hair, weaving them tightly into the web, and tightened them with the pin, and then she again called out to Samson, “The Philistines are coming to capture you!” Samson woke from his sleep and as he stood he pulled away the pin, the loom and web. ³¹¹ 15 Delilah said to Samson:

³⁰³ This was near Samson’s home in Zorah.

³⁰⁴ Delilah was no doubt a Philistine woman who had a Semitic name.

³⁰⁵ This enormous amount of silver greatly outweighed all considerations of love. The amount is rather odd, for it is not a rounded figure, evidencing their generosity.

³⁰⁶ TAN: “bind you and tame you.”

³⁰⁷ Bowstrings were made by twisting the intestines of an animal very tightly and then letting them dry prior to stringing them on a bow. Once dry they became less pliable and much stronger.

³⁰⁸ Literally: “smells.” The bowstrings were as weak, for Samson as a candle wick that has been burned.

³⁰⁹ Literally: “with which work has never been done.”

³¹⁰ This phrase is omitted in Hebrew. It is added to the LXX. “and pin me with a pin, to the web, and I will become an ordinary man. So Delilah put him to sleep with his head on her lap and wove seven locks of his hair into the web.” The “pin,” apparently, was used to beat the newly woven warp tightly, to form a quality piece of woven cloth. In later years a ‘heddle bar’ was used to tighten the warp. REB: “weave them into the warp and draw them tight with the beater.”

³¹¹ TAN: “Awakening from his sleep he pulled out the peg, the loom, and web.” The Hebrew is somewhat uncertain. It is clear, however, that Samson was not hindered by having his hair woven into the material that was in the process of being woven.

“How can you say, ‘I love you’ when your heart is not with me? Three times you have deceived me, not telling me the truth. I beg you to tell me wherein your strength lies!”

d. The Final Attempt 16:16 – 22

¹⁶ She kept nagging him with her words, day and night, and kept on pestering and cajoling him, until he was impatient to the point of death. ³¹² ¹⁷ He opened up and said, “A razor has never touched my head for I have been a Nazirite to God, being already dedicated as a Nazirite in my mother’s womb. If I were to have my hair cut I would lose my strength and I would be like any other man.”

¹⁸ When Delilah sensed that he really had confided everything to her she called the tyrant kings (*or, lords*) of the Philistines, saying, “Come at once! He has confided in me.” Then the tyrant kings (*or, lords*) of the Philistines came, personally bringing the money they had promised. ¹⁹ Delilah had Samson fall asleep on her knees and then called in a man (*or, a barber*) to shave his head. After that she began to torment him ³¹³ and his strength left him. ²⁰ She said, “The Philistines are coming to capture you!” He woke from his sleep and said, “I will go out as on the other occasions and shake myself free.” He did not know that the Lord had left him. ³¹⁴ ²¹ The Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes. They then brought him to Gaza and he was chained with bronze fetters ³¹⁵ and he ground flour [*at the prison mill*] ³¹⁶ ²² However, the hair on his head began to grow after it had been shaved.

8. The End of Samson 16:23 – 31

²³ The tyrant kings (*or, the lords*) of the Philistines all gathered to offer a great sacrifice to their god, Dagon, ³¹⁷ and to rejoice, for they said,

“Our god has given us Samson,
our enemy is in our hand.”

²⁴ When the people saw Samson they praised their god and said,

“Our god has given our enemy into our hands,
the ravager of our country who has killed many of us.”

²⁵ When their hearts were merry ³¹⁸ they said, “Call Samson, that he might entertain us. ³¹⁹ Samson was summoned and brought from prison and entertained (*or, was ridiculed by*) them. Later he was made to stand between two pillars. ²⁶ Samson said to the boy who had led him, by his hand, from the prison, “Let go of me and let me feel the pillars on which this temple rests, that I might be able to lean against them.” ²⁷ The building was filled with men and women along with all the tyrant kings (*or, lords*) of the

³¹² Samson was no doubt bored to death with Delilah’s ceaseless nagging and told all. As a Nazirite there was more to being a Nazirite than long hair but that seems to be the only qualification Samson seemed to feel was important.

³¹³ So: MT. LXX: “his strength began to weaken.” NIV: “so began to subdue him.”

³¹⁴ To find a sentence in the Hebrew Scriptures that is more sad would be difficult.

³¹⁵ The Hebrew word is a dual form. This might mean that both his arms and legs were fettered.

³¹⁶ TAN: “and he became a mill slave in the prison.”

³¹⁷ Dagon was a very old Mesopotamian god who was venerated already 25 Centuries B.C.E. He was brought to Syria and then to Canaan. In the past Dagon was considered to be a ‘fish’ god. This was thought because of the resemblance of his name to the Hebrew word for fish. Modern archaeology has rescued him from that traditional view. As a ‘fish’ god it was assumed that his origin was Cyprus, the original home of the Philistines, but there is no archaeological or written evidence of that.

³¹⁸ Literally: “their heart was pleasant.”

³¹⁹ The Hebrew word can be interpreted in several ways. TAN: “dance for us.” It could also mean “so we can make fun of him.”

Philistines, and there were three thousand ³²⁰ people who were able to look down into the atrium of the temple while Samson entertained (*or, was ridiculed*). ³²¹

²⁸ Then Samson called upon the Lord and said, “O Lord God, ³²² I pray that you will remember me and strengthen me. I pray that this time, O God, that I will be enabled to have vengeance against these Philistines for the loss, at least, of one of my eyes.” ²⁹ Samson held fast to two of the pillars, ones that were primary supports of the building, and he leaned his weight against his right hand and then against his left hand. ³⁰ Samson then called out, “Let me die with the Philistines.” Then he bowed with all his might and the temple crashed down on the tyrant rulers (*or, lords*) of the Philistines and all the people who were inside the temple. So those who were killed at the time of Samson’s death numbered more than all those he had killed during his life time. ³¹ His brothers and other family members then came down and brought his body back to be buried between Zorah and Eshtaol in the town of Manoah, his father’s home town. He had judged Israel for twenty years.

<CHAPTER 17>

III. Appendixes 18:1 – 21:25

A. Relocation of the Danites and the Origin of Their Sanctuary 17:1 – 18:37 ³²³

1. Micah’s Image 17:1 - 6

¹ There was a man from the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah. ³²⁴ ² He told his mother, “The eleven hundred pieces of silver which were stolen from you, about which you uttered a curse, ³²⁵ and also spoke about in my hearing: Be assured that I have the silver for I am the one who took it.” His mother said, “May my son be blessed by the Lord.” ³²⁶ ³ He returned the eleven hundred pieces of silver ³²⁷ to his mother, who then said, “I consecrate the silver to the Lord, for the benefit of my son to make an idol (*or, graven image*).” ³²⁸ ⁴ When he returned the money to his mother, his mother took two hundred pieces ³²⁹ to a silversmith and he sculpted an image (*or, a graven image*) ³³⁰ and also made a molten image, both of which were in the house of Micah. ⁵ Micah had a shrine ³³¹ and he made an ephod ³³² and some household gods. Additionally, he installed one of his sons to be his priest. ⁶ In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what they considered was right.

³²⁰ Several mss have “seven hundred.”

³²¹ NRSV: “performed.”

³²² In this sentence Samson uses three different names for God. Adonai, Elohim and Yahweh.

³²³ The main purpose of this first story in the Appendix is to explain how it was that the tribe of Dan had moved and established a sanctuary in the new location. In the LXX the text is disarranged.

³²⁴ JB: “Michaehu.” This spelling is found in the JB in vss 1 & 4. Micah is a shortened form of “Michaehu.”

³²⁵ I. e.: Cursing anyone who knew the whereabouts of the coins and did not declare it.

³²⁶ This statement was used to countermand the curse.

³²⁷ The silver weighed about twenty-eight pounds.

³²⁸ NAB adds: “a carved idol overlaid with silver (instead of a molten image).” The making of images was expressly forbidden in Exodus 20:4, 23; Deuteronomy 4:16.

³²⁹ This was about five pounds of silver.

³³⁰ This kind of image was usually made of wood and then covered with silver.

³³¹ Literally: “a house of gods.”

³³² An ephod was an apron like item of clothing to be worn by a priest.

2. Micah's Levite 17:7 – 13

7 A young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the tribe of Judah, who was a Levite, named Ben-gershom.³³³ 8 He had left the city of Bethlehem in Judea to live wherever he could find a suitable place. As he traveled he came to the house of Micah. 9 Micah asked him, "Where do you come from?" He answered, "I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to stay where I might find a welcome." 10 Micah said to him, "Stay with me and be a father and a priest to me and I will give you ten pieces of silver (*or, four ounces*) each year, along with food and clothing." 11 The Levite was content³³⁴ to live there and became like one of the members of the family. 12 Micah consecrated the Levite and he became the priest over the household of Micah. 13 Then Micah said, "Now I am assured that the Lord will cause me to prosper for I have a Levite as my priest."

<CHAPTER 18>

3. The Danite Spies 18:1 – 6

1 In those days there was no king in Israel. During that time the tribe of Dan was in search of more space to establish the tribe and provide land to be inherited by the tribe's families.³³⁵ 2 The Danites sent five qualified men to represent the entire tribe, residents of Zorab and Eshtaol, to reconnoiter the country and explore it. They were informed that they should 'Go, explore the land.' They entered the hill country of Ephraim, coming to the house of Micah and lodged there. 3 While they were at the house of Micah they recognized the accent of the young Levite and they approached him, saying, "Who brought you here? What are you doing here? What is your business?" 4 He told them what Micah had done for him by having him be Micah's priest. 5 Following that they said to him, "Please inquire of God for us whether this journey on which we are will be successful." The priest replied, "Go in peace. The journey you are taking will have the approval of the Lord."

4. Report of the Spies 18:7 – 10

7 The five men then left and came to Laish.³³⁶ The people who lived there led a carefree life, feeling secure, in the same manner as the people of Sidon. Life was tranquil and lacking nothing on earth, and possessing wealth.³³⁷ They, however, had no dealings or relationship with the Sidonites. 8 When the spies returned to their fellow Danites in Zorab and Eshtaol they were asked, "What is your report?" 9 They said, "Rise! Let us go against [*the people of Laish*]. We have seen the land which is very fertile! Do you just want to sit and do nothing? Why hold back and fail to enter and possess this land? 10 When you go you will come to a nation that is unsuspecting. The land is broad and will be conquered readily. Here is no other place on earth like it."

³³³ The favored reading is "named Ben-Gershom." Some scholars translate the Hebrew as "he stayed there."

³³⁴ The MT adds: "and he went."

³³⁵ An area was allocated to the tribe of Dan in Joshua 19:4 – 16 but they were apparently unable to take possession of the entire area. Additionally, the Philistines were claiming much of the tribal land for themselves. The situation finally was such that it was considered to be necessary for a new tribal land to be obtained by the tribe of Dan. As a result spies were sent out to seek a possible re-location of the tribe. A number of people from the tribe had already been absorbed into other tribes.

³³⁶ Laish was modern day Tell el-Qudi.

³³⁷ So versions. The Hebrew text is uncertain.

5. Response of the Danites 18:11 - 13

¹¹ Six hundred men from the tribe of Dan, armed with weapons, set out from Zorab and Eshtaol. ¹² They went up and encamped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. It is for this reason that this location is called Mahaneh-dan (*or, the Camp of Dan*). It was located just west of Kiriath-jearim. ¹³ From there they passed through the hill country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah.

6. Seizure of Micaah's Cultic Objects 18:14 – 20

¹⁴ The five men who had gone to reconnoiter the area of Laish, told their brothers, “Do you realize that in that house are an ephod, teraphim, a sculpted image and a molten idol? Now, a veiled threat should be sufficient to claim these for ourselves. ¹⁵ They turned aside and came to the house of the young Levite at the house of Micah, and inquired about his wellbeing. ¹⁶ The six hundred Danites, fully armed, stood at the gate. ¹⁷ The five men who had entered, and had been there previously when reconnoitering the area entered to take the sculpted image, the ephod, the teraphim, the idol of cast metal. The priest was standing with the six hundred armed men at the gate. ¹⁸ When the five men entered Micah's house and took the sculpted image, the idol of cast metal, the ephod and the teraphim, the priest asked, “What are you doing?” ¹⁹ They said, “Keep quiet! Hold your mouth shut! Join us and be a father and a priest to us. Is it better for you to be the priest for one man or to be a priest for a tribe within the family of Israel?” ²⁰ The priest was elated ³³⁸ and personally carried the ephod, the teraphim, and sculpted image as he went along with the people.

7. Pursuit of the Danites 18:21 – 26

²¹ They then departed, putting the little ones, the cattle and goods in front of them. ²² When they had gone a good distance from the home of Micah, men came from Micah's house and called out, for they had overtaken the Danites. ²³ They shouted at the Danites who then turned and said to Micah, “What ails you that you have come with such a company [*of men*]?” ²⁴ Micah said, “You took my gods which I made, and respect, and my priest. What do I have left? How dare you ask, ‘What ails you?’” ²⁵ The Danites said to him, “Don't raise your voice to us again or anger might cause some of us to attack and you will lose your life and the lives of everyone in your household.” ²⁶ The Danites went their way; and when Micah realized that they too powerful he returned home.

8. Capture of Laish 18:27 – 31

²⁷ Taking the things Micah had made as well as the priest who belonged to Micah, the Danites arrived at Laish, to a respecting and trusting nation and made war against them and burned down the city. ²⁸ There was no one to assist them since Sidon was far away and they had no treaty with Syria. This took place in the valley that belongs to Beth-rehob (*The house of the open place*). They rebuilt the city and it became their home. ³³⁹ ²⁹ The city was renamed Dan, after the name of the Dan who was born to Israel, but the previous name of the city was Laish. ³⁰ The Danites set up their sculpted image for themselves and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Moses ³⁴⁰ and his sons were the priests of the Danites until the time arrived when they went into captivity. ³¹ So Micah's

³³⁸ The lack of loyalty of the priest to Micah, after all that Micah had done for him, refutes all creditability on his part and exemplified the standards of the age.

³³⁹ After the conquest by the Danites the city was remained in Israelite hands until the conquest by Tiglath Pileser in 733 B.C.E.

³⁴⁰ Another reading would be “Manasseh.”

sculpted image was set up as if it had always been theirs, making their place of worship equal to the size of the house of God in Shiloh. ³⁴¹

<CHAPTER 19>

B. *The Offense of Gibeah 19:1 – 21:25*

1. *The Levite and His Concubine 19:1 - 9*

¹ In those days when there was no king in Israel a certain Levite sojourned in the remote area of the hill country of Ephraim. He had taken a secondary wife (*or, concubine*) from Bethlehem of Judah. ² As the result of unfaithfulness ³⁴² the secondary wife (*or, concubine*) left him and went back to her parental home in Bethlehem, Judah and remained there for four months. ³ Her husband then went with the intention of wooing her again ³⁴³ and bringing her back. He traveled with his servant and several donkeys. When he arrived she brought him into her father's house, and when her father saw him he came with joy to welcome him. ³⁴⁴ ⁴ His father-in-law urged him to stay and he was heartily welcome, remaining for three days. They regaled him with food and drink during his visit. ⁵ On the fourth day he rose early in the morning and prepared to go but the girl's father said to his son-in-law, "Strengthen (*or, fortify*) yourself ³⁴⁵ with a bit of food and after that you can still go." ⁶ So the two men ate and drank together and the girl's father then said, "Please spend the night and enjoy yourself." ⁷ When the men rose the following morning his father-in-law kept urging him to stay and he spent another night there. ⁸ On the fifth day he got up early, and when he prepared to leave, the girl's father again said, "Strengthen (*or, fortify*) yourself," so they lingered until mid-afternoon. and the two of them ate and drank. ⁹ As the man, his secondary wife (*or, concubine*), and his servant rose to leave the girl's father said, "Look it is late in the day, almost evening. ³⁴⁶ Stay and spend the night and enjoy yourself. Tomorrow you can get up early in the morning and then make your journey and get home." ³⁴⁷

2*The Return Journey 19:10 – 15*

¹⁰ The man, however, would not spend another night, so they left and arrived opposite Jebus ³⁴⁸ (*that is, Jerusalem*). He was accompanied by his servant, ³⁴⁹ his secondary wife (*or, concubine*) and two saddled donkeys. ¹¹ When they arrived at Jebus it was late in the day. ³⁵⁰ The servant said to his master, "Come, we could go into this Jebusite city and spend the night there." ¹² His master replied, "We will not turn aside to go into a city of foreigners who do not belong to the people of Israel; we will pass by it

³⁴¹ Jeroboam I, the king of Israel had the house of God in Dan enlarged. He also had a golden calf installed at Dan and Bethel to counteract the desire to go to the temple in Jerusalem as the place of worship.

³⁴² Hebrew literally: "played the harlot" The Hebrew is not exactly clear as to who was unfaithful: the woman or the Levite. LXX: "she became angry with him."

³⁴³ Literally: "speak to her heart."

³⁴⁴ Reconciliation would remove the disrepute that was brought on by the separation.

³⁴⁵ Literally: "your heart."

³⁴⁶ Literally: "the day is encamping." TAN: "it is past noon."

³⁴⁷ This passage has a mixture of single and plural words which make understanding it a bit difficult.

³⁴⁸ This was the city which later came to be known as Jerusalem. During this time it was a Canaanite city. It remained a Canaanite city until the time of the kings.

³⁴⁹ "His servant" is based on a slight emendation. Based on the distance that traveled they must have left Bethlehem at least three hours prior to sunset.

³⁵⁰ NEB translates the Hebrew as, "the weather grew wild and stormy."

and go to the city of Gibeah.”³⁵¹ He then added, “Let us move on toward Gibeah or toward Ramah and spend the night in one of them.”¹⁴ They then moved on and just as the sun was setting they arrived at Gibeah, one of the cities of the tribe of Benjamin.¹⁵ Turning aside they entered into the city. The man seated himself in the open square of the city, for no one seemed ready to take them in their home to have them spend the night.

3. *The Hospitality of the Ephraimite 19:16 – 21*

¹⁶ While waiting, an old man, an Ephraimite, was returning home from having worked in the field, because it was evening. He had been an immigrant into the city of Gibeah, for originally he stemmed from the tribe of Benjamin.³⁵² ¹⁷ He looked about and spied the wayfarer in the open square of the city and said, “Where are you going?? Where have you come from?” ¹⁸ The man replied, “We are passing through, having come from Bethlehem in Judea and are bound for the remote area of Ephraim which is my home. I had gone to Bethlehem in Judah³⁵³ and no one has taken me into his house. ¹⁹ We have straw and fodder for our donkeys and there is sufficient bread for me, my wife³⁵⁴ and the boy, which we can share with your servants. There is no need for any provisions.” ²⁰ The old man said, “Peace be with you! I will take care of all your needs, only do not spend the night in the market square.” ²¹ So he brought them into his house and provided mixed fodder for the donkeys. He also washed their feet and they ate and drank.

4. *The Rape of the Secondary Wife (or, Concubine) 19:22 – 26*

¹⁹ As they were enjoying themselves, the men of the city, evil fellows,³⁵⁵ surrounded the house, beating on the door,³⁵⁶ and they called out to the old man, the master of the house, saying, “Bring out the man who came with you that we may have intercourse with him!”³⁵⁷ ²³ The master of the house went out to them and said, “No! My brethren, do not act in such a wicked manner! This man has come into my house, Do not do this horrendous thing!. ²⁴ Here are my virgin daughter and his secondary wife (*or, concubine*). Let me bring them out and you can do whatever seems good to them. But: do nothing horrendous to this man.”³⁵⁸ ²⁵ The men would not listen to him. Then the man (*the Levite*) seized his secondary wife (*or, concubine*) and pushed her out to them. They gang raped her and abused her all night – and just as dawn was breaking they let her go. ²⁶ When dawn appeared³⁵⁹ the woman came, collapsing at the door of the house where her master was, lying there until full daylight had come.

5. *The Reaction of the Levite 19:27 – 30*

²⁷ Her master wakened in the morning and rose to go out and upon opening the door of the house, there was his secondary wife (*or, concubine*), lying there with her hand

³⁵¹ Gibeah was located four miles north of Jebus (*or, Jerusalem*), ten miles from Bethlehem. It’s modern name is “Tell el Ful.”

³⁵² The lack of hospitality on the part of the people of Gibeah is in sharp contrast to usual custom. Some scholars have felt that the Benjaminites were not as hospitable as the other tribes.

³⁵³ Literally: “to the house of the Lord.”

³⁵⁴ Literally: “your maidservant.”

³⁵⁵ Literally: “sons of Beliel.” NRSV: “a perverse lot.”

³⁵⁶ The Hebrew word is the *hithpa’el* form which is intensive. “hurling themselves against the door intent on breaking it down.” An ancient Ugaritic text speaks of an ideal son as “one who may drive away anyone who would molest his father’s night guest.”

³⁵⁷ This story is reminiscent of the story in Genesis 19,

³⁵⁸ Respect for women is glaringly absent.

³⁵⁹ Literally: “at the turning of the morning.”

on the threshold. ³⁶⁰ 28 He said to her, “Get up. It is time to get going.” There was no answer. He then put her on his donkey and the man traveled on, to his own house. 29 When he entered his own house he took a knife and holding on to his secondary wife (*or, concubine*), he cut her into twelve pieces, dividing her limb from limb, and sent the pieces to each the territories of Israel. ³⁶¹ 30 Everyone who saw it said, “Nothing like this has ever been seen (*or, taken place*) in Israel from the time that Israel came from Egypt until now!

Consider it! Take counsel and speak!” ³⁶²

<CHAPTER 20>

6, *Israel Gathers at Mizpah 20:1 – 7*

¹ All the people of Israel gathered: from Dan to Beer-sheba, including the land of Gibeah, assembling in total unity, in the presence of the Lord at Mizpah. ³⁶³ ² The chiefs ³⁶⁴ of each of the tribes of Israel presented themselves before the assembled people of God, four hundred thousand men who were physically fit to engage in warfare. ³ (The Benjaminites had heard that the people of Israel were mobilizing their forces at Mizpah.) The people of Israel said, “Tell us how it was that this criminal act occurred!” ³⁶⁵ ⁴ The Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered answered: “I came to Gibeah in [*the Gibeah belonging to*] in Benjamin, along with my secondary wife (*or, concubine*), ³⁶⁶ intending to spend the night. ⁵ The men of Gibeah rose up against me, and surrounded the house at night, intending to kill me, and they gang raped my secondary wife, (*or, concubine*) until she died. ⁶ I took her and cut her to pieces and sent her body parts throughout the entire country that is inhabited by Israelites, for an infamy has taken place in Israel that is an outrage. ⁷ The people of Israel are to be assured that this is where you are to give your advice and counsel.”

7. *Israel’s Decision 20:8 – 11*

⁸ All the people rose in unity, as if a single person, and said, “Not a single one of us will go to his tent or return home for we will besiege them. ³⁶⁷ ⁹ This is what we will do: we will choose lots and this will determine who goes into battle first. ¹⁰ We will take turns: ten men out of units of one hundred from all the tribes of Israel, a hundred from units of a thousand. The others will collect supplies, establishing a supply line to bring food during the battle when Gibeah is being punished (*or, paid back*) for the horrendous act done to the people of Israel, by Gibeah in Benjamin.” ³⁶⁸ ¹¹ All the men of Israel gathered against the city, acting in unison.

³⁶⁰ TCB: “with her hand on the door frame.”

³⁶¹ For a strangely similar story of an attempt to get Israel to unite see I Samuel 11:7.

³⁶² One of the two recensions of the LXX adds: “And he commanded the men whom he sent away with the pieces, saying, ‘You must say this to all the men of Israel: Has anything like this ever happened from the day when the children of Israel came out of Egypt until today? Think about it and speak!’”

³⁶³ Cf.: ANET p. 32b.

³⁶⁴ Literally: “cornerstones.”

³⁶⁵ Some scholars feel verse 3 is a later interpolation or an informative gloss. Others feel this verse should be between verses 13 and 14.

³⁶⁶ CB: “consort.”

³⁶⁷ An alternate translation might be: “Whether we live in tents or houses we will not go home until we have attacked. Let a selection be made as to who should be the first to join in the fight.”

³⁶⁸ An emendation would read, “for those who go to Gibeah.”

8. *The Ultimatum Rejected 20:12 – 17*

12 The tribes of Israel sent men through the entire tribe of Benjamin, saying, “What wickedness is this that has taken place in your midst? 13 Because of what has happened you are to surrender the scoundrels who live in Gibeah, who have committed this crime that we may kill them, and thereby banish this wickedness forever in Israel.” The Benjaminites, however, refused to accede to the voice of their brothers, the people of Israel. 14 The Benjaminites gathered from all their cities at Gibeah for the purpose of waging war against the people of Israel. 15 They immediately mustered an army from the cities of the tribe, totaling twenty-six thousand men who were able to do battle. The inhabitants of the city of Gibeah, however, mustered only seven hundred ³⁶⁹ men, all of whom were trained in warfare. 16 Out of the total men who were mustered, there were seven hundred select warriors who were left-handed, all of whom could sling a stone and hit a hair, never missing. 17 The men of Israel, with the exception of Benjamin mustered four-hundred thousand, all of which were highly trained warriors.

9. *Seeking Divine Guidance 20:18*

18 The people of Israel rose and went up to Bethel and inquired of God, “Which of us should be the first to go into battle against the Benjaminites?” The Lord said, “Judah is to go first.”

10. *The First Encounter 20:19 – 23*

19 Then the people of Israel rose in the morning and camped against Gibeah. 20 The men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin, and the men of Israel drew up the battle against them at Gibeah. 21 The Benjaminites sallied forth from Gibeah and on that day they killed twenty-two thousand men of Israel. 22 The soldiers of Israel then gained courage and rallied and again formed battle lines in the same place as on the first day.³⁷⁰ 23 The people of Israel wept before the Lord until evening when they inquired of the Lord, “Should we again draw near to wage war against our brothers, the Benjaminites?” The Lord said, “Go, attack them.”

11. *The Second Encounter 20:24 – 28*

24 The warriors of Israel again drew near to the Benjaminites on the second day. 25 Benjamin advanced from the gates of Gibeah and on that day killed eighteen thousand warriors of Israel, all of whom were trained. 26 Then all the people of Israel, including the army, went to Bethel and wept. They sat there before the Lord, fasting until evening, and offered burnt offerings before the Lord. 27 The people of Israel again inquired of the Lord (for the ark of the covenant of the Lord was there in those days, 28 and Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, ministered before it in those days.) They then asked, “Should we go to battle against our brothers, the Benjaminites, again?” The Lord replied, “Go, for tomorrow I will give them into your hand.”

12. *Third Encounter 20:29 - 36a*

29 Israel set an ambush around Gibeah. 30 The people of Israel again advanced against the Benjaminites on the third day and established their battle line before Gibeah as they previously had done. 31 The Benjaminites sallied out against the warriors and were drawn away from the city, as had been the case previously. As this was taking place the Benjaminites were enabled to kill thirty Israelites along the highway which led to Bethel and [*in the other direction*] to Gibeah as well as in the open country. 32 The Benjaminites

³⁶⁹ Omitted by the LXX.

³⁷⁰ Some scholars feel verses 22 & 23 should be transposed.

said to themselves, “They are routed again, just as in the first battle,” but the Israelites said, “Let us retreat and draw them away from the city and toward the roads.”³³ At that time all the men of Israel rose up³⁷¹ from the places where they had been hidden for the ambush so while the original attackers drew back to Baal-hammar, those who were hiding in ambush, rushed out across the plain (*or, west*) of Gibeah.³⁴ Ten thousand attacked Gibeah, all were battle hardened warriors of Israel, engaging in a fierce battle. The Benjaminites realized that disaster was at hand.³⁷²³⁵ The Lord defeated Benjamin before Israel and the men of Israel destroyed twenty-five thousand one hundred men from the tribe of Benjamin in one day in that battle.³⁷³³⁶ This caused the Benjaminites to realize that they were defeated.

13. Another Tradition of the Last Encounter 20:36b – 44

The men of Israel retreated from the Benjaminites because they relied on the men who were in ambush who were quickly deployed against Gibeah.³⁷ The ambush was hurriedly deployed and they massacred, giving no quarter.³⁸ Now it had been agreed with the first attackers and those in the ambush that when the first attackers saw a sizable cloud of smoke rising from the city³⁹ the men of Israel (*the first attackers*) would turn in battle. Benjamin had begun to think they were inflicting many casualties on the Israelites, killing about thirty. They thought, “This is certainly a repeat of the first battle.”⁴⁰ However, when the smoke signal began to rise from the city in a column the Benjaminites looked back and discovered that the entire city was going up in smoke.⁴¹ It was at this time that the men of Israel staged a counter attack and the men of Benjamin sensed defeat and destruction were at hand.⁴² They then turned away from the Israelites, fleeing toward the wilderness but the enemy overtook them. Those men who had been in the city came out and were massacred.³⁷⁴⁴³ The Benaminites were wounded or killed and their pursuers trod them down from Nohah³⁷⁵ to the eastern side of the region.⁴⁴ Eighteen thousand men from Benjamin were killed, all of them brave warriors.

14. Flight of the Benjaminiite Survivors 20:45 – 48

⁴⁵ The Benjaminites turned and fled toward the wilderness to the Rock of Rimmon. Five thousand warriors were killed along the highways while the rest were pursued as far as Gideon, and two thousand of them were killed.⁴⁶ As the result, on this day twenty-five thousand men were killed – all of them valiant warriors.⁴⁶ Six hundred men had fled and turned toward the Rock of Rimmon and lived there for four months.³⁷⁶⁴⁸ The men of Judah turned back against the Benjaminites and slaughtered them with their swords – people and animals and anything else that had survived. The other villages were also destroyed by fire.

<CHAPTER 21>

15. Mourning the Fate of Benjamin 21:1 – 7

¹ The men of Israel had vowed at Mizpah, “None of us will give our daughter to be married³⁷⁷ to a man from the tribe of Benjamin.”³⁷⁸² The people assembled at Bethel

³⁷¹ Literally: “burst forth.”

³⁷² Literally: “touching.”

³⁷³ This sentence seems to continue in v.45.

³⁷⁴ The Hebrew is somewhat uncertain.

³⁷⁵ So: LXX. Literally: “pursued them at their resting place.”

³⁷⁶ The location of the Rock of Rimmon was 4 miles east of Bethel, modern day Rummun.

³⁷⁷ Literally: “for a wife.”

(*or, the house of God*), sitting there until evening moaning and weeping bitterly. ³ They said, “O Lord God of Israel, why has this happened in Israel, that there should be one tribe lacking in Israel?” ³⁷⁹ ⁴ The following morning the people rose early and built an altar and offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings (*or, well being sacrifices*). ⁵ The people of Israel said, “Which one of the tribes failed to attend the assembly to the Lord?” They had taken a solemn oath ³⁸⁰ concerning any tribe that did not come to the Lord at Mizpah. This oath was: “That tribe will be put to death.” ⁶ The people of the land ³⁸¹ had compassion on Benjamin, for these were considered as their brothers and sisters, and said, “One tribe is to be severed from Israel today. ⁷ What can we possibly do to provide wives for those who have survived? We have sworn that we will not give them our daughters as their wives?”

16. Expedition Against Jabesh-gilead 21:8 – 12

⁸ They said, “Who is there among the tribes of Israel who did not come into the presence of the Lord at Mizpah?” No one had come to the assembled camp from Jabesh-gilead. ³⁸² ⁹ When the people were mustered, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead was present. ¹⁰ Those who had assembled sent twelve thousand of the most competent warriors and commanded them “Kill the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with your swords – men, women and children, ¹¹ You are to do the following: You are to kill every man woman and child. However all young women who have never had intercourse with a man are to live.” ¹² Among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead they found four hundred young virgins who had never had any sexual relations with a man. ³⁸³ These were brought to Shiloh which was in the land of Canaan. ³⁸⁴

17. The Embassy of Peace 21:13 – 15

¹³ The entire assembly then sent word to the Benjaminites who survived on Rock Rimmon and proclaimed that there now was peace. ³⁸⁵ ¹⁴ The surviving men of Benjamin then were given the four hundred virgins from Jabesh-gilead but these were not sufficient for the six hundred Benjaminites who had been at Rock Rimmon. ³⁸⁶ ¹⁵ The people had compassion on Benjamin because the Lord had caused a breach in the tribes of Israel. ³⁸⁷

18. Maidens from Shiloh 21:16 – 25

³⁷⁸ Some scholars feel verses 1 and 15 – 24 are from a different written or oral source and should be placed together at the beginning of this chapter.

³⁷⁹ Following the heat of battle the shattered tribal brotherhood needed to be restored. They realized that some vows were to be regretted for they were rash and ill-considered.

³⁸⁰ Literally: “there was a great oath.”

³⁸¹ “The people of the land” is a way of describing the general citizenry, not the leadership.

³⁸² Jabesh-gilead was about 45 miles northeast of Bethel and Mizpah where the assembly was to gather. The people of Jabesh-gilead and Benjamin had not intermarried. Cf. I Samuel 4. It was only through Rachel that there was any kind of link between the people of Jabesh-gilead and the tribe of Benjamin. Cf. I Samuel 11 & 31.

³⁸³ Literally: “known a man by lying with him.”

³⁸⁴ I.e.: west of the Jordan. Jabesh-gilead was east of the Jordan. While this account speaks of all the people, other than the 400 virgins, were killed; subsequent history speaks of survivors.

³⁸⁵ NEB: “to parlay with them, and peace was proclaimed.”

³⁸⁶ The Hebrew is somewhat uncertain. Literally: “did not find so.”

³⁸⁷ TEV: “the Lord had broken the unity of the tribes of Israel.”

¹⁶ Then the chief leaders of the assembly said, “What are we able to do for the warriors for whom there is no wife since there are no women remaining in the tribe of Benjamin?” ³⁸⁸ ¹⁷ They then said, “It is necessary to have wives for the remnant of Benjamin that have escaped, that the tribe will not be blotted out. ¹⁸ However, it is impossible for us to give them wives from among our own daughters. The people of Israel have made a vow: ‘Cursed is everyone who gives his daughter as a wife to any man of the tribe of Benjamin.’” ¹⁹ They then said, “Look – there is a feast of the Lord in Shiloh, which is near Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south to Lebonah.” ³⁸⁹ ²⁰ The Benjaminites were then commanded as follows: “Go and lie in wait for virgins in the vineyards of Shiloh, ²¹ and when the young women come out to dance, come out of the vineyards and seize one of them, one to each man who has no wife, and return to the tribal land of Benjamin. ²² When their fathers or brothers come to complain to you answer by saying, ‘Be generous toward us and permit us to have them; since we did not capture a wife for ourselves during battle. Also, remember, you incurred no guilt by giving your daughters to us.’” ³⁹⁰ ²³ The Benjaminites kidnapped their wives, according to the number of those who had no wife, and having abducted them they were carried off to rebuild the towns of Benjamin and they lived in them. ³⁹¹ ²⁴ It was then that the people of Israel departed, everyone going to his tribe and family, each one returning to his own inheritance.

²⁵ In those days there was no king in Israel. Every one did what seemed right to themselves. ³⁹²

³⁸⁸ MFT. “how can we save a nucleus for Benjamin to prevent a clan from being wiped out of Israel?” TCB” “caused a rupture in the tribes of Israel.”

³⁸⁹ Some scholars feel this is in conjunction with the Passover celebration. Other scholars feel it is related to the feast of the Tabernacles. The events described in Judges seem to fit the latter since the Tabernacles was a happy time with dancing. REB: “the pilgrimage in honor of the Lord.”

³⁹⁰ TCB: “Do us a favor for their sake, we didn’t capture enough women for every man during the battle, and this way you are not guilty because you did not give them anything willingly.”

³⁹¹ The men of Shiloh were powerless to do anything to undo this ‘fait accompli.’

³⁹² The writer / editor feels a king is the solution. History makes plain that this was not the final solution to providing morality.