EDIFIED EDITION

Judges

A modern rendering of the Holy Scriptures

21	618	Old	7
chapters	verses	Testament	book of 66

Contents

Chapter 1
Chapter 2
Chapter 3
Chapter 4
Chapter 5
Chapter 6
Chapter 7
Chapter 8
Chapter 9
Chapter 10
Chapter 11
Chapter 12
Chapter 13
Chapter 14
Chapter 15
Chapter 16
Chapter 17
Chapter 18
Chapter 19
Chapter 20
Chapter 21

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Numbered notes follow each chapter.

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Chapter 1

Judges 1 opens after Joshua's death. The LORD sends Judah up first against the Canaanites; Judah and Simeon defeat Adoni-bezek, take Jerusalem, Hebron and other towns, and Othniel wins Achsah as his wife by capturing Debir. But Judah cannot drive out the people of the plain with their iron chariots, and the chapter goes on to list tribe after tribe that fails to drive out the Canaanites, who stay on in the land, some as forced labourers.

[1]After the death of Joshua, the Israelites asked the LORD, "Which of us is to go up first to fight against the Canaanites?"

[2]The LORD answered, "Judah is to go up. See, I have given the land into his hand."

[3]Judah said to his brother Simeon, "Come up with me into my allotted territory, and let us fight against the Canaanites. Then I will go with you into yours." So Simeon went with him.

[4]When Judah went up, the LORD gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand, and they struck down ten thousand men at Bezek.

[5]At Bezek they came upon Adoni-bezek and fought against him, and they defeated the Canaanites and

the Perizzites.

6 Adoni-bezek ran, but they chased and seized him, and cut off his thumbs and big toes.

7 Then Adoni-bezek said, “Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my table. As I have done, so God has repaid me.” They brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there.

8 The people of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it. They put it to the sword and set the city on fire.[1]

9 Afterwards the people of Judah went down to fight the Canaanites living in the hill country, the Negev and the lowlands.

10 Judah advanced against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron, formerly called Kiriath-arba, and struck down Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmai.

11 From there they advanced against the inhabitants of Debir, formerly called Kiriath-sepher.

12 Caleb said, “Whoever attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will give him my daughter Achsah as his wife.”

13 Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, captured it, and Caleb gave him his daughter Achsah as his wife.

14 When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for the field. As she got down from her donkey, Caleb asked her, “What is it you want?”

15 She said to him, “Give me a blessing. Since you have given me land in the Negev, give me springs of water too.” So Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.[2]

16 The descendants of the Kenite, Moses’ father-in-law,[3] went up with the people of Judah from the City of Palms[4] into the wilderness of Judah in the Negev near Arad, and they went and settled among the people.

17 Then Judah went with his brother Simeon, and they struck down the Canaanites living in Zephath and devoted the town to destruction. So the town was called Hormah.[5]

18 Judah also captured Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron, each with its territory.

19 The LORD was with Judah, and they took possession of the hill country, but they could not drive out the people of the plain, because they had chariots of iron.

20 Hebron was given to Caleb, as Moses had promised, and he drove out from it the three sons of Anak.

21 But the Benjaminites did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem, and the Jebusites have lived with the Benjaminites in Jerusalem to this day.

22 The house of Joseph, for their part, attacked Bethel, and the LORD was with them.

23 The house of Joseph sent spies to Bethel, which used to be called Luz.

24 The scouts saw a man coming out of the town and said to him, “Show us how to get into the town, and we will deal kindly with you.”

25 So he showed them the way in, and they put the town to the sword but let the man and all his family go.

26 The man went to the land of the Hittites, where he built a town and called it Luz, which is its name to this day.

27 But Manasseh did not drive out the people of Beth-shean, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam or Megiddo and their dependent towns, for the Canaanites were determined to stay in that land.

28 When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labour but did not drive them out completely.

29 Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites living in Gezer, so the Canaanites lived on among them in Gezer.

30 Zebulun did not drive out the people of Kitron or Nahalol, so the Canaanites lived on among them, but became forced labourers.

31 Asher did not drive out the people of Acco or Sidon, of Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik or Rehob.

32 So the tribe of Asher settled among the Canaanites who lived in the land, having failed to drive them out.

33 Naphtali did not drive out the people of Beth-shemesh or Beth-anath, but lived among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land; the people of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath became forced labourers for them.

34 The Amorites pressed the Danites back into the hill country and would not let them come down into the plain.

35 The Amorites were determined to stay in Har-heres, Aijalon and Shaalbim, but when the power

of the house of Joseph grew, they too were put to forced labour.

36 The border of the Amorites ran from the Ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela and upwards.

1 Yet the Jebusites still held the city (1:21; Joshua 15:63) until David took it (2 Samuel 5:6–9).

2 Verses 10–15 retell Joshua 15:13–19.

3 Hebrew חֹתָן (choten); see the note at Numbers 10:29.

4 Jericho; compare Deuteronomy 34:3.

5 Hormah means ‘destruction’; see the note at Numbers 21:3.

Chapter 2

Judges 2 explains the pattern of the whole book. The angel of the LORD rebukes Israel at Bochim for making covenants with the people of the land, and the people weep. After the generation of Joshua dies, a new generation that does not know the LORD serves the Baals and the Ashtoreths. In anger the LORD gives them over to raiders and enemies; then, moved by their groaning, He raises up judges who save them. But whenever a judge dies they turn back to worse ways, so the LORD leaves the nations in the land to test whether Israel will keep His way.

1 The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim and said, “I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land I swore to give your fathers. I said, ‘I will never break My covenant with you,

2 and you shall make no covenant with the people of this land; you shall tear down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed My voice. What is this you have done?

3 So now I tell you, I will not drive them out before you. They will be thorns in your sides,[1] and their gods will be a snare to you.”

4 When the angel of the LORD had spoken these words to all the Israelites, the people wept aloud.

5 So they named that place Bochim,[2] and there they offered sacrifices to the LORD.

6 When Joshua had sent the people away, the Israelites went each to his own inheritance to take possession of the land.[3]

7 As long as Joshua lived, the people served the LORD, and also as long as the elders lived who survived him, men who had witnessed every great deed the LORD had done for Israel.

8 Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten.

9 They buried him in the territory of his inheritance at Timnath-heres,[4] in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

10 And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. Another generation grew up after them who did not know the LORD or the work He had done for Israel.

11 Then the Israelites did what was evil in the LORD’s sight and served the Baals.[5]

12 They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and went after other gods, the gods of the peoples around them, and bowed down to them. They provoked the LORD to anger.

13 They forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.

14 Then the LORD’s anger blazed against Israel. He handed them over to raiders who stripped them bare, and sold them to the enemies who surrounded them, so that they could no longer hold their ground against them.

15 Whenever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for harm, as the LORD had warned and as the LORD had sworn to them, and they were in great distress.

16 Then the LORD raised up judges,[6] who saved them from the hands of those who plundered them.

17 Yet they would not listen even to their judges, but prostituted themselves to other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned from the way their fathers had walked in obedience to the LORD’s commandments; they did not do as their fathers had done.

18 Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and saved them from the hand of their enemies as long as the judge lived, for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning under those who oppressed and harassed them.

19 But whenever the judge died, they turned back
and behaved more corruptly than their fathers,
going after other gods, serving them and bowing
down to them. They would not give up their
practices or their stubborn ways.
20 Then the LORD's anger burned against Israel,
and He said, "This nation has violated the
covenant I laid on their fathers and has not
heeded My voice.
21 I for My part will no longer drive out before
them any of the nations Joshua left when he died.
22 Through them I will test Israel, to see whether
they will keep the way of the LORD and walk in it
as their fathers did, or not."
23 So the LORD left those nations, not driving them
out at once, and did not give them into Joshua's
hand.

1 Hebrew 'they will be sides to you'; compare Numbers 33:55 and Joshua 23:13.

2 Bochim means 'weepers'.

3 Verses 6–9 retell Joshua 24:28–31.

4 Called Timnath-serah in Joshua 19:50 and 24:30.

5 The many local forms of Baal, the Canaanite storm god; the Ashtoreths (verse 13) were forms of his consort, the goddess Astarte.

6 Hebrew שֹׁפְטִים (shofetim), leaders who rescued and governed the tribes, not only judges in court.

Chapter 3

Judges 3 names the nations the LORD left to test Israel and to teach war to a generation that had not known it. Israel intermarries with them and serves their gods. The cycle then begins: the LORD sells Israel to Cushan-rishathaim, and when they cry out He raises up Othniel, on whom the Spirit of the LORD comes, and the land has rest forty years. Next Eglon king of Moab oppresses Israel for eighteen years, until the left-handed Ehud brings him tribute, stabs him in his upper room and escapes, then leads Israel to cut off Moab at the fords of the Jordan; the land has rest eighty years. After him Shamgar strikes down six hundred Philistines with an ox goad.

1 These are the nations the LORD left in order to
test Israel by them, all those Israelites who had
not known any of the wars of Canaan.
2 He did this only so that the generations of the
Israelites might know war, and teach it to those
who had not known it before:
3 the five rulers of the Philistines, all the
Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites who
lived in the Lebanon range, from Mount Baal-
hermon to Lebo-hamath.
4 They were left to test Israel by them, to find out
whether Israel would obey the commandments of
the LORD, which He had given their fathers
through Moses.
5 So the Israelites lived among the Canaanites,
Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and
Jebusites.
6 They took their daughters as wives for
themselves and gave their own daughters to their
sons, and they served their gods.
7 The Israelites did what was evil in the LORD's
sight. They forgot the LORD their God and served
the Baals and the Asherahs.[1]
8 The LORD's anger blazed against Israel, and He
handed them over to Cushan-rishathaim,[2] king
of Aram-naharaim; and for eight years the
Israelites were subject to him.
9 But when the Israelites cried out to the LORD,
the LORD raised up a deliverer for them, who
saved them: Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger
brother.
10 The Spirit of the LORD came on him, and he
judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD
gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Aram into his
hand, and he overpowered Cushan-rishathaim.
11 So the land had rest for forty years, until Othniel
son of Kenaz died.
12 Again the Israelites did what was evil in the
LORD's sight, and because they did what was evil
in the LORD's sight, the LORD strengthened
Eglon king of Moab against Israel.
13 Eglon gathered the Ammonites and Amalekites
to join him, and went and struck Israel, and they
took possession of the City of Palms.
14 The Israelites served Eglon king of Moab for
eighteen years.

15 But when the Israelites cried out to the LORD,
the LORD raised up a deliverer for them, Ehud
son of Gera, the Benjaminite, a left-handed man.[3]
The Israelites sent tribute by him to Eglon king of
Moab.
16 Ehud had made himself a double-edged sword
about a cubit[4] long, and he strapped it on his right
thigh under his clothes.
17 He brought the tribute to Eglon, king of Moab,
who was an extremely fat man.
18 When Ehud had finished presenting the tribute,
he sent away the people who had carried it.
19 But at the carved stones by Gilgal he went back
himself. “Your Majesty,” he said, “I have a private
message for you.” “Quiet!” said the king, and
everyone standing in attendance left the room.
20 Ehud came to him as he sat alone in his cool
upper room and said, “I have a message from God
for you.” And the king rose from his seat.
21 Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the
sword from his right thigh and plunged it into the
king’s belly.
22 Even the hilt went in after the blade, and the fat
closed over the blade, for he did not pull the
sword out of his belly, and the dung came out.[5]
23 Ehud slipped out by the porch, closing the doors
of the upper room after him and bolting them.
24 After he had gone, the servants came in and
found the doors of the upper room bolted. “He
must be relieving himself in the inner room,” they
said.
25 They waited until they were embarrassed, and
still he did not open the doors of the upper room.
So they took the key and opened them, and there
was their master lying dead on the floor.
26 While they were waiting, Ehud escaped. He
passed the carved stones and got away to Seirah.
27 When he arrived, he blew the ram’s horn in the
hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went
down with him from the hill country, with him at
their head.
28 He said to them, “Follow me, for the LORD has
given your enemies, the Moabites, into your
hand.” So they went down after him, seized the
fords of the Jordan against Moab, and let no one
cross.
29 At that time they struck down about ten
thousand Moabites, all strong, able-bodied men;
not one escaped.
30 That day Moab was brought low beneath Israel’s
hand, and the land was at peace for eighty years.
31 After him came Shamgar son of Anath, who
struck down six hundred Philistines with an ox
goad. He too saved Israel.

1 The poles or images of the goddess Asherah; see the note at Deuteronomy 7:5.
2 The name means ‘Cushan of double wickedness’, perhaps a mocking form.
3 Hebrew ‘bound in his right hand’. ‘Benjamin’ means ‘son of the right hand’, a pointed irony; compare 20:16.
4 Hebrew גֹּמֶד (gomed), a measure found only here; perhaps about 30 to 45 centimetres.
5 The meaning of the last Hebrew word is uncertain.

Chapter 4

Judges 4 tells how, after Ehud’s death, the LORD sells Israel to Jabin king of Canaan, whose commander Sisera has nine hundred iron chariots. Deborah, a prophet who is judging Israel, summons Barak and gives him the LORD’s command to take ten thousand men to Mount Tabor. Barak will go only if she goes with him, so she tells him the honour will go to a woman. The LORD routs Sisera’s army at the Kishon. Sisera flees on foot to the tent of Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite, who gives him milk, covers him, and drives a tent peg through his temple as he sleeps. So God subdues Jabin.

1 After Ehud died, the Israelites again did what
was evil in the LORD’s sight.
2 So the LORD handed them over to Jabin, a king
of Canaan reigning in Hazor. His army commander
was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim.
3 The Israelites cried out to the LORD, for Jabin
had nine hundred iron chariots and had cruelly
oppressed the Israelites for twenty years.
4 Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth,[1]
was judging Israel at that time.
5 She used to sit under the palm of Deborah
between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of
Ephraim, and the Israelites came up to her for
judgement.

6 She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh
in Naphtali and said to him, “Has not the LORD,
the God of Israel, commanded you, ‘Go, march to
Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men
from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun.
7 I will draw Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s
army, with his chariots and his troops, to meet you
at the Kishon River, and I will give him into your
hand’?”
8 “I will go if you go with me,” Barak told her, “but
if you will not come, neither will I.”
9 “I will certainly go with you,” she said. “But the
road you are taking will not lead to your glory, for
the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a
woman.” So Deborah got up and went with Barak
to Kedesh.
10 Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to
Kedesh. Ten thousand men marched up behind
him, and Deborah went up with him too.
11 Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the
Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses’ father-
in-law,[2] and had pitched his tent as far away as the
oak in Zaanannim, near Kedesh.
12 When Sisera was told that Barak son of Abinoam
had gone up to Mount Tabor,
13 Sisera called out all his chariots, nine hundred
iron chariots, and all the troops with him, from
Harosheth-hagoyim to the Kishon River.
14 Then Deborah said to Barak, “Go! This is the day
the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. Has
not the LORD gone out ahead of you?” So Barak
went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand
men following him.
15 The LORD threw Sisera and all his chariots and
all his army into a panic before Barak’s sword.
Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot.
16 Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far
as Harosheth-hagoyim, and all Sisera’s army fell
by the sword; not a man was left.
17 Sisera, though, had run on foot to the tent of
Jael, Heber the Kenite’s wife, since Jabin king of
Hazor was at peace with Heber’s clan.
18 Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him,
“Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me. Do not be
afraid.” So he turned aside to her into the tent,
and she covered him with a rug.
19 “Please let me have a little water,” he said to
her; “I am thirsty.” She opened a skin of milk and
gave him a drink, then covered him over again.
20 He said to her, “Stand at the entrance of the
tent. If anyone comes and asks you, ‘Is there a
man here?’ say, ‘No.’”
21 But Jael the wife of Heber took a tent peg and a
hammer in her hand, crept up to him quietly and
drove the peg through his temple into the ground,
while he lay fast asleep from exhaustion. So he
died.
22 Just then Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera,
and Jael went out to meet him. “Come,” she said,
“and I will show you the man you are looking for.”
So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera dead,
with the tent peg through his temple.
23 So on that day God subdued Jabin king of
Canaan before the Israelites.
24 And the hand of the Israelites pressed harder
and harder against Jabin king of Canaan until they
had destroyed him.

1 Or ‘a woman of Lappidoth’; the name means ‘torches’.
2 See the note at Numbers 10:29.

Chapter 5

Judges 5 is the Song of Deborah and Barak. It praises the LORD for the leaders who led and the people who volunteered, recalls how the LORD marched from Seir and the earth shook, and how the roads lay empty until Deborah arose as a mother in Israel. It honours the tribes who came to the battle and shames those who stayed at home. The kings of Canaan fought at Taanach, but the stars fought from heaven and the Kishon swept the enemy away. Jael is most blessed of women for striking Sisera down, while his mother waits at the window for spoil that will never come. So may all the LORD’s enemies perish; and the land has rest forty years.

1 On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam
sang this song:
2 “When the leaders took the lead in Israel,[1] when
the people offered themselves willingly, bless the
LORD!

3 Hear, you kings; listen, you rulers! I, I will sing to
the LORD; I will make music to the LORD, the God
of Israel.
4 LORD, when You went out from Seir, when You
marched from the land of Edom, the earth
trembled, the heavens poured, the clouds poured
down water.
5 The mountains quaked before the LORD, the One
of Sinai, before the LORD, the God of Israel.
6 In the days of Shamgar son of Anath, in the days
of Jael, the highways were deserted, and travellers
kept to the winding byways.
7 Village life[2] came to an end in Israel; it was gone,
until I arose, I, Deborah, arose to be a mother to
Israel.
8 When they chose new gods, war came to their
gates; not a shield, not a spear was seen among
Israel's forty thousand.
9 My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel,
who offered themselves willingly among the
people. Bless the LORD!
10 You who ride on white donkeys, who sit on rich
carpets, and you who walk along the road,
consider this!
11 Over the sound of the archers[3] at the watering
places, there they recount the righteous acts of
the LORD, the righteous acts of His villagers in
Israel. Then the people of the LORD went down to
the gates.
12 Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, break
out in song! Arise, Barak, and lead away your
captives, son of Abinoam!
13 Then the survivors came down to the nobles; the
people of the LORD came down to me against the
mighty.
14 From Ephraim they came, whose roots are in
Amalek; after you, Benjamin, with your kinsmen.
From Machir came down commanders, and from
Zebulun those who carry the marshal's staff.
15 The princes of Issachar were with Deborah; as
was Issachar, so was Barak, rushing into the valley
at his heels. Among the clans of Reuben there was
great searching of heart.
16 Why did you stay among the sheepfolds, to hear
the piping for the flocks? Among the clans of
Reuben there was great searching of heart.
17 Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan; and Dan, why
did he linger by the ships? Asher sat still at the
coast and stayed by his harbours.
18 Zebulun is a people who risked their lives to the
death, and Naphtali too, on the heights of the
field.
19 The kings came on to battle; the kings of Canaan
fought at Taanach by Megiddo's waters, yet they
took away no silver as booty.
20 The stars joined the fight from the sky; from
their paths they fought Sisera.
21 The torrent of Kishon swept them away, the
ancient torrent, the torrent of Kishon. March on,
my soul, with strength!
22 Then the horses' hooves hammered, with the
galloping, galloping of his mighty steeds.
23 'Curse Meroz,' says the angel of the LORD,
'curse its people bitterly, because they did not
come to help the LORD, to help the LORD against
the mighty.'
24 Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of
Heber the Kenite, of women in tents most blessed.
25 He asked for water; she gave him milk; in a bowl
fit for nobles she brought him curds.
26 She reached her hand for the tent peg, her right
hand for the workman's hammer. She struck
Sisera; she crushed his head; she shattered and
pierced his temple.
27 At her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still; at her
feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell,
done to death.
28 Through the window she looked; Sisera's mother
cried out through the lattice: 'Why is his chariot
so long in coming? Why are the hoofbeats of his
chariots delayed?'
29 The wisest of her ladies answer her; indeed she
gives herself the answer:
30 'Are they not finding and dividing the spoil: a
girl, two girls for each man; spoil of dyed cloth for
Sisera, spoil of dyed cloth embroidered, two
pieces of dyed embroidery for the neck of the
plunderer?'
31 So may all Your enemies perish, LORD! But may
those who love Him be like the sun when it rises
in its strength." And the land had rest for forty
years.

1 The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain; perhaps ‘when locks of hair hung loose in Israel’, a sign of a vow before battle.

2 Or ‘leadership’; the Hebrew word is rare.

3 Or ‘of those who divide the flocks’; the meaning is uncertain.

Chapter 6

Judges 6 tells how the LORD gives Israel into the hand of Midian for seven years. Midianites, Amalekites and eastern peoples swarm over the land like locusts each harvest, and Israel hides in caves. When they cry out, a prophet reminds them of the LORD’s deliverance and their disobedience. The angel of the LORD appears to Gideon threshing wheat in a winepress, calls him a mighty warrior and sends him to save Israel; fire from the rock consumes Gideon’s offering, and he builds an altar called The LORD is Peace. At night Gideon pulls down his father’s altar to Baal and the Asherah, and is named Jerubbaal. When Midian gathers, the Spirit of the LORD clothes Gideon; he summons the tribes and asks God for a sign with a fleece, wet and then dry.

1 The Israelites did what was evil in the LORD’s
sight, and the LORD gave them into the hand of
Midian for seven years.

2 The power of Midian bore down on Israel, and
because of Midian the Israelites made themselves
hiding places in the mountains, caves and
strongholds.

3 Whenever Israel had sown its crops, Midian,
Amalek and the people of the east would come up
and attack them.

4 They would camp against them and ruin the
produce of the land as far as Gaza, leaving
nothing to live on in Israel, neither sheep nor ox
nor donkey.

5 For they came up with their livestock and their
tents, as thick as locusts. They and their camels
could not be counted, and they came into the land
to lay it waste.

6 So Israel was brought very low because of
Midian, and the Israelites cried out to the LORD.

7 When the Israelites cried out to the LORD
because of Midian,

8 the LORD sent a prophet to the Israelites, who
said to them, “This is what the LORD, the God of
Israel, says: ‘I brought you up from Egypt and led
you out of the house of slavery.

9 I rescued you from the Egyptians and from
everyone who oppressed you; I drove them out
ahead of you and handed their land over to you.

10 I said to you, “I am the LORD your God; do not
fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you
are living.” But you have not obeyed My voice.’”

11 Then the angel of the LORD came and sat under
the oak at Ophrah that belonged to Joash the
Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was threshing
wheat in the winepress to hide it from the
Midianites.

12 The angel of the LORD appeared to him and
said, “The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.”

13 Gideon said to him, “Pardon me, my lord, but if
the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to
us? Where are all His wonderful deeds that our
fathers told us about, saying, ‘Did not the LORD
bring us up from Egypt?’ But now the LORD has
abandoned us and given us into the hand of
Midian.”

14 The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in this
strength of yours and save Israel from the hand of
Midian. Am I not sending you?”

15 “Pardon me, Lord,” he replied, “but how can I
save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh,
and I am the youngest in my father’s house.”

16 The LORD said to him, “But I will be with you,
and you will strike down the Midianites as if they
were one man.”

17 Gideon said to Him, “If I have found favour in
Your sight, give me a sign that it is You who are
speaking with me.

18 Please do not leave here until I come back to
You and bring out my offering and set it before
You.” He said, “I will stay until you return.”

19 Gideon went in and prepared a young goat and
unleavened bread from an ephah of flour.[1] He put
the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot,
brought them out to Him under the oak and
presented them.

20 “Lay the meat and the unleavened bread on this
rock,” the angel of God told him, “and pour the
broth over them.” Gideon did so.

21 Then the angel of the LORD reached out the tip
of the staff in his hand and touched the meat and

the unleavened bread. Fire flared up from the rock and consumed the meat and the bread, and the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight.

22 When Gideon saw that it was the angel of the LORD, he said, “Alas, Lord GOD! For I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!”

23 But the LORD said to him, “Peace be with you. Do not be afraid; you will not die.”

24 So Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it The LORD is Peace.[2] To this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

25 That same night the LORD said to him, “Take your father’s bull, the second bull, seven years old.[3] Tear down your father’s altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it.

26 Then build an altar to the LORD your God on the top of this stronghold, with the stones laid in proper order. Take the second bull and offer it as a burnt offering, using the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down.”

27 So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD had told him. But because he was afraid of his father’s household and the men of the town, he did it by night rather than by day.

28 When the men of the town got up early in the morning, there was Baal’s altar torn down, the Asherah pole beside it cut down, and the second bull offered on the newly built altar.

29 They asked one another, “Who did this?” After searching and enquiring, they were told, “Gideon son of Joash did it.”

30 Then the men of the town said to Joash, “Bring out your son. He must die, because he has torn down Baal’s altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it.”

31 But Joash said to all who stood against him, “Will you plead Baal’s cause? Will you save him? Whoever pleads his cause shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him plead for himself, since someone has torn down his altar.”

32 So that day Gideon was called Jerubbaal,[4] that is, “Let Baal plead against him,” because he tore down his altar.

33 Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and people of the east joined forces, crossed over and camped in the Valley of Jezreel.

34 Then the Spirit of the LORD clothed Gideon,[5] and he blew the ram’s horn, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him.

35 He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, and they too were called out to follow him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, and they came up to meet them.

36 Then Gideon said to God, “If it is really by my hand that You will rescue Israel, as You promised,

37 see, I am laying a woollen fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece alone and the ground all round is dry, then I will know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said.”

38 And that is what happened. He got up early the next morning, squeezed the fleece and wrung the dew out of it, a bowlful of water.

39 Then Gideon said to God, “Do not be angry with me; let me speak just once more. Let me make just one more test with the fleece: this time let the fleece alone be dry and let there be dew on all the ground.”

40 And God did so that night. The fleece alone was dry, and there was dew on all the ground.

1 About 22 litres (5 gallons).

2 Hebrew יְהוָה שָׁלוֹם (YHWH shalom).

3 The Hebrew is difficult; perhaps ‘your father’s young bull and a second bull seven years old’.

4 ‘Let Baal plead (against him)’.

5 Hebrew ‘clothed itself with Gideon’, as a man puts on a garment.

Chapter 7

Judges 7 tells how the LORD reduces Gideon’s army so that Israel cannot boast that its own strength saved it. The fearful go home, and of the ten thousand left only the three hundred who lap water with their hands are kept. By night Gideon, encouraged by a Midianite’s dream of a barley loaf that flattens a tent, divides his men into three companies with rams’ horns and torches hidden in jars. At his signal they blow the horns, smash the jars and shout, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!” The LORD sets the Midianites against one another and they flee. The Ephraimites seize the fords of the Jordan and kill the Midianite commanders Oreb and Zeeb.

1 Early in the morning Jerubbaal, that is, Gideon,
and all the people with him camped beside the
spring of Harod. The camp of Midian lay north of
them in the valley, by the hill of Moreh.
2 The LORD said to Gideon, “You have too many
people with you for Me to give Midian into their
hand, or Israel would boast against Me, ‘My own
hand has saved me.’
3 Now announce in the people’s hearing, ‘Whoever
is afraid and trembling may turn back and leave
Mount Gilead.’” So twenty-two thousand of the
people went back, and ten thousand remained.
4 But the LORD said to Gideon, “There are still too
many people. Take them down to the water, and I
will sift them for you there. If I say to you, ‘This
one shall go with you,’ he shall go with you; and if
I say, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ he shall not
go.”
5 So he took the people down to the water, and the
LORD said to Gideon, “Everyone who laps the
water with his tongue as a dog laps, set apart by
himself, and likewise everyone who kneels down
to drink.”
6 The number of those who lapped, putting their
hands to their mouths, was three hundred men; all
the rest of the people knelt down to drink water.
7 The LORD said to Gideon, “With the three
hundred men who lapped I will save you and give
Midian into your hand. Let all the rest go home.”
8 So the three hundred took the people’s
provisions and their rams’ horns, and Gideon sent
all the other Israelites home, each to his tent, but
kept the three hundred. The camp of Midian lay
below him in the valley.
9 That night the LORD said to him, “Get up and go
down against the camp, for I have given it into
your hand.
10 But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the
camp with Purah your servant,
11 and listen to what they are saying. After that
your hands will be strengthened to go down
against the camp.” So he went down with Purah
his servant to the outposts of the armed men in
the camp.
12 The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the
people of the east lay along the valley as thick as
locusts, and their camels were as countless as the
sand on the seashore.
13 When Gideon arrived, a man was telling his
comrade a dream. “I had a dream,” he said. “A
round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the
camp of Midian. It came to the tent and struck it
so that it fell, turned it upside down, and the tent
collapsed.”
14 His comrade answered, “This can be nothing
else but the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the
Israelite. God has given Midian and the whole
camp into his hand.”
15 When Gideon heard the dream and its
interpretation, he bowed in worship. Then he went
back to the camp of Israel and said, “Get up, for
the LORD has given the camp of Midian into your
hand!”
16 He divided the three hundred men into three
companies and put rams’ horns and empty jars
into the hands of all of them, with torches inside
the jars.
17 “Watch me and do as I do,” he told them. “When
I come to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do.
18 When I and all who are with me blow the horn,
then you also blow your horns all round the camp
and shout, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon!’”
19 Gideon and the hundred men with him reached
the edge of the camp at the beginning of the
middle watch,[1] just after the guards had been
changed. They blew the horns and smashed the
jars in their hands.
20 All three companies blew the horns and broke
the jars. Holding the torches in their left hands
and the horns to blow in their right, they shouted,
“A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!”
21 Each man stood in his place all round the camp,
and the whole camp ran, crying out as they fled.
22 When the three hundred blew their horns, the
LORD set every man’s sword against his comrade
throughout the camp, and the army fled as far as
Beth-shittah towards Zererah, as far as the border
of Abel-meholah by Tabbath.
23 The men of Israel were called out from Naphtali,
Asher and all Manasseh, and they pursued Midian.
24 Gideon sent messengers throughout the hill
country of Ephraim, saying, “Come down against
Midian and seize the waters ahead of them as far
as Beth-barah, and the Jordan too.” So all the men
of Ephraim were called out, and they seized the
waters as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan.
25 They captured the two commanders of Midian,
Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the Rock of
Oreb and Zeeb at the Winepress of Zeeb,[2] and

they pursued Midian. They brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon across the Jordan.

1 The night was divided into three watches; this was about ten o'clock at night.

2 Oreb means 'raven' and Zeeb 'wolf'. Compare Psalm 83:11 and Isaiah 10:26.

Chapter 8

Judges 8 tells how Gideon soothes the angry Ephraimites with a gracious answer. Pursuing the Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna across the Jordan, he is refused bread by the men of Succoth and Penuel, and on his return he punishes them. He kills the two kings to avenge his brothers. When Israel asks him to rule over them, he refuses: the LORD will rule over them. But he makes an ephod from the captured gold, and all Israel prostitutes themselves to it. After forty years of peace Gideon dies, and Israel turns again to the Baals and forgets the LORD.

1 Then the men of Ephraim said to him, "Why have you treated us like this, not calling us when you went to fight Midian?" And they quarrelled with him fiercely.

2 He answered them, "What have I done now compared with you? Are not the gleanings of Ephraim's grapes better than the whole vintage of Abiezer?

3 God has given into your hand the commanders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. What was I able to do compared with you?" When he said this, their anger against him subsided.

4 Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over, he and the three hundred men with him, exhausted but still in pursuit.

5 "Please give my men some bread," he asked the people of Succoth. "They are worn out, and I am chasing Zebah and Zalmunna, Midian's kings."

6 But the leaders of Succoth replied, "Have you already got Zebah and Zalmunna in your grasp, that we should feed your troops?"

7 Gideon said, "Very well. When the LORD has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will flail your flesh with the thorns and briers of the wilderness."

8 From there he went up to Penuel and made the same request, and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had.

9 So he said to the men of Penuel too, "When I come back in peace, I will tear down this tower."

10 Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with their army, about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of the whole army of the people of the east; a hundred and twenty thousand swordsmen had fallen.

11 Gideon went up by the route of the tent-dwellers east of Nobah and Jogbehah and attacked the army while it felt secure.

12 Zebah and Zalmunna fled, but he pursued them and captured the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, throwing the whole army into panic.

13 Gideon son of Joash came back from the fighting by way of the Heres pass.

14 He caught a young man of Succoth and questioned him, and the young man wrote down for him the names of the officials and elders of Succoth, seventy-seven men.

15 Then he came to the men of Succoth and said, "Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me, saying, 'Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your exhausted men?'"

16 He seized the city's elders and, using desert thorns and briers, made the men of Succoth learn their lesson.

17 He pulled down Penuel's tower as well and put the townsmen to death.

18 Then he asked Zebah and Zalmunna, "What were the men like whom you killed at Tabor?" "They were like you," they answered, "every one of them like the son of a king."

19 "They were my own brothers," Gideon said, "my mother's sons. As surely as the LORD lives, had you spared them, I would not kill you."

20 He said to Jether his firstborn, "Get up and kill them!" But the young man did not draw his sword, for he was afraid, being still a boy.

21 Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Get up and strike us yourself, for as the man is, so is his strength." So Gideon got up and killed Zebah and

Zalmunna, and took the crescent ornaments from the necks of their camels.

22 The Israelites said to Gideon, “Be our ruler, you, then your son and your son’s son, since you have rescued us from Midian.”

23 But Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you.”

24 Then Gideon said to them, “Let me make one request of you: let each of you give me an earring from his spoil.” (The enemy had gold earrings, for they were Ishmaelites.)

25 “We will gladly give them,” they answered. So they spread out a cloak, and each man threw on it an earring from his spoil.

26 The weight of the gold earrings he asked for came to seventeen hundred shekels of gold,[1] besides the crescent ornaments, the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian, and besides the chains on their camels’ necks.

27 Gideon made an ephod[2] from it and put it in his town, Ophrah. All Israel prostituted themselves to it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his household.

28 So Midian was subdued before the Israelites and did not raise its head again, and the land had rest for forty years in the days of Gideon.

29 Then Jerubbaal son of Joash went back to his own house and settled there.

30 Gideon had seventy sons of his own body, for he had many wives.

31 A concubine of his in Shechem also gave him a son, whom he called Abimelech.[3]

32 Gideon son of Joash died in ripe old age and was laid in his father Joash’s tomb at Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

33 As soon as Gideon was dead, the Israelites turned again and prostituted themselves to the Baals, and made Baal-berith[4] their god.

34 The Israelites did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies on every side,

35 nor did they show loyal kindness to the family of Jerubbaal, that is, Gideon, in return for all the good he had done for Israel.

1 About 20 kilograms (43 pounds).

2 A priestly garment used to seek God’s guidance (Exodus 28:6–30), or here perhaps an image.

3 ‘My father is king’, a name that hints at the story that follows.

4 ‘Lord of the covenant’, a god worshipped at Shechem (9:4, 46).

Chapter 9

Judges 9 tells the story of Abimelech, Gideon’s son by his concubine in Shechem. With money from the temple of Baal-berith he hires worthless men, murders his seventy brothers on one stone, and is made king at Shechem; only the youngest, Jotham, escapes. From Mount Gerizim Jotham tells the fable of the trees who sought a king and found only the bramble, and calls down fire on Abimelech and Shechem alike. After three years God sends an evil spirit between them. Gaal stirs Shechem to revolt; Abimelech defeats him, destroys the city and burns the tower of Shechem with a thousand people inside. Attacking the tower of Thebez, he is struck by a millstone a woman drops on his head, and has his armour-bearer kill him. So God repays the evil of Abimelech and of Shechem.

1 Abimelech son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem, to his mother’s brothers, and said to them and to all his mother’s family,

2 “Ask all the citizens of Shechem, ‘Which is better for you: to have all seventy of Jerubbaal’s sons rule over you, or one man?’ Remember that I am your own flesh and blood.”

3 His mother’s brothers repeated all these words about him to all the citizens of Shechem, and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, “He is our brother.”

4 They gave him seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-berith, and with it Abimelech hired worthless and reckless men, who followed him.

5 At his father’s house in Ophrah he slaughtered his brothers, Jerubbaal’s seventy sons, on a single stone. Only Jotham, Jerubbaal’s youngest son, was left alive, for he had hidden himself.

6 Then all the citizens of Shechem and all Beth-millo gathered and went and made Abimelech king by the oak of the pillar at Shechem.

7 When Jotham was told of it, he went and stood on
the top of Mount Gerizim and called out to them in
a loud voice: “Listen to me, citizens of Shechem,
so that God may listen to you!

8 One day the trees went out to choose a king and
anoint him. ‘Be our king,’ they said to the olive
tree.

9 But the olive tree said to them, ‘Should I give up
my oil, by which gods and men are honoured, to
go and sway over the trees?’

10 So the trees turned to the fig tree: ‘Come, be
king over us.’

11 But the fig tree said to them, ‘Should I give up
my sweetness and my good fruit, to go and sway
over the trees?’

12 Next the trees said to the vine, ‘Come and be
our king.’

13 But the vine said to them, ‘Should I give up my
wine, which cheers gods and men, to go and sway
over the trees?’

14 At last all the trees said to the bramble, ‘Come,
you be king over us.’

15 The bramble answered the trees, ‘If you truly
mean to anoint me your king, come and shelter
under my shade. If you do not, may fire burst from
the bramble and consume the cedars of Lebanon!’

16 Now then, did you act honestly and in good faith
in making Abimelech king? Have you done right
by Jerubbaal and his family, and given him what
his deeds deserved?

17 for my father fought for you, risked his life and
rescued you from the hand of Midian,

18 but today you have risen against my father’s
house, killed his sons, seventy men on one stone,
and made Abimelech, the son of his slave woman,
king over the citizens of Shechem because he is
your brother,

19 if, I say, you have acted in good faith and
integrity towards Jerubbaal and his house today,
then rejoice in Abimelech, and may he rejoice in
you.

20 But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and
devour the citizens of Shechem and Beth-millo,
and let fire come out from the citizens of Shechem
and Beth-millo and devour Abimelech!”

21 Then Jotham ran away and fled to Beer, and he
lived there for fear of his brother Abimelech.

22 Abimelech ruled over Israel for three years.

23 Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech
and the citizens of Shechem, and the citizens of
Shechem broke faith with Abimelech,

24 This was so that the crime against Jerubbaal’s
seventy sons might be avenged, and their blood
brought home to Abimelech their brother, who
murdered them, and to the men of Shechem, who
helped him murder his brothers.

25 The citizens of Shechem set men in ambush
against him on the hilltops, and they robbed
everyone who passed by them on the road. And
Abimelech was told of it.

26 Now Gaal son of Ebed came with his brothers
and moved into Shechem, and the citizens of
Shechem put their confidence in him.

27 They went out into the fields, gathered the
grapes from their vineyards and trod them, and
held a festival. They went into the house of their
god, ate and drank, and cursed Abimelech.

28 Gaal son of Ebed said, “Who is this Abimelech,
and what is Shechem, that we should be his
servants? Is he not Jerubbaal’s son, with Zebul as
his deputy? Serve the men of Hamor, Shechem’s
founder! Why serve Abimelech?

29 If only this people were under my command!
Then I would get rid of Abimelech. I would say to
Abimelech, ‘Muster your army and come out!’”

30 When Zebul, the governor of the city, heard
what Gaal son of Ebed had said, he was furious.

31 He sent messengers to Abimelech secretly,[1]
saying, “Gaal son of Ebed and his brothers have
come to Shechem, and they are stirring up the city
against you.

32 Now get up by night, you and the men with you,
and lie in wait in the fields.

33 In the morning, as soon as the sun is up, rise
early and rush upon the city. When he and the
people with him come out against you, do to him
whatever you can.”

34 So Abimelech and all the men with him got up
by night and lay in wait against Shechem in four
companies.

35 Gaal son of Ebed went out and stood at the
entrance of the city gate, and Abimelech and the
men with him rose from their ambush.

36 When Gaal saw the troops, he said to Zebul,
“Look, people are coming down from the hilltops!”
But Zebul said to him, “You are mistaking the
shadows of the hills for men.”

37 Gaal spoke again: “Look, people are coming
down from the centre of the land,[2] and one
company is coming by way of the Diviners’ Oak.”
38 Then Zebul said to him, “Where is your big talk
now, you who said, ‘Who is Abimelech, that we
should serve him?’ Are these not the people you
despised? Go out now and fight them!”
39 So Gaal went out at the head of the citizens of
Shechem and fought against Abimelech.
40 Abimelech pursued him, and Gaal fled; many fell
slain, right up to the gateway.
41 Abimelech stayed at Arumah, and Zebul drove
Gaal and his brothers out, so that they could no
longer live in Shechem.
42 The next day the people went out into the fields,
and Abimelech was told.
43 He took his men, divided them into three
companies and lay in wait in the fields. When he
saw the people coming out of the city, he rose
against them and struck them down.
44 Abimelech and the company with him rushed
forward and stood at the entrance of the city gate,
while the other two companies rushed on all who
were in the fields and struck them down.
45 Abimelech fought against the city all that day.
He captured it and killed the people in it, tore the
city down and sowed it with salt.
46 When all the citizens of the tower of Shechem
heard of it, they went into the stronghold of the
temple of El-berith.
47 Abimelech was told that all the citizens of the
tower of Shechem had gathered there.
48 So Abimelech went up Mount Zalmon, he and all
the men with him. Abimelech took an axe in his
hand, cut down a bundle of brushwood, lifted it
and put it on his shoulder. He said to the men with
him, “What you have seen me do, hurry and do the
same!”
49 So every man cut down a bundle and followed
Abimelech. They piled them against the
stronghold and set it on fire over the people
inside, so that all the people of the tower of
Shechem died, about a thousand men and women.
50 Then Abimelech went to Thebez, camped
against it and captured it.
51 But there was a strong tower inside the city, and
all the men and women, all the citizens of the city,
fled to it. They shut themselves in and went up on
to the roof of the tower.
52 Abimelech came to the tower and attacked it,
and went up to the door of the tower to set it on
fire.
53 But a woman threw an upper millstone down on
Abimelech’s head and cracked his skull.
54 He hurriedly called the young man who carried
his armour and said to him, “Draw your sword and
kill me, so that people will not say of me, ‘A
woman killed him.’” So the young man ran him
through, and he died.[3]
55 Seeing Abimelech dead, the Israelites all went
back to their homes.
56 So God repaid the evil Abimelech had done to
his father in killing his seventy brothers,
57 and God brought back on the heads of the men
of Shechem all their evil. The curse of Jotham son
of Jerubbaal came upon them.

1 Or ‘at Tormah’; the Hebrew word is uncertain.
2 Hebrew ‘the navel of the land’.
3 Compare 2 Samuel 11:21.

Chapter 10

Judges 10 briefly records the judges Tola, who judged Israel twenty-three years, and Jair of Gilead, whose thirty sons rode thirty donkeys and ruled thirty towns. Then Israel again serves the Baals and the gods of all the surrounding nations, and the LORD sells them to the Philistines and the Ammonites, who crush them for eighteen years. When they cry out, the LORD at first tells them to cry to the gods they have chosen; but when they put away their foreign gods and serve Him, He can no longer bear Israel’s misery. The Ammonites camp in Gilead, and Gilead’s leaders look for a man to lead them.

1 After Abimelech’s time, Tola son of Puah, son of
Dodo, from the tribe of Issachar, arose to rescue
Israel. His home was at Shamir in the Ephraim
hills.

2 For twenty-three years he led Israel as judge;
when he died, he was buried at Shamir.
3 After him came Jair the Gileadite, who judged
Israel for twenty-two years.
4 His thirty sons rode on thirty donkeys and
governed thirty towns;[1] in Gilead these are still
called Havvoth-jair.
5 When Jair died, he was buried at Kamon.
6 Again the Israelites did what was evil in the
LORD's sight. They served the Baals and the
Ashtoreths, the gods of Aram, of Sidon, of Moab,
of the Ammonites and of the Philistines. They
forsook the LORD and did not serve Him.
7 So the LORD's anger burned against Israel, and
He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and
the Ammonites,
8 who that year shattered and crushed the
Israelites. For eighteen years they oppressed all
the Israelites who were beyond the Jordan in
Gilead, the land of the Amorites.
9 The Ammonites also crossed the Jordan to fight
against Judah, Benjamin and the house of
Ephraim, and Israel was in great distress.
10 Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD, "We
have sinned against You, for we have forsaken our
God and served the Baals."
11 The LORD said to the Israelites, "When the
Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the
Philistines,
12 the Sidonians, Amalek and Maon[2] oppressed you
and you cried out to Me, did I not save you from
their hand?
13 But you have abandoned Me and worshipped
other gods, so I will not rescue you again.
14 Go and cry for help to the gods you have chosen;
let them rescue you when trouble comes!"
15 But the Israelites said to the LORD, "We have
sinned. Do to us whatever seems good to You, only
please rescue us today."
16 So they put away the foreign gods from among
them and served the LORD, and He could bear
Israel's misery no longer.
17 Then the Ammonites were called to arms and
camped in Gilead, and the Israelites assembled
and camped at Mizpah.
18 The people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one
another, "Whoever will begin the fight against the
Ammonites shall be head over all who live in
Gilead."

1 A play on words: 'donkeys' (עֲיָרִים, ayarim) and 'towns' (עָרִים).

2 The Greek has 'Midian'.

Chapter 11

Judges 11 tells of Jephthah the Gileadite, a mighty warrior and the son of a prostitute, driven out by his half-brothers. When the Ammonites attack, the elders of Gilead bring him back as their head. He sends the Ammonite king a long account of how Israel came by the land three hundred years before, and calls on the LORD to judge between them. The Spirit of the LORD comes on Jephthah, and he vows that if the LORD gives him victory, whatever comes out of his house to meet him will be offered as a burnt offering. He defeats Ammon, but his only daughter comes out dancing to meet him. She asks for two months to mourn on the hills, and then he does to her as he vowed; Israel's daughters commemorate her each year.

1 Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior. He
was the son of a prostitute, and Gilead was his
father.
2 Gilead's wife also bore him sons, and when they
grew up, they drove Jephthah out, saying to him,
"You will have no inheritance in our father's
house, for you are the son of another woman."
3 So Jephthah fled from his brothers and settled in
the land of Tob. Worthless men gathered round
Jephthah and went out raiding with him.
4 Some time later the Ammonites made war on
Israel.
5 When the Ammonites made war on Israel, the
elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah from the
land of Tob.
6 They said to Jephthah, "Come and be our
commander, so that we can fight the Ammonites."
7 "Was it not you who hated me and threw me out
of my father's house?" Jephthah answered the
elders of Gilead. "So why come to me now that
you are in trouble?"

8 The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, “That is
why we have turned to you now: come with us and
fight the Ammonites, and you will be head over all
of us who live in Gilead.”
9 Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, “If you
bring me back to fight the Ammonites and the
LORD gives them over to me, I will be your head.”
10 The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, “The
LORD will be witness between us; we will
certainly do as you say.”
11 So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and
the people made him head and commander over
them. And Jephthah spoke all his words before the
LORD at Mizpah.
12 Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of
the Ammonites, saying, “What is there between
you and me, that you have come to fight against
my land?”
13 The king of the Ammonites answered Jephthah’s
messengers, “Because when Israel came up from
Egypt, they took my land from the Arnon to the
Jabbok and to the Jordan. Now give it back
peaceably.”
14 Jephthah sent messengers again to the king of
the Ammonites
15 and said to him, “This is what Jephthah says:
Israel did not take the land of Moab or the land of
the Ammonites.
16 When Israel came up out of Egypt, they
journeyed through the wilderness as far as the
Red Sea and reached Kadesh.
17 Then Israel sent messengers to the king of
Edom, saying, ‘Please let us pass through your
land,’ but the king of Edom would not listen. They
sent also to the king of Moab, but he refused. So
Israel stayed at Kadesh.
18 Then they travelled through the wilderness,
went round the land of Edom and the land of
Moab, and came along 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
the Arnon was Moab’s border.
19 Next Israel sent envoys to Sihon, the Amorite
king who reigned at Heshbon, asking, ‘Let us go
through your country to our own land.’
20 But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his
territory. He gathered all his people, camped at
Jahaz and fought against Israel.
21 The LORD, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all
his people into Israel’s hand, and they defeated
them. So Israel took possession of all the land of
the Amorites who lived in that country.
22 They took possession of all the territory of the
Amorites from the Arnon to the Jabbok, and from
the wilderness to the Jordan.
23 So now the LORD, the God of Israel, has
dispossessed the Amorites before His people
Israel, and are you to take possession of it?
24 Will you not possess what Chemosh your god
gives you to possess? And all that the LORD our
God has dispossessed before us, we will possess.
25 Are you any better than Balak son of Zippor,
king of Moab? Did he ever quarrel with Israel or
fight against them?
26 While Israel lived in Heshbon and its villages, in
Aroer and its villages, and in all the towns along
the Arnon for three hundred years, why did you
not take them back during that time?
27 I have not sinned against you, but you are doing
me wrong by making war on me. Let the LORD,
the Judge, decide today between the Israelites and
the Ammonites.”
28 But the king of the Ammonites paid no attention
to the message Jephthah sent him.
29 Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Jephthah.
He passed through Gilead and Manasseh, passed
on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead
he advanced against the Ammonites.
30 Jephthah made a vow to the LORD: “If You will
indeed give the Ammonites into my hand,
31 whatever comes out of my house first to meet
me, when I come home safely from the
Ammonites, shall belong to the LORD, and I will
sacrifice it as a burnt offering.”[1]
32 So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to
fight against them, and the LORD gave them into
his hand.
33 He struck them from Aroer to the
neighbourhood of Minnith, twenty towns, and as
far as Abel-keramim, with a very great slaughter.
So the Ammonites were subdued before the
Israelites.
34 When Jephthah came home to Mizpah, there
was his daughter coming out to meet him with
tambourines and dancing! She was his only child;
apart from her he had neither son nor daughter.

35 As soon as he saw her he tore his clothes. “Oh, my daughter!” he cried. “You have crushed me; you have brought disaster on me. I have made a promise to the LORD that I cannot take back.”

36 She said to him, “My father, you have opened your mouth to the LORD. Do to me as you have said, now that the LORD has taken vengeance for you on your enemies, the Ammonites.”

37 And she said to her father, “Let this one thing be done for me: let me alone for two months, so that I may go and wander on the hills and weep for my virginity, I and my companions.”

38 “Go,” he said, and he let her go for two months. She went with her companions and wept on the hills for her virginity.

39 At the end of two months she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed. She had never known a man. And it became a custom in Israel

40 that year by year the daughters of Israel go out for four days to commemorate[2] the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

1 Or ‘whoever’; the Hebrew can mean either.

2 Or ‘to lament’; the Hebrew word is rare. Jephthah is among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11:32.

Chapter 12

Judges 12 tells how the Ephraimites, angry that Jephthah fought Ammon without them, threaten to burn his house. Jephthah answers that he called them and they did not come, and the men of Gilead defeat Ephraim and hold the fords of the Jordan. Every fugitive who says he is not an Ephraimite is told to say “Shibboleth”; those who say “Sibboleth” are killed, forty-two thousand in all. After Jephthah’s six years come the minor judges Ibzan of Bethlehem, Elon the Zebulunite and Abdon son of Hillel.

1 The men of Ephraim were called out; they crossed to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, “Why did you cross over to fight the Ammonites without calling us to go with you? We will burn your house down over your head!”

2 Jephthah said to them, “I and my people were in a great struggle with the Ammonites. I called you, but you did not save me from their hand.

3 When I saw that you would not save me, I took my life in my hands and crossed over against the Ammonites, and the LORD gave them into my hand. Why then have you come up against me today to fight me?”

4 Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. The men of Gilead struck Ephraim down, because the Ephraimites had said, “You Gileadites are fugitives from Ephraim, living in Ephraim and Manasseh.”[1]

5 The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan against Ephraim. Whenever a fugitive from Ephraim said, “Let me cross,” the men of Gilead would ask him, “Are you an Ephraimite?” If he said, “No,”

6 they said to him, “Then say ‘Shibboleth’.” If he said “Sibboleth”, because he could not pronounce it right, they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan.[2] Forty-two thousand of Ephraim fell at that time.

7 For six years Jephthah judged Israel. Then he died, Jephthah of Gilead, and was buried in a town of Gilead.[3]

8 Ibzan of Bethlehem was the next to judge Israel.

9 He had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He gave his daughters in marriage outside his clan and brought in thirty young women from outside for his sons. He judged Israel seven years.

10 Then Ibzan died and was buried in Bethlehem.

11 Next Elon of Zebulun led Israel as judge, for ten years.

12 When Elon of Zebulun died, he was buried at Aijalon, in Zebulun’s territory.

13 After him Abdon son of Hillel, from Pirathon, judged Israel.

14 He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy donkeys. He judged Israel eight years.

15 When Abdon son of Hillel of Pirathon died, he was buried at Pirathon in Ephraim’s territory, in the Amalekite hill country.

1 The meaning of the taunt is uncertain.

2 Shibboleth means ‘ear of grain’ or ‘flowing stream’; the Ephraimites could not make the ‘sh’ sound.

3 So the Greek; the Hebrew has ‘in the towns of Gilead’.

Chapter 13

Judges 13 tells of Samson’s birth. Israel again does evil, and the LORD gives them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years. The angel of the LORD appears to the barren wife of Manoah, a Danite of Zorah, and promises her a son who is to be a Nazirite to God from birth and will begin to save Israel from the Philistines. Manoah prays for the man of God to return, and asks what the boy’s way of life is to be. The angel will not eat with them or give his name, which is “wonderful”, but ascends in the flame of their offering. Manoah fears they will die for having seen God, but his wife reasons otherwise. The boy is named Samson, the LORD blesses him, and the Spirit of the LORD begins to stir him.

1 Again the Israelites did what was evil in the LORD’s sight, and the LORD gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.

2 There was a man of Zorah, of the clan of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. His wife was barren and had borne no children.

3 The angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, “You are barren and have borne no children, but you will conceive and bear a son.

4 So now be careful to drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean,

5 for you will conceive and bear a son. No razor is to touch his head, for the boy is to be a Nazirite to God from the womb,[1] and he will begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.”

6 The woman went and told her husband, “A man of God came to me. He looked like the angel of God, very awesome. I did not ask him where he came from, and he did not tell me his name.

7 He told me, ‘You are going to conceive and give birth to a son. So from now on no wine, no strong drink, and nothing unclean, because the boy will be God’s Nazirite from his birth until the day he dies.’”

8 Then Manoah prayed to the LORD, “Please, Lord, let the man of God You sent come to us again and teach us what we are to do for the boy who is to be born.”

9 God heard Manoah’s prayer, and the angel of God came to the woman once more while she was sitting out in the field; her husband Manoah was not there with her.

10 The woman ran quickly and told her husband, “The man who came to me the other day has appeared to me!”

11 Manoah got up and followed his wife. When he came to the man, he said to him, “Are you the man who spoke to my wife?” “I am,” he said.

12 Manoah said, “Now when your words come true, what is to be the boy’s way of life, and what is he to do?”

13 The angel of the LORD said to Manoah, “The woman must take care to do all I told her.

14 She must not eat anything that comes from the vine, nor drink wine or strong drink, nor eat anything unclean. She must keep all that I commanded her.”

15 Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, “Please let us keep you here and prepare a young goat for you.”

16 The angel of the LORD said to Manoah, “Even if you keep me here, I will not eat your food. But if you prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the LORD.” (Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the LORD.)

17 Then Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, “What is your name, so that we may honour you when your words come true?”

18 But the angel of the LORD said to him, “Why do you ask my name? It is wonderful.”[2]

19 So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering and offered it on the rock to the LORD. And He did a wonderful thing while Manoah and his wife looked on.

20 As the flame went up from the altar towards heaven, the angel of the LORD went up in the flame of the altar. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell face down to the ground.

21 The angel of the LORD did not appear again to Manoah and his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the LORD.

22 “We are bound to die,” Manoah said to his wife,
“because we have seen God!”
23 But his wife said to him, “If the LORD had meant
to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt
offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor
shown us all these things, nor now told us such
things as these.”
24 The woman bore a son and named him Samson.[3]
The boy grew, and the LORD blessed him.
25 And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him in
Mahaneh-dan,[4] between Zorah and Eshtaol.

1 See Numbers 6:1–21. Compare Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11) and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15).

2 Hebrew פֶּלְאִי (peli), ‘beyond understanding’; compare Isaiah 9:6 and Genesis 32:29.

3 Perhaps from שֶׁמֶשׁ (shemesh), ‘sun’.

4 ‘The camp of Dan’; compare 18:12.

Chapter 14

Judges 14 tells how Samson sees a Philistine woman at Timnah and insists on marrying her, not knowing that the LORD is seeking an occasion against the Philistines. On the way the Spirit of the LORD rushes on him and he tears a young lion apart with his bare hands; later he finds bees and honey in its carcass. At the wedding feast he sets the thirty Philistine companions a riddle about the eater and the strong. They threaten his bride until she coaxes the answer from him, and Samson pays his wager by striking down thirty men of Ashkelon. In anger he goes home, and his wife is given to his companion.

1 Samson went down to Timnah, and there he saw
a woman, one of the Philistine women.
2 He came back and told his father and mother, “I
have seen a woman in Timnah, one of the
Philistine women. Now get her for me as my wife.”
3 His father and mother said to him, “Is there no
woman among your kinsmen or among all our
people, that you must go and take a wife from the
uncircumcised Philistines?” But Samson said to
his father, “Get her for me, for she is right in my
eyes.”
4 His father and mother did not know that this was
from the LORD, who was seeking an occasion
against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines
ruled over Israel.
5 Samson went down with his father and mother to
Timnah. As they came to the vineyards of Timnah,
a young lion came roaring towards him.
6 The Spirit of the LORD rushed on him, and he
tore the lion apart with his bare hands as one
tears a young goat. But he did not tell his father or
mother what he had done.
7 Then he went down and talked with the woman,
and she was right in Samson’s eyes.
8 Some time later, when he went back to take her,
he turned aside to look at the lion’s carcass, and
there was a swarm of bees in the lion’s body, and
honey.
9 He scooped it out into his hands and went on,
eating as he went. When he came to his father and
mother, he gave them some, and they ate it. But
he did not tell them he had scooped the honey
from the lion’s carcass.[1]
10 Then his father went down to see the woman,
and Samson gave a feast there, as was the custom
for bridegrooms.
11 When the people saw him, they chose thirty
young men to keep him company.
12 “Let me put a riddle to you,” Samson said. “If
you can solve it for me before the seven days of
the feast are over, I will give you thirty linen
garments and thirty sets of clothes.
13 But if you cannot tell me, then you shall give me
thirty linen garments and thirty changes of
clothes.” They said to him, “Tell your riddle; let us
hear it.”
14 He said to them, “Out of the eater came
something to eat; out of the strong came
something sweet.” For three days they could not
solve the riddle.
15 On the seventh day[2] they said to Samson’s wife,
“Coax your husband into telling us the riddle, or
we will burn you and your father’s house with fire.
Did you invite us here to rob us?”
16 So Samson’s wife wept over him and said, “You
only hate me; you do not love me. You have told
my people a riddle and have not told me the

answer.” He said to her, “I have not told even my father or my mother. Why should I tell you?”

17 She wept over him for the seven days of the feast, and on the seventh day he told her, because she pressed him so hard. Then she told the riddle to her people.

18 Before sunset on the seventh day the men of the town came to him with the answer: “What is sweeter than honey, and what is stronger than a lion?” He replied, “Had you not ploughed with my heifer, you would never have solved my riddle.”

19 Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed on him. He went down to Ashkelon, struck down thirty of their men, took their spoil, and gave the changes of clothes to those who had solved the riddle. In hot anger he went back to his father’s house.

20 And Samson’s wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man.

1 Touching a dead body broke the Nazirite vow (Numbers 6:6).

2 So the Hebrew; the Greek and Syriac have ‘fourth’.

Chapter 15

Judges 15 tells how Samson, finding his wife given to another man, takes revenge on the Philistines by tying torches to the tails of three hundred foxes and burning their grain, vineyards and olive groves. The Philistines burn his wife and her father, and Samson strikes them down. When the Philistines come against Judah, three thousand men of Judah bind Samson with new ropes and hand him over, but the Spirit of the LORD rushes on him, the ropes melt from his arms, and he kills a thousand men with the fresh jawbone of a donkey. Afterwards, dying of thirst, he calls on the LORD, who splits open a hollow and gives him water. Samson judges Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

1 Some time later, at the time of the wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife, taking a young goat. He said, “I will go in to my wife in her room.” But her father would not let him go in.

2 Her father said, “I was sure you hated her, so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she is? Please take her instead.”

3 Samson said to them, “This time I will be blameless towards the Philistines when I do them harm.”

4 So Samson went and caught three hundred foxes.[1] He took torches, turned the foxes tail to tail, and fastened a torch between each pair of tails.

5 When he had set the torches alight, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines and burned up the stacked grain and the standing grain, the vineyards and the olive groves.

6 The Philistines asked, “Who did this?” They were told, “Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he took his wife and gave her to his companion.” So the Philistines went up and burned her and her father with fire.

7 Samson said to them, “Since this is how you act, I swear I will be avenged on you, and only then will I stop.”

8 He struck them down hip and thigh with a great slaughter. Then he went down and stayed in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

9 The Philistines went up and camped in Judah, and spread out at Lehi.

10 “Why have you marched against us?” the men of Judah asked. “To take Samson prisoner,” they replied, “and pay him back for what he did to us.”

11 So three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft in the rock of Etam. “Do you not realise that the Philistines are our masters?” they said to Samson. “What have you done to us?” He answered, “I only treated them as they treated me.”

12 “We have come to tie you up and hand you to the Philistines,” they told him. “Then promise me on oath,” Samson said, “that you will not attack me yourselves.”

13 “No,” they told him, “we will only bind you and hand you over to them. We will not kill you.” So they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.

14 As he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him. Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed on him, and the ropes on his arms became like flax that has caught fire, and the bonds melted from his hands.

15 He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached
out and took it, and with it he struck down a
thousand men.

16 Then Samson said, “With a donkey’s jawbone I
have made donkeys of them, heaps on heaps;[2]
with a donkey’s jawbone I have killed a thousand
men.”

17 Having said this, he flung the jawbone away, and
the place was named Ramath-lehi.[3]

18 Then he was very thirsty, and he called on the
LORD and said, “You have given this great victory
by the hand of Your servant. Must I now die of
thirst and fall into the hands of the
uncircumcised?”

19 So God split open the hollow place at Lehi, and
water came out of it. When he drank, his strength
returned and he revived. So the spring was named
En-hakkore;[4] it is at Lehi to this day.

20 Samson judged Israel twenty years in the days
of the Philistines.

1 Or ‘jackals’.

2 A play on words: חֲמוֹר (chamor) means both ‘donkey’ and ‘heap’.

3 ‘Jawbone hill’.

4 ‘The spring of the one who called’.

Chapter 16

Judges 16 tells of Samson’s fall. At Gaza he carries off the city gates in the night. Then he falls in love with Delilah, whom the Philistine rulers bribe to find the secret of his strength. Three times he deceives her, and three times breaks free, but she presses him day after day until he tells her that he is a Nazirite and his hair has never been cut. While he sleeps she has his head shaved; his strength leaves him, for the LORD has left him. The Philistines gouge out his eyes and set him to grind grain in prison in Gaza. At a great feast to Dagon they bring him out to entertain them, but his hair has begun to grow. Samson prays for strength one last time, pushes apart the two central pillars, and brings the temple down on the rulers and the people, killing more in his death than in his life.

1 One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a
prostitute, and he spent the night with her.

2 The people of Gaza were told, “Samson has come
here!” So they surrounded the place and lay in
wait for him all night at the city gate. They kept
quiet all night, saying, “When it is daylight, we
will kill him.”

3 But Samson lay there only until midnight. At
midnight he got up, took hold of the doors of the
city gate and the two gateposts, pulled them up,
bar and all, put them on his shoulders and carried
them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.

4 After this he fell in love with a woman in the
Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

5 The rulers of the Philistines went up to her and
said, “Coax him and find out where his great
strength lies and how we can overpower him, so
that we may bind him and subdue him. Each of us
will give you eleven hundred pieces of silver.”

6 So Delilah said to Samson, “Please tell me where
your great strength lies, and how you could be
bound and subdued.”

7 Samson said to her, “If they bind me with seven
fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, I shall
become weak and be like any other man.”

8 Then the rulers of the Philistines brought her
seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried,
and she bound him with them.

9 She had men lying in wait in an inner room. And
she said to him, “The Philistines are upon you,
Samson!” But he snapped the bowstrings as a
strand of tow snaps when it touches the fire. So
the secret of his strength was not discovered.

10 Then Delilah said to Samson, “You have mocked
me and told me lies. Now please tell me how you
can be bound.”

11 He said to her, “If they bind me tightly with new
ropes that have never been used, I shall become
weak and be like any other man.”

12 So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with
them, and said to him, “The Philistines are upon
you, Samson!” The men were lying in wait in the
inner room. But he snapped the ropes off his arms
like thread.

13 Delilah said to Samson, “You have been making
a fool of me all along, telling me lies. Tell me how
you can be tied up.” He answered, “Weave the
seven locks of my hair into the fabric on the loom
and pin it tight, and I will be as weak as anyone
else.”[1]

14 So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of
his head, wove them into the web, and fastened it
with the pin. Then she said to him, “The
Philistines are upon you, Samson!” But he woke
from his sleep and pulled away the pin of the loom
and the web.

15 “How can you tell me you love me,” she said,
“when you do not trust me? This is the third time
you have made a fool of me without telling me the
secret of your great strength.”

16 She pressed him day after day with her words
and nagged him until he was sick to death of it.

17 At last he opened his whole heart to her. “No
razor has ever been used on my head,” he said,
“because I have been God’s Nazirite since before I
was born. If my head were shaved, my strength
would go, and I would be as weak as any other
man.”

18 When Delilah saw that he had told her
everything, she sent and called the rulers of the
Philistines, saying, “Come up once more, for he
has told me everything.” Then the rulers of the
Philistines came up to her, bringing the money in
their hands.

19 She made him fall asleep on her knees, and
called a man and had him shave off the seven
locks of his head. She began to subdue him, and
his strength left him.

20 Then she said, “The Philistines are upon you,
Samson!” He woke from his sleep and thought, “I
will go out as at other times and shake myself
free.” But he did not know that the LORD had left
him.

21 The Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes
and brought him down to Gaza. They bound him
with bronze shackles, and he was set to grinding
grain in the prison.

22 But the hair of his head began to grow again
after it had been shaved.

23 The Philistine rulers came together for a great
sacrifice to their god Dagon and a celebration.
“Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy, into
our hands!” they said.

24 When the people saw him, they praised their
god, for they said, “Our god has given into our
hand our enemy, who laid waste our land and
killed so many of us.”

25 When their hearts were merry, they said, “Call
Samson, and let him entertain us.” So they called
Samson out of the prison, and he entertained
them. They made him stand between the pillars.

26 Samson said to the young man who held him by
the hand, “Let me feel the pillars that support the
house, so that I can lean against them.”

27 The house was full of men and women, and all
the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the
roof there were about three thousand men and
women watching Samson perform.

28 Then Samson called to the LORD and said,
“Lord GOD, remember me, I pray, and strengthen
me, I pray, only this once, O God, so that I may
take vengeance on the Philistines for one of my
two eyes.”

29 Then Samson reached for the two central pillars
that held up the building, one with his right hand
and one with his left, and braced himself against
them.

30 And Samson said, “Let me die with the
Philistines!” Then he pushed with all his strength,
and the house fell on the rulers and on all the
people in it. So those he killed at his death were
more than those he had killed during his life.[2]

31 His brothers and his father’s whole family came
down to fetch him. They carried him back and
buried him in his father Manoah’s tomb between
Zorah and Eshtaol. For twenty years he had been
Israel’s judge.

1 So the Greek; the Hebrew lacks the words from ‘and fasten it’ to the end of the verse, and the first words of verse 14.

2 Samson is among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11:32.

Chapter 17

Judges 17 begins the closing stories of the book, set in days when there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Micah of the hill country of Ephraim returns eleven hundred pieces of silver he stole from his mother, who has part of it made into a carved and cast image. Micah sets up a shrine with an ephod and household gods, and makes one of his sons his priest. When a young Levite from Bethlehem passes by looking for a place to live, Micah hires him as his priest, sure that now the LORD will prosper him.

1 In the hill country of Ephraim lived a man named
Micah.[1]
2 He said to his mother, “Those eleven hundred
pieces of silver that were stolen from you, the
theft you put a curse on in my hearing, I have the
money; I was the one who took it.” His mother
said, “The LORD bless you, my son!”
3 He gave the eleven hundred pieces of silver back
to his mother, and his mother said, “I solemnly
dedicate the silver to the LORD from my own hand
for my son, to make a carved image and a cast
image. So now I give it back to you.”
4 When he gave the silver back to his mother, she
took two hundred pieces of silver and gave them
to the silversmith, who made them into a carved
image and a cast image, and it stood in Micah’s
house.
5 This man Micah had a shrine, and he made an
ephod and household gods,[2] and installed one of
his sons, who became his priest.
6 In those days Israel had no king, and everyone
did whatever seemed right to him.[3]
7 There was a young man from Bethlehem in
Judah, of the clan of Judah. He was a Levite, and
he was living there as a foreigner.
8 The man left the town of Bethlehem in Judah to
live wherever he could find a place. As he
journeyed, he came to the hill country of Ephraim,
to Micah’s house.
9 Micah asked him, “Where have you come from?”
He told him, “I am a Levite from Bethlehem in
Judah, and I am going to live wherever I can find a
place.”
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 a year, a set of clothes and your
food.” So the Levite went in.
11 The Levite agreed to stay with the man, and the
young man became to him like one of his sons.
12 Micah installed the Levite, and the young man
became his priest and lived in Micah’s house.
13 Then Micah said, “Now I know that the LORD
will prosper me, since I have a Levite as my
priest.”

1 Hebrew ‘Micayehu’, ‘Who is like the LORD?’, shortened to Micah from verse 5.

2 Hebrew תְּרָפִים (teraphim); compare Genesis 31:19.

3 This refrain recurs in 18:1, 19:1 and 21:25, closing the book.

Chapter 18

Judges 18 tells how the tribe of Dan, still without an inheritance of its own, sends five men to spy out land. At Micah’s house they meet the Levite, who promises them success. They find Laish, a quiet, unsuspecting people far from any help, and six hundred armed Danites set out. On the way they carry off Micah’s image, ephod and household gods, and persuade the Levite to become priest to a whole tribe instead of one household. When Micah pursues them, they warn him off. The Danites destroy Laish, rebuild it as Dan, and set up the carved image, served by Jonathan, a descendant of Moses, as long as the house of God was at Shiloh.

1 In those days Israel had no king. And in those
days the tribe of the Danites was looking for an
inheritance of its own to live in, for until then no
inheritance had fallen to them among the tribes of
Israel.[1]
2 So the Danites sent five able men from their
whole clan, from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the
land and explore it. They said to them, “Go and
explore the land.” They came to the hill country of
Ephraim, to Micah’s house, and spent the night
there.
3 While they were near Micah’s house, they
recognised the voice of the young Levite, so they
turned aside there and asked him, “Who brought

you here? What are you doing in this place? What is your business here?”

4 He told them, “This is what Micah has done for me: he has hired me, and I have become his priest.”

5 They said to him, “Please enquire of God, so that we may know whether the journey we are on will succeed.”

6 The priest said to them, “Go in peace. The journey you are on is under the LORD’s eye.”

7 So the five men went on and came to Laish. They saw that the people there were living in security, after the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and unsuspecting. There was no one in the land to put them to shame in anything or to hold power over them.[2] They were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone.

8 When they came back to their brothers at Zorah and Eshtaol, their brothers asked them, “What news?”

9 They said, “Up, let us go against them! We have seen the land, and it is very good. Are you going to sit still? Do not hesitate to go in and take possession of the land.

10 When you go, you will come to an unsuspecting people and a spacious land. God has given it into your hand, a place where nothing on earth is lacking.”

11 So six hundred men of the clan of the Danites, armed with weapons of war, set out from Zorah and Eshtaol.

12 They went up and camped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. That is why the place west of Kiriath-jearim is called Mahaneh-dan to this day.

13 From there they passed on to the hill country of Ephraim and came to Micah’s house.

14 Then the five men who had gone to spy out the land of Laish said to their brothers, “Do you know that in these houses there are an ephod, household gods, a carved image and a cast image? Now think what you should do.”

15 So they turned aside there and came to the house of the young Levite, at Micah’s house, and greeted him.

16 The six hundred Danites, armed with their weapons of war, stood at the entrance of the gate.

17 The five men who had gone to spy out the land went in and took the carved image, the ephod, the household gods and the cast image, while the priest stood at the entrance of the gate with the six hundred armed men.

18 When the men entered Micah’s house and carried off the carved image, the ephod, the household gods and the cast image, the priest asked them, “What do you think you are doing?”

19 They said to him, “Be quiet! Put your hand over your mouth and come with us, and be a father and a priest to us. Is it better for you to be priest to the household of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and a clan in Israel?”

20 The priest was glad. He took the ephod, the household gods and the carved image, and went along in the midst of the people.

21 They turned and went on their way, putting their little ones, their livestock and their goods in front of them.

22 When they had gone some distance from Micah’s house, the men who lived in the houses near Micah’s house were called out, and they caught up with the Danites.

23 They shouted after the Danites, who turned round and said to Micah, “What is the matter with you, that you have called out these men?”

24 He said, “You have taken my gods that I made, and the priest, and gone away. What have I left? How can you ask me, ‘What is the matter with you?’”

25 The Danites said to him, “Do not let your voice be heard among us, or angry men will fall on you, and you will lose your life and the lives of your household.”

26 So the Danites went on their way. Micah saw that they were too strong for him, so he turned round and went home.

27 They took what Micah had made, and the priest who had belonged to him, and came to Laish, to a people quiet and unsuspecting. They put them to the sword and burned the city.

28 There was no one to rescue them, because it was far from Sidon and they had no dealings with anyone. It was in the valley that belongs to Beth-rehob. They rebuilt the city and settled in it.

29 They named the city Dan, after their ancestor Dan, who was born to Israel; but the city was formerly called Laish.

30 The Danites set up the carved image for themselves, and Jonathan son of Gershom, son of

Moses,[3] and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the time the land went into exile.

31 They kept for themselves Micah's carved image that he had made, all the time the house of God was at Shiloh.

1 Compare 1:34 and Joshua 19:47.

2 The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

3 So some manuscripts and the Greek. In the Hebrew text a small raised letter n (ן) turns 'Moses' into 'Manasseh', probably to spare Moses' name from the shame.

Chapter 19

Judges 19 tells a dark story from the days when Israel had no king. A Levite goes to Bethlehem to bring back his concubine, and her father keeps him feasting for days. Setting out late, they will not stop in Jebusite Jerusalem but go on to Gibeah in Benjamin, where no one offers them shelter except an old man from Ephraim. In the night worthless men of the city surround the house, as at Sodom. The Levite pushes his concubine out to them, and they abuse her all night; at dawn she collapses at the door and dies. The Levite cuts her body into twelve pieces and sends them throughout Israel, and all who see it say that nothing like this has happened since Israel came out of Egypt.

1 In those days, when Israel had no king, a Levite was living as a foreigner in the remote hill country of Ephraim. He took for himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.

2 But his concubine was unfaithful to him,[1] and she left him and went to her father's house in Bethlehem in Judah, and stayed there four months.

3 Then her husband set out after her to speak to her heart and bring her back. He had his servant with him and a pair of donkeys. She brought him into her father's house, and when the young woman's father saw him, he was glad to meet him.

4 His father-in-law, the young woman's father, made him stay, and he remained with him three days. They ate and drank and spent the nights there.

5 On the fourth day they got up early in the morning, and he prepared to leave, but the young woman's father said to his son-in-law, "Refresh yourself with a bite of bread, and then you can go."

6 So the two of them sat down and ate and drank together. Then the young woman's father said to the man, "Please agree to stay the night and enjoy yourself."

7 When the man got up to go, his father-in-law pressed him, so he stayed the night there again.

8 On the fifth day he got up early in the morning to leave, and the young woman's father said, "Please refresh yourself. Wait until the day wears on." So the two of them ate together.

9 When the man got up to go with his concubine and his servant, his father-in-law, the young woman's father, said to him, "Look, the day is drawing towards evening. Please spend the night. The day is almost over; stay here and enjoy yourself. Tomorrow you can get up early for your journey and go home."

10 But the man would not stay the night. He got up and left, and came to a point opposite Jebus, that is, Jerusalem. He had with him the two saddled donkeys, and his concubine was with him.

11 When they were near Jebus and the day was far spent, the servant said to his master, "Come, let us turn aside into this city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it."

12 But his master said to him, "We will not turn aside into a city of foreigners who are not Israelites. We will go on to Gibeah."

13 And he said to his servant, "Come, let us try to reach one of these places and spend the night in Gibeah or Ramah."

14 So they passed on and went their way, and the sun set as they came near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin.

15 They turned aside there to go in and spend the night at Gibeah. He went in and sat down in the city square, but no one took them into his house for the night.

16 Then an old man came in from his work in the fields that evening. He was from the hill country of Ephraim and was living as a foreigner in Gibeah; the men of the place were Benjaminites.

17 He looked up and saw the traveller in the city
square, and the old man asked, “Where are you
going, and where have you come from?”

18 He answered, “We are travelling from
Bethlehem in Judah to the remote hill country of
Ephraim, where I come from. I went to Bethlehem
in Judah, and now I am going to the house of the
LORD,[2] but no one has taken me into his house.

19 We have straw and fodder for our donkeys, and
bread and wine for me and your servant woman
and the young man with your servants. We lack
nothing.”

20 The old man said, “Peace be with you. Let me
take care of all your needs; only do not spend the
night in the square.”

21 He took him into his home and fed the donkeys;
and when they had washed their feet, they had
something to eat and drink.

22 While they were enjoying themselves, some men
of the city, worthless men, surrounded the house
and pounded on the door. They said to the old
man, the owner of the house, “Bring out the man
who came to your house, so that we may know
him.”[3]

23 The man, the owner of the house, went out to
them and said, “No, my brothers, do not do this
evil thing. Since this man has come into my house,
do not do this outrage.

24 Here is my virgin daughter and his concubine.
Let me bring them out to you; humble them and
do with them whatever seems good to you. But to
this man do not do such an outrageous thing.”

25 But the men would not listen to him. So the man
seized his concubine and pushed her outside to
them, and they raped her and abused her all night
until morning. At dawn they let her go.

26 As morning came, the woman came and fell
down at the entrance of the man’s house where
her master was, and lay there until it was light.

27 In the morning her master rose, opened the
house doors and stepped out to continue his
journey, and there lay the woman, his concubine,
fallen at the doorway, her hands on the threshold.

28 He said to her, “Get up; let us go.” But there was
no answer. Then he put her on the donkey, and the
man set out for home.

29 When he reached his house, he took a knife, and
taking hold of his concubine, he cut her limb by
limb into twelve pieces and sent them throughout
all the territory of Israel.

30 All who saw it said, “Nothing like this has ever
happened or been seen from the day the Israelites
came up from the land of Egypt until this day.
Think about it, take counsel and speak!”

1 So the Hebrew; the Greek has ‘became angry with him’.

2 The Greek has ‘to my house’.

3 That is, abuse him sexually; compare Genesis 19:4–8, which this account closely echoes.

Chapter 20

> *Judges 20 tells how all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, gathers as one man before the LORD at Mizpah, four hundred thousand strong. The Levite tells his story, and the tribes resolve not to go home until Gibeah is punished. When Benjamin refuses to hand over the guilty men, the Benjaminites muster twenty-six thousand men, including seven hundred left-handed slingers. Asking God at Bethel, Israel is told to send Judah first, but on two days Benjamin cuts down forty thousand Israelites. Israel weeps and fasts before the ark, and Phinehas the priest receives the LORD’s promise of victory. On the third day Israel sets an ambush, draws Benjamin away from the city, and sets Gibeah ablaze. Twenty-five thousand Benjaminites fall; only six hundred escape to the rock of Rimmon, and Israel puts the towns of Benjamin to the sword.*

1 Then all the Israelites came out, from Dan to
Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, and the
community assembled as one man before the
LORD at Mizpah.

2 The leaders of all the people, of all the tribes of
Israel, took their places in the assembly of the
people of God: four hundred thousand foot
soldiers armed with swords.

3 (The Benjaminites heard that the Israelites had
gone up to Mizpah.) The Israelites said, “Tell us
how this evil thing happened.”

4 The Levite, the husband of the murdered woman,
answered, “I came with my concubine to Gibeah,
which belongs to Benjamin, to spend the night.

5 The men of Gibeah came after me and
surrounded the house by night. It was me they
intended to kill; my concubine they raped until she
died.
6 I took my concubine, cut her in pieces and sent
them throughout all the territory of Israel's
inheritance, because they have committed a lewd
and outrageous act in Israel.
7 Now, all you Israelites, give your word and your
counsel here."
8 All the people rose as one man and said, "None of
us will go home to his tent; none of us will return
to his house.
9 This is what we will do to Gibeah: we will go up
against it by lot.
10 We will take ten men out of every hundred from
all the tribes of Israel, a hundred out of every
thousand, and a thousand out of every ten
thousand, to bring provisions for the army, so that
when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin they may
repay it for all the outrage it has committed in
Israel."
11 So all Israel's men were massed against the city,
joined together as one.
12 The Israelite tribes sent messengers all through
the tribe of Benjamin: "What is this wicked thing
that has been done among you?
13 Now hand over the men, the worthless men in
Gibeah, so that we may put them to death and
purge the evil from Israel." But the Benjaminites
would not listen to their brothers the Israelites.
14 Instead the Benjaminites gathered from their
towns at Gibeah to go out to war against the
Israelites.
15 That day the Benjaminites mustered twenty-six
thousand swordsmen from their towns, besides
the inhabitants of Gibeah, who mustered seven
hundred picked men.
16 In this whole force there were seven hundred
chosen men who were left-handed,[1] each of whom
could sling a stone at a hair without missing.
17 The men of Israel, apart from Benjamin,
mustered four hundred thousand swordsmen, all
of them men of war.
18 The Israelites got up and went to Bethel and
asked God, "Which of us is to go up first to fight
against the Benjaminites?" The LORD said, "Judah
first."
19 The Israelites got up in the morning and camped
against Gibeah.
20 The men of Israel went out to fight Benjamin
and drew up their battle lines against them at
Gibeah.
21 The Benjaminites came out of Gibeah and that
day cut down twenty-two thousand Israelites on
the field.
22 But the people, the men of Israel, took courage
and again drew up their battle lines in the same
place as on the first day.
23 The Israelites went up and wept before the
LORD until evening, and asked the LORD, "Shall
we again draw near to fight against our brothers
the Benjaminites?" The LORD said, "Go up against
them."
24 So the Israelites advanced against the
Benjaminites on the second day.
25 Benjamin came out from Gibeah against them on
the second day and cut down another eighteen
thousand Israelites on the field, all of them
swordsmen.
26 Then all the Israelites, the whole army, went up
to Bethel and wept. They sat there before the
LORD and fasted that day until evening, and
offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before
the LORD.
27 The Israelites sought the LORD's guidance (for
the ark of God's covenant was there at that time,
28 and Phinehas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron,
ministered before it in those days): "Shall we go
out once more to battle against our brothers the
Benjaminites, or shall we stop?" The LORD said,
"Go up, for tomorrow I will give them into your
hand."
29 So Israel set men in ambush all round Gibeah.
30 The Israelites went up against the Benjaminites
on the third day and drew up their lines against
Gibeah as before.
31 The Benjaminites came out to meet the army
and were drawn away from the city. As before,
they began to strike down some of the people on
the roads, one of which goes up to Bethel and the
other to Gibeah, and in the open field, about thirty
men of Israel.
32 The Benjaminites said, "They are being beaten
before us as at first." But the Israelites said, "Let
us flee and draw them away from the city to the
roads."

33 All the men of Israel rose up from their places
and drew up their lines at Baal-tamar, while the
Israelite ambush burst out of its place west of
Geba.[2]
34 Ten thousand picked men from all Israel came
against Gibeah, and the fighting was fierce, but
the Benjaminites did not realise that disaster was
close upon them.
35 The LORD struck Benjamin down before Israel,
and that day the Israelites destroyed twenty-five
thousand one hundred men of Benjamin, all of
them swordsmen.
36 Then the Benjaminites saw that they were
beaten. The men of Israel had given ground to
Benjamin, because they were relying on the
ambush they had set against Gibeah.
37 The men in ambush rushed out against Gibeah;
they spread out and put the whole city to the
sword.
38 The men of Israel had arranged a signal with the
ambush: they were to send up a great cloud of
smoke from the city.
39 When the men of Israel turned in the battle,
Benjamin had begun to strike down about thirty of
them, and they said, “They are certainly beaten
before us, as in the first battle.”
40 But when the signal began to rise from the city
in a column of smoke, the Benjaminites looked
behind them, and there was the whole city going
up in smoke to the sky.
41 Then Israel turned back to face them, and the
Benjaminites were thrown into panic, seeing that
disaster had overtaken them.
42 So they turned their backs before the men of
Israel and fled towards the wilderness, but the
battle overtook them, and those who came out of
the towns cut them down in the midst of them.
43 They surrounded the Benjaminites, pursued
them without rest and trod them down as far as a
point east of Gibeah.
44 Eighteen thousand men of Benjamin fell, all of
them valiant men.
45 The rest turned and fled towards the wilderness,
to the rock of Rimmon. Israel picked off five
thousand men on the roads, and pursued them as
far as Gidom and struck down two thousand more.
46 So all who fell from Benjamin that day were
twenty-five thousand swordsmen,[3] all of them
valiant men.
47 Yet six hundred men turned and escaped to the
rock of Rimmon in the wilderness, and remained
there for four months.
48 The men of Israel turned back against the
Benjaminites and put them to the sword, the
whole city, the livestock and everything they
found. And all the towns they came across they set
on fire.

1 Hebrew ‘bound in the right hand’, as Ehud in 3:15.
2 So the Greek; the Hebrew has ‘from the clearing of Geba’.
3 A round figure for the 25,100 of verse 35.

Chapter 21

> *Judges 21 closes the book. Israel has sworn at Mizpah that no one will give a daughter in marriage to Benjamin, and now the people weep at Bethel that a tribe is missing from Israel. Finding that no one from Jabesh-gilead came to the assembly, they destroy the town and give its four hundred young women to the six hundred surviving Benjaminites. For the rest, they tell the Benjaminites to lie in wait in the vineyards at the yearly feast at Shiloh and each seize a wife from the girls who come out to dance. The Benjaminites rebuild their towns, and the Israelites go home. In those days Israel had no king, and everyone did whatever seemed right to him.*

1 Now the men of Israel had sworn at Mizpah,
“None of us will give his daughter in marriage to
Benjamin.”
2 The people came to Bethel and sat there before
God until evening, and they lifted up their voices
and wept bitterly.
3 They said, “O LORD, the God of Israel, why has
this happened in Israel, that today one tribe
should be missing from Israel?”
4 Early next morning the people built an altar
there and presented burnt offerings and peace
offerings.

5 The Israelites asked, “Which of all the tribes of
Israel did not come up to the assembly before the
LORD?” For they had taken a solemn oath that
whoever did not come up to the LORD at Mizpah
should be put to death.

6 The Israelites grieved for their brother Benjamin
and said, “Today one tribe has been cut off from
Israel.

7 What shall we do for wives for those who are left,
since we have sworn by the LORD not to give
them any of our daughters as wives?”

8 So they asked, “Which one of the tribes of Israel
did not come up to the LORD at Mizpah?” And it
turned out that no one from Jabesh-gilead had
come to the camp, to the assembly.

9 For when the people were counted, not one of
the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead was there.

10 So the community sent twelve thousand of their
bravest men there, with orders: “Go and put the
inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead to the sword, the
women and the little ones too.

11 This is what you are to do: devote to destruction
every male and every woman who has lain with a
man.”

12 Among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead they
found four hundred young women who were
virgins and had not lain with a man, and they
brought them to the camp at Shiloh in the land of
Canaan.

13 Then the whole community sent word to the
Benjaminites at the rock of Rimmon and
proclaimed peace to them.

14 So Benjamin returned at that time, and they
were given the women of Jabesh-gilead whom they
had spared; but there were not enough for them.

15 The people were sorry for Benjamin, for the
LORD had torn a gap in Israel’s tribes.

16 The elders of the community said, “What shall
we do for wives for those who are left, since the
women of Benjamin have been destroyed?”

17 They said, “There must be an inheritance for the
survivors of Benjamin, so that a tribe is not
blotted out from Israel.

18 Yet we cannot give them wives from our
daughters, for the Israelites have sworn, ‘Cursed
is anyone who gives a wife to Benjamin.’”

19 So they said, “There is the yearly feast of the
LORD at Shiloh, north of Bethel, east of the road
that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of
Lebonah.”

20 And they instructed the Benjaminites, “Go and
lie in wait in the vineyards

21 and watch. When the daughters of Shiloh come
out to dance in the dances, come out of the
vineyards, and each of you seize a wife for himself
from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of
Benjamin.

22 When their fathers or brothers come to
complain to us, we will say to them, ‘Be gracious
to them for our sake, because we did not take a
wife for each man in battle. And you did not give
your daughters to them, or you would now be
guilty.’”[1]

23 The Benjaminites did so. They took wives for
themselves, as many as they were, from the
dancers they carried off. Then they went back to
their inheritance, rebuilt the towns and settled in
them.

24 And at that time the Israelites left there, each to
his own tribe and clan; they went out from there,
each to his own inheritance.

25 In those days Israel had no king, and everyone
did whatever seemed right to him.

1 That is, guilty of breaking the oath of verse 1. The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.