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Judges

Judah Fights the Canaanites

1 Joshua died. Then the people of Israel prayed to the Lord. They said, “Which of our family groups should be the first to go and fight for us against the Canaanite people?”

²The Lord said to the Israelite people, “The family group of Judah will go. I will let them take this land.”

³The men of Judah asked for help from their brothers from the family group of Simeon. The men of Judah said, “Brothers, the Lord ₁promised to₁ give each of us some land. If you will come and help us fight for our land, then we will go and help you fight for your land.” The men of Simeon agreed to help their brothers from Judah fight.

⁴The Lord helped the men of Judah defeat the Canaanites and the Perizzites. The men of Judah killed 10,000 men at the city of Bezek. ⁵In the city of Bezek the men of Judah found the ruler of Bezek* and fought him. The men of Judah defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

⁶The ruler of Bezek* tried to escape. But the men of Judah chased him and caught him. When they caught him, they cut off his thumbs and big toes. ⁷Then the ruler of Bezek said, “I cut the thumbs and big toes off of 70 kings. And those kings had to eat pieces of food that fell from my table. Now God has paid me back for the things I did to those kings.” The men of Judah took the ruler of Bezek to Jerusalem and he died there.

⁸The men of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it. The men of Judah used their swords to kill the people of Jerusalem. Then they burned the city. ⁹Later,

ruler of Bezek Or, “Adoni Bezek.”

the men of Judah went down to fight against some more Canaanites. Those Canaanites lived in the hill country, in the Negev,* and in the western foothills.

¹⁰Then the men of Judah went to fight against the Canaanite people that lived in the city of Hebron. (Hebron used to be called Kiriath Arba.) The men of Judah defeated the men named Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi.*

Caleb and His Daughter

¹¹The men of Judah left that place. They went to the city of Debir to fight against the people there. (In the past, Debir was called Kiriath Sepher.) ¹²Before the men of Judah started to fight, Caleb made a promise to the men. Caleb said, “I want to attack Kiriath Sepher. I will give my daughter Acsah to the man that attacks and captures that city. I will let that man marry my daughter.”

¹³Caleb had a younger brother named Kenaz. Kenaz had a son named Othniel. Othniel captured the city of Kiriath Sepher. So Caleb gave his daughter Acsah to Othniel to be his wife.

¹⁴Acsah went to live with Othniel. Othniel told Acsah* to ask her father for some land. ₁Acsah went to her father.₁ When she got off her donkey, Caleb asked her, “What is wrong?”

¹⁵Acsah answered Caleb, “Give me a blessing.* You gave me dry desert land in the Negev.* Please give me some land with water on it.” So Caleb gave her what she wanted.

Negev The desert area south of Judah.

Sheshai, Ahiman, Talmi Three sons of a man named Anak. They were giants. See Num. 13:22.

Othniel told Acsah Or, “Acsah told Othniel.”

Give me a blessing Or, “Please welcome me.” Or, “Give me a stream of water.”

He gave her the upper and lower pools of water in that land.

¹⁶The Kenite people left the City of Palm Trees (*Jericho*) and went with the men of Judah. Those people went to the Desert of Judah to live with the people there. This was in the Negev* near the city Arad. (The Kenite people were from the family of Moses' father-in-law.)

¹⁷Some Canaanite people lived in the city of Zephath. So the men of Judah and men from the family group of Simeon attacked those Canaanite people. They completely destroyed the city. So they named the city Hormah.*

¹⁸The men of Judah also captured the city of Gaza and the small towns around it. The men of Judah also captured the cities of Ashkelon and Ekron and all the small towns around them.

¹⁹The Lord was on the side of the men of Judah when they fought. They took the land in the hill country. But the men of Judah failed to take the land in the valleys, because the people living there had iron chariots.*

²⁰Moses had promised to give the land near Hebron to Caleb. So that land was given to Caleb's family. The men of Caleb forced the three sons of Anak* to leave that place.

The Men of Benjamin Settle in Jerusalem

²¹The family group of Benjamin could not force the Jebusite people to leave Jerusalem. So even today,* the Jebusite people live with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem.

The Men of Joseph Capture Bethel

^{22–23}Men from the family group of Joseph went to fight against the city of Bethel. (In the past, Bethel was named Luz.) The Lord was on the side of the men from the family group of Joseph. The men from the family of Joseph sent some spies to the city of Bethel. [These men looked for ways to defeat the city of Bethel.] ²⁴While the spies were watching the

city of Bethel, they saw a man come out of the city. The spies said to the man, "Show us a secret way into the city. We will attack the city. But if you help us, we will not hurt you."

²⁵The man showed the spies the secret way into the city. The men of Joseph used their swords to kill the people of Bethel. But they did not hurt the man that helped them. And they did not hurt the people in his family. That man and his family were allowed to go free. ²⁶That man then went to the land where the Hittite people lived and built a city. He named the city Luz. And that city is still called Luz today.

Other Family Groups Fight the Canaanites

²⁷There were Canaanite people living in the cities of Beth Shean, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, Megiddo, and the small towns around those cities. The people from the family group of Manasseh could not force those people to leave those towns. So the Canaanite people stayed. They refused to leave their homes. ²⁸Later the people of Israel grew stronger and forced the Canaanite people to work as slaves for them. But the people of Israel could not force all of the Canaanite people to leave their land.

²⁹[The same thing happened with the people from the family group of Ephraim.] There were Canaanite people living in Gezer. And the people of Ephraim did not make all of those Canaanite people leave their land. So the Canaanite people continued to live in Gezer with the people of Ephraim.

³⁰[The same thing happened with the people from the family group of Zebulun.] Some Canaanite people lived in the cities of Kitron and Nahalol. The people of Zebulun did not force those people to leave their land. Those Canaanite people stayed and lived with the people of Zebulun. But the people of Zebulun made those people work for them as slaves.

³¹[The same thing happened with the people from the family group of Asher.] The people of Asher did not force the other people to leave the cities of Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Aczib, Helbah, Aphek, and Rehob. ³²The people of Asher did not force those Canaanite people to leave their land. So the Canaanite people continued to live with the people of Asher.

Negev The desert area south of Judah.

Hormah This name means "completely destroyed."

iron chariots Small wagons used in war. They were faster and could carry more weapons than soldiers on foot.

three sons of Anak Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi, mentioned above in verse 10.

even today That is, at the time the book was written.

³³[The same thing happened with the people from the family group of Naphtali.] The people of Naphtali did not force the people to leave the cities of Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath. So the people of Naphtali continued to live with the people in those cities. Those Canaanite people worked as slaves for the people of Naphtali.

³⁴The Amorite people forced the people of the family group of Dan to live in the hill country. They had to stay in the hills because the Amorite people would not let them come down to live in the valleys. ³⁵The Amorite people decided to stay in Mount Heres, Aijalon, and Shaalbim. Later, the family group of Joseph grew stronger. Then they made the Amorite people work as slaves for them. ³⁶The land of the Amorite people was from Scorpion Pass to Sela and up into the hill country past Sela.

The Angel of the Lord at Bokim

2 The Angel of the Lord went up to the city of Bokim from the city of Gilgal. The angel spoke a message from the Lord to the people of Israel. This was the message: “I brought you out of Egypt. I led you to the land that I promised to give to your ancestors.* I told you I would never break my agreement with you. ²But in return, you must never make any agreement with the people living in that land. You must destroy their altars.* I told you that. But you didn’t obey me!

³“Now I will tell you this, ‘I will not force the other people to leave this land any longer. These people will become a problem for you. They will be like a trap to you. Their false gods will become like a net to trap you.’”

⁴After the angel gave the people of Israel this message from the Lord, the people cried loudly. ⁵So the people of Israel named the place where they cried, Bokim.* At Bokim the people of Israel offered sacrifices to the Lord.

ancestors Literally, “fathers,” meaning a person’s parents, grandparents, and all the people they are descended from.

altar(s) A stone table used for burning sacrifices that were offered as gifts to God.

Bokim This name means “People crying.”

Disobedience and Defeat

⁶Then Joshua told the people to go home. So each family group went to take their area of land to live in it. ⁷The people of Israel served the Lord as long as Joshua was alive. They continued serving the Lord during the lifetimes of the elders (*leaders*) that lived after Joshua had died. These old men had seen all the great things the Lord had done for the people of Israel. ⁸Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110 years. ⁹The people of Israel buried Joshua. They buried Joshua on the land that he had been given. That was at Timnath Heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

¹⁰After that whole generation died, the next generation grew up. This new generation did not know about the Lord and what the Lord had done for the people of Israel. ¹¹So the people of Israel did evil and served the false god Baal.* The Lord saw the people doing this evil thing. ¹²The Lord had brought the people of Israel out of Egypt. And the ancestors* of these people had worshiped the Lord. But the people of Israel quit following the Lord. The people of Israel began to worship the false gods of the people living around them. That made the Lord angry. ¹³The people of Israel quit following the Lord and began worshiping Baal and Ashtoreth.*

¹⁴The Lord was angry with the people of Israel. So the Lord let enemies attack the people of Israel and take their possessions. The Lord let their enemies that lived around them defeat them. The people of Israel could not protect themselves from their enemies. ¹⁵When the people of Israel went out to fight, they always lost. They lost because the Lord was not on their side. The Lord had already warned the people of Israel that they would lose if they served the gods of the people

Baal The Canaanite people believed that this false god brought the rain and storms. They also thought that he made the land produce good crops.

Ashtoreth The Canaanite people thought that this false goddess could make people able to have babies. She was their goddess of love and war.

living around them. The people of Israel suffered very much.

¹⁶Then the Lord chose leaders called judges. These leaders saved the people of Israel from the enemies that took their possessions. ¹⁷But the people of Israel did not listen to their judges. The people of Israel were not faithful to God—they followed other gods.* In the past, the ancestors* of the people of Israel obeyed the Lord's commands. But now the people of Israel changed and stopped obeying the Lord.

¹⁸Many times the enemies of Israel did bad things to the people. So the people of Israel would cry for help. And each time, the Lord felt sorry for the people. Each time he sent a judge to save the people from their enemies. The Lord was always with those judges. So each time, the people of Israel were saved from their enemies. ¹⁹But when each judge died, the people of Israel again sinned and started worshiping the false gods. The people of Israel were very stubborn—they refused to change their evil ways.

²⁰So the Lord became angry with the people of Israel, and he said, "This nation has broken the Agreement that I made with their ancestors.* They have not listened to me. ²¹So I will no longer defeat the nations and clear the way for the people of Israel. Those nations were still in this land when Joshua died. And I will let those nations stay in this land. ²²I will use those nations to test the people of Israel. I will see if the people of Israel can keep the Lord's commands like their ancestors did." ²³The Lord allowed those nations to stay in the land. The Lord did not force those nations to quickly leave the country. He did not help Joshua's army defeat them.

3¹⁻²The Lord did not force all the people of those other nations to leave Israel's land. The Lord wanted to test the people of Israel. None of the people of Israel living at this time had fought in the wars to take the land of

Canaan. So the Lord let those other nations stay in their country. (The Lord did this to teach the people of Israel that had not fought in those wars.) Here are the names of the nations the Lord left in the land: ³the five rulers of the Philistine people, all of the Canaanite people, the people of Sidon, and the Hivite people that lived in the Lebanon mountains from Mount Baal Hermon to Lebo Hamath. ⁴The Lord left those nations in the land to test the people of Israel. He wanted to see if the people of Israel would obey the Lord's commands that he had given to their ancestors* through Moses.

⁵The people of Israel lived with the Canaanite people, the Hittite people, the Amorite people, the Perizzite people, the Hivite people, and the Jebusite people. ⁶The people of Israel began to marry the daughters of those people. The people of Israel allowed their own daughters to marry the sons of those people. And the people of Israel began to worship the gods of those people.

Othniel, the First Judge

⁷The Lord saw that the people of Israel did evil things. The people of Israel forgot about the Lord their God and served the false gods Baal* and Asherah.* ⁸The Lord was angry with the people of Israel. The Lord allowed Cushan Rishathaim, the king of Aram Naharaim* to defeat the people of Israel and to rule over them. The people of Israel were under that king's rule for eight years. ⁹But the people of Israel cried to the Lord for help. The Lord sent a man to save them. That man's name was Othniel. He was the son of a man named Kenaz. Kenaz was Caleb's younger brother. Othniel saved the people of Israel. ¹⁰The Spirit of the Lord came on Othniel and he became a judge for the people of Israel. Othniel led the people of Israel to war. The Lord helped Othniel defeat Cushan

Baal The Canaanite people believed that this false god brought the rain and storms. They also thought that he made the land produce good crops.

Asherah An important Canaanite goddess. The people thought she was the wife of El or the lover of Baal.

Aram Naharaim The area in Northern Syria between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

were not faithful ... other gods Literally, "acted like a prostitute to other gods."

ancestors Literally, "fathers," meaning a person's parents, grandparents, and all the people they are descended from.

Rishathaim, the king of Aram. ¹¹So the land was at peace for 40 years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died.

Ehud, the Judge

¹²Again the Lord saw the people of Israel do evil things. So the Lord gave Eglon king of Moab power to defeat the people of Israel. ¹³Eglon got help from the Ammonite people and the Amalekite people. They joined him and attacked the people of Israel. Eglon and his army defeated the people of Israel and forced them to leave the City of Palm Trees (*Jericho*). ¹⁴Eglon king of Moab ruled over the people of Israel for 18 years.

¹⁵The people cried to the Lord. The Lord sent a man to save the people of Israel. This man’s name was Ehud. Ehud was the son of a man named Gera from the family group of Benjamin. Ehud was trained to fight with his left hand. The people of Israel sent Ehud with a gift to Eglon king of Moab. ¹⁶Ehud made a sword for himself. That sword had two sharp edges and was about 18 inches* long. Ehud tied the sword to his right thigh and hid it under his uniform.

¹⁷So Ehud brought the gift to Eglon king of Moab. Eglon was a very fat man. ¹⁸After offering the gift, he sent away the men that had carried the gift. ¹⁹They left the king’s palace. When Ehud reached the statues* near Gilgal, he turned and went back to see the king. Ehud said to King Eglon, “King, I have a secret message for you.”

The king told him to be quiet and then sent all of the servants out of the room. ²⁰Ehud went to King Eglon. The king was sitting all alone in the upper room of his palace.*

Then Ehud said, “I have a message from God for you.” The king stood up from his throne. He was very close to Ehud. ²¹As the king was getting up from his throne,* Ehud reached with his left hand and took out the

sword that was tied to his right thigh. Then Ehud pushed the sword into the king’s belly. ²²The sword went into Eglon’s belly so far that even the handle sank in and the king’s fat covered it. Ehud left the sword inside Eglon. When he was stabbed, Eglon lost control of his bowels and the excrement came out.

²³Ehud went out of the the private room, closing the doors to the upper room and locking the king inside. ²⁴Ehud then left the main room and the servants went back in. The servants found the doors to the upper room locked. So the servants said, “The king must be relieving himself in his private restroom.” ²⁵So the servants waited for a long time. The king never opened the doors to the upper room. Finally the servants became worried. They got the key and unlocked the doors. When the servants entered, they saw their king lying on the floor, dead.

²⁶While the servants were waiting for the king, Ehud had time to escape. Ehud passed by the statues* and went toward the place named Seirah. ²⁷When Ehud came to Seirah, he blew a trumpet there in the hill country of Ephraim. The people of Israel heard the trumpet and went down from the hills, with Ehud leading them. ²⁸Ehud said to the people of Israel, “Follow me! The Lord has helped us to defeat our enemies, the people of Moab.”

So the people of Israel followed Ehud. They went down with Ehud to take control of the places where people could easily cross the Jordan River into the land of Moab. The people of Israel did not allow any one to go across the Jordan River. ²⁹The people of Israel killed about 10,000 strong and brave men from Moab. Not one Moabite man escaped. ³⁰So on that day the people of Israel began to rule over the people of Moab. And there was peace in the land for 80 years.

18 inches Literally, “1 cubit.”

statues These were probably statues of gods or animals that “protected” the entrance to the city.

palace A large house for the king and his family.

he was very close ... throne This section of the text is found in the ancient Greek translation, but it is not in the Hebrew text.

statues These were probably statues of gods or animals that “protected” the entrance to the city.

Shamgar, the Judge

³¹After Ehud saved the people of Israel, another man saved Israel. That man's name was Shamgar son of Anath.* Shamgar used an oxgoad* to kill 600 Philistine men.

Deborah, the Woman Judge

4 After Ehud died, the people again did the things the Lord said are evil. ²So the Lord allowed Jabin king of Canaan to defeat the people of Israel. Jabin ruled in a city named Hazor. A man named Sisera was the commander of King Jabin's army. Sisera lived in a town called Harosheth Haggoyim. ³Sisera had 900 iron chariots, and he was very cruel to the people of Israel for 20 years. So they cried to the Lord for help.

⁴There was a woman prophet named Deborah. She was the wife of a man named Lappidoth. She was judge of Israel at that time. ⁵One day, Deborah was sitting under the Palm Tree of Deborah. And the people of Israel came up to her to ask her what to do about Sisera. The Palm Tree of Deborah is between the cities of Ramah and Bethel, in the hill country of Ephraim. ⁶Deborah sent a message to a man named Barak. She asked him to come to meet with her. Barak was the son of a man named Abinoam. Barak lived in the city of Kedesh, which is in the area of Naphtali. Deborah said to Barak, "The Lord God of Israel commands you: 'Go and gather 10,000 men from the family groups of Naphtali and Zebulun. Lead those men to Mount Tabor. ⁷I will make Sisera, the commander of King Jabin's army, come to you. I will make Sisera, his chariots and his army come to the Kishon River.* I will help you to defeat Sisera there.'"

⁸Then Barak said to Deborah, "I will go and do this if you will go with me. But if you will not go with me, then I won't go."

⁹"Of course I will go with you," Deborah answered. "But because of your attitude, you

will not be honored when Sisera is defeated. The Lord will allow a woman to defeat Sisera."

So Deborah went with Barak to the city of Kedesh. ¹⁰At the city of Kedesh, Barak called the family groups of Zebulun and Naphtali together. Barak gathered 10,000 men to follow him from those family groups. Deborah also went with Barak.

¹¹Now there was a man named Heber, that was from the Kenite people. Heber had left the other Kenite people. (The Kenite people were descendants* of Hobab. Hobab was Moses' father-in-law.*) Heber had made his home by the oak tree in a place named Zaanannim. Zaanannim is near the city of Kedesh.

¹²Someone told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam was at Mount Tabor. ¹³So Sisera got together his 900 iron chariots. Sisera also got together all the men with him. They marched from the city of Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River.

¹⁴Then Deborah said to Barak, "Today the Lord will help you defeat Sisera. Surely you know that the Lord has already cleared the way for you." So Barak led the 10,000 men down from Mount Tabor. ¹⁵Barak and his men attacked Sisera. During the battle, the Lord confused Sisera and his army and chariots. They did not know what to do. So Barak and his men defeated Sisera's army. But Sisera left his chariot and ran away on foot. ¹⁶Barak continued fighting Sisera's army. Barak and his men chased Sisera's chariots and army all the way to Harosheth Haggoyim. Barak and his men used their swords to kill all of Sisera's men. Not one of Sisera's men was left alive.

¹⁷But Sisera ran away. He came to the tent where a woman named Jael lived. Jael was the wife of a man named Heber. He was one of the Kenite people. Heber's family was at peace with Jabin king of Hazor. So Sisera ran to Jael's tent. ¹⁸Jael saw Sisera coming, so she went out to meet him. Jael said to Sisera, "Sir, come into my tent. Come in. Don't be afraid." So Sisera went into Jael's tent, and she covered him with a carpet.

Anath The Canaanite goddess of war. Here this might be Shamgar's father or mother or it might mean, "Shamgar the great soldier" or "Shamgar from the town of Anath."

oxgoad A sharp stick used to make cattle go the right way.

Kishon River A river about ten miles from Mount Tabor.

descendants A person's children and their future families.

father-in-law Or possibly, "son-in-law."

¹⁹Sisera said to Jael, “I am thirsty. Please give me a little water to drink.” Jael had a bottle made from animal skin. She kept milk in that bottle. Jael gave Sisera a drink of that milk. Then she covered Sisera up.

²⁰Then Sisera said to Jael, “Go stand at the entrance to the tent. If someone comes by and asks you, ‘Is anyone in there?’, tell him, ‘No.’”

²¹But Jael found a tent peg and a hammer. Jael quietly went to Sisera. Sisera was very tired, so he was sleeping. Jael put the tent peg to the side of Sisera’s head and hit it with a hammer. The tent peg went through the side of Sisera’s head and into the ground! Sisera died.

²²Just then Barak came by Jael’s tent, looking for Sisera. Jael went out to meet Barak and said, “Come in here, and I will show you the man that you are looking for.” So Barak entered the tent with Jael. There Barak found Sisera lying dead on the ground, with the tent peg through the side of his head.

²³On that day God defeated Jabin king of Canaan for the people of Israel. ²⁴So the people of Israel became stronger and stronger until they defeated Jabin king of Canaan. The people of Israel finally destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

The Song of Deborah

5 On the day that the people of Israel defeated Sisera, Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song:*

- 2 The men of Israel prepared for battle.*
They volunteered to go to war!
Bless the Lord!
- 3 Listen, kings.
Pay attention, rulers.
I will sing.
I myself will sing to the Lord.
I will make music to the Lord,
to the God of the people of Israel.

Chapter 5 This is a very old song and many of the lines are hard to understand in the original language.

prepared ... battle This might also mean “When leaders led in Israel,” or “When men wore long hair in Israel.” Soldiers often dedicated their hair as a special gift to God.

4 Lord, in the past you came from Seir.*
You marched from the land of Edom.*
You marched and the earth shook.
The skies rained.
The clouds dropped water.

5 The mountains shook
before the Lord,
the God of Mount Sinai,
before the Lord,
the God of Israel!

6 In the days of Shamgar son of Anath,*
and in the days of Jael,
the main roads were empty.
Caravans* and travelers
traveled on the back roads.

7 There were no soldiers.
There were no soldiers in Israel
until you came, Deborah,
until you came to be a mother to Israel.*

8 God chose new [leaders]
to fight at the city gates.*
No one could find a shield or a spear
among the 40,000 soldiers of Israel.

9 My heart is with the commanders of Israel
who volunteered to go to war!
Bless the Lord!

10 Pay attention you people
riding on white donkeys,
sitting on saddle blankets,*
and walking along the road!

11 At the watering holes for the animals,
we hear the music of cymbals.

Seir Another name for the land of Edom.

Edom This land was south and east of Israel.

Shamgar son of Anath A judge of Israel. See Judges 3:31.

Caravans Groups of traders. Usually many traders traveled together with their things packed on donkeys or camels.

until you came ... to Israel Or, “until I came, Deborah, until I came, mother of Israel.” Or, “until I established you, Deborah, until I established you, mother of Israel.”

God chose ... gates Or, “They chose to follow new gods. So they had to fight at their city gates.” The Hebrew here is hard to understand.

saddle blankets We are not sure of the meaning of this Hebrew word.

- People sing about
the victories of the Lord,
the victories of his soldiers in Israel
when the Lord's people fought
at the city gates [and won]!
- 12 Wake up, wake up, Deborah!
Wake up, wake up, sing the song!
Get up, Barak!
Go capture your enemies, son of
Abinoam!
- 13 Now, survivors, go to the leaders.
People of the Lord, come with me
and the soldiers.
- 14 The men of Ephraim came
from the hill country of Amalek.*
Benjamin, those men followed you
and your people.
And there were commanders
from the family of Makir.*
Leaders from the family group of Zebulun
came with their bronze clubs.
- 15 The leaders of Issachar were
with Deborah.
The family of Issachar was true to Barak.
Those men marched to the valley on foot.
Reuben, there are many brave soldiers
in your army groups.
- 16 So why did you sit there
against the walls of your sheep pens?*
- The brave soldiers of Reuben
thought hard about war.
But they stayed home
listening to the music
they played for their sheep.
- 17 The people of Gilead* stayed
in their camps on the other side
of the Jordan River.
As for you, people of Dan,
why did you stay by your ships?
The people of Asher remained by the sea,
camped near their safe harbors.
- 18 But the men of Zebulun and Naphtali
risked their lives fighting on those hills.
- 19 The kings of Canaan came to fight,
but they didn't carry any treasures home!
They fought
at the city of Taanach,
by the waters of Megiddo.
- 20 The stars fought [them] from heaven.
From their paths [across the sky],
they fought against Sisera.
- 21 The Kishon River, that ancient river,
swept Sisera's men away.
My soul, march on with strength!*
- 22 The horses' hooves hammered the ground.
Sisera's mighty horses ran and ran.
- 23 The Angel of the Lord said,
"Curse the city of Meroz.
Curse its people!
They did not come with soldiers
to help the Lord."
- 24 Jael was the wife of Heber the Kenite.
She will be blessed above all women.
- 25 Sisera asked for water.
Jael gave him milk.
In a bowl fit for a ruler,
she brought him cream.
- 26 Then Jael reached out
and took the tent peg.
Her right hand reached for the hammer
that a worker would use.
Then she used the hammer on Sisera!
She hit him on the head
and made a hole through his temple!
- 27 He sank between Jael's feet.
He fell.
And there he lay.
He sank between her feet.
He fell.
Where Sisera sank,
there he fell.
And there he lay, dead!
- 28 Look, there is Sisera's mother,
looking out the window,
looking through the curtains
and crying.

hill country of Amalek The area settled by the family group of Ephraim. See Judges 12:15.

Makir This family was part of the family group of Manasseh that settled in the area east of the Jordan River.

walls of your sheep pens Or, "campfires" or "saddlebags."

Gilead These people lived in the area east of the Jordan River.

My soul, march on with strength Or, with some changes it could be, "His mighty charging horses marched forward."

“Why is Sisera’s chariot so late?
Why can’t I hear his wagons?”

- 29 Her wisest servant girl answers her,
Yes, the servant gives her an answer:
30 “I’m sure they won the war
and they are now taking things
from the people they defeated!
They are dividing those things
among themselves!
Each soldier is taking a girl or two.
Maybe Sisera found a piece of dyed cloth.
That’s it!
Sisera found a piece of fancy cloth
—or maybe two—
for Sisera the Conqueror to wear.”
31 May all your enemies die like this, Lord!
And may all the people who love you
be strong like the rising sun!

So there was peace in the land for 40 years.

The Midianites Fight Israel

6 Again the people of Israel did things the Lord said were evil. So for seven years the Lord allowed the people of Midian to defeat the people of Israel.

²The people of Midian were very powerful and were cruel to the people of Israel. So the people of Israel made many hiding places in the mountains. They hid their food in caves and places that were hard to find. ³They did that because the Midianite and Amalekite people from the east always came and destroyed their crops. ⁴Those people camped in the land and destroyed the crops that the people of Israel had planted. Those people ruined the crops of the people of Israel as far as the land near the city of Gaza. Those people did not leave anything for the people of Israel to eat. They did not even leave them any sheep, or cattle, or donkeys. ⁵The people of Midian came up and camped in the land. They brought their families and their animals with them. They were as many as swarms of locusts! There were so many of those people and their camels that it was not possible to count them. All of these people came into the land and ruined it. ⁶The people of Israel became very poor because of the people of

Midian. So the people of Israel cried to the Lord for help.

⁷The people* of Midian did all those bad things. So the people of Israel cried to the Lord for help. ⁸So the Lord sent a prophet to them. The prophet said to the people of Israel, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘You were slaves in the land of Egypt. I made you free and brought you out of that land. ⁹I saved you from the powerful people of Egypt. Then the people of the land of Canaan hurt you. So I again saved you. I made those people leave their land. And I gave their land to you.’ ¹⁰Then I said to you, ‘I am the Lord your God. You will live in the land of the Amorite people, but you must not worship their false gods.’ But you did not obey me.”

The Angel of the Lord Visits Gideon

¹¹At that time, the Angel of the Lord came to a man named Gideon. The Angel of the Lord came and sat down under an oak tree at a place called Ophrah. This oak tree belonged to a man named Joash. Joash was from the Abiezer family. Joash was the father of Gideon. Gideon was beating some wheat* in a winepress.* The Angel of the Lord sat down near Gideon. Gideon was hiding so the Midianites could not see the wheat. ¹²The Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and said to him, “The Lord be with you, great soldier!”

¹³Then Gideon said, “I promise sir, if the Lord is with us, then why are we having so many troubles? We heard that he did wonderful things for our ancestors.* Our ancestors told us that the Lord took them out of Egypt. But the Lord left us. The Lord has allowed the people of Midian to defeat us.”

¹⁴The Lord turned toward Gideon and said, “Use your power. Go save the people of Israel

The people Verses 7–10 do not appear in the oldest Hebrew copy of the book of Judges, the Dead Sea Scroll fragment, 4QJudgesA.

beating some wheat This was the way people separated the grains of wheat from the other parts of the plants.

winepress A place for squeezing juice from grapes, often it was only a shallow hole in a large rock in the ground.

ancestors Literally, “fathers,” meaning a person’s parents, grandparents, and all the people they are descended from.

from the people of Midian. I am sending you to save them!”

¹⁵But Gideon answered and said, “Pardon me, sir. How can I save Israel? My family is the weakest in the family group of Manasseh. And I am the youngest one in my family.”

¹⁶The Lord answered Gideon and said, “I am with you! So you can defeat the people of Midian! It will seem like you are fighting against only one man.”

¹⁷Then Gideon said to the Lord, “If you are pleased with me, give me proof that you really are the Lord. ¹⁸Please wait here. Don’t go away until I come back to you. Let me bring my offering and set it down in front of you.”

And the Lord said, “I will wait until you come back.”

¹⁹So Gideon went in and cooked a young goat in boiling water. Gideon also took about 20 pounds* of flour and made bread without yeast. Then Gideon put the meat into a basket and the water from the boiled meat into a pot. Gideon brought out the meat, the water from the boiled meat, and the bread without yeast. Gideon gave that food to the Lord under the oak tree.

²⁰The Angel of God said to Gideon, “Put the meat and the bread on that rock over there. Then pour out the broth.” Gideon did as he was told.

²¹The Angel of the Lord had a walking stick in his hand. The Angel of the Lord touched the meat and the bread with the end of the stick. Then fire jumped up from the rock! The meat and the bread were completely burned up! Then the Angel of the Lord disappeared.

²²Then Gideon realized that he had been talking to the Angel of the Lord. So Gideon shouted, “Oh my Lord and Master! I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face!”

²³But the Lord said to Gideon, “Calm down!* Don’t be afraid! You will not die!”*

20 pounds Literally, “1 ephah.”

Calm down Literally, “Peace.”

You will not die Gideon thought he would die because he had seen the Lord face to face.

²⁴So Gideon built an altar* in that place to worship the Lord. Gideon named that altar, “The Lord is Peace.” That altar still stands in the city of Ophrah. Ophrah is where the Abiezer family lives.

Gideon Tears Down the Altar of Baal.

²⁵That same night the Lord spoke to Gideon. The Lord said, “Take the full-grown bull that belongs to your father, the one that is seven years old. Your father has an altar* to the false god Baal.* There is also a wooden pole beside the altar. That pole was made to honor the false goddess Asherah.* Use the bull to pull down the Baal altar, and cut down the Asherah pole. ²⁶Then build the right kind of altar for the Lord your God. Build that altar on this high ground. Then kill and burn the full-grown bull on this altar. Use the wood from the Asherah pole to burn your offering.”

²⁷So Gideon got ten of his servants and did what the Lord had told him to do. But Gideon was afraid that his family and the men of the city might see what he was doing. Gideon did what the Lord told him to do. But he did it at night, and not in the daytime.

²⁸The men of the city got up the next morning. And they saw that the altar for Baal* had been destroyed! They also saw that the Asherah* pole had been cut down. The Asherah pole had been sitting next to the altar for Baal. Those men also saw the altar that Gideon had built. And they saw the bull that had been sacrificed on that altar.

²⁹The men of the city looked at each other and asked, “Who pulled down our altar? Who cut down our Asherah* pole? Who sacrificed this bull on this new altar?” They asked many questions and tried to learn who did those things.

Someone told them, “Gideon son of Joash did this.”

altar(s) A stone table used for burning sacrifices that were offered as gifts to God.

Baal The Canaanite people believed that this false god brought the rain and storms. They also thought that he made the land produce good crops.

Asherah An important Canaanite goddess. The people thought she was the wife of El or the lover of Baal.

³⁰So the men of the city came to Joash. They said to Joash, “You must bring your son out. He pulled down the altar* for Baal.* And he cut down the Asherah* pole that was by that altar. So your son must die.”

³¹Then Joash spoke to the crowd that was standing around him. Joash said, “Are you going to take Baal’s side? Are you going to rescue Baal? If anyone takes Baal’s side, let him be put to death by morning. If Baal really is a god, let him defend himself when someone pulls down his altar.” ³²Joash said, “If Gideon pulled Baal’s altar down, then let Baal argue with him.” So on that day Joash gave Gideon a new name. He called him Jerub Baal.*

Gideon Defeats the People of Midian

³³The people of Midian, Amalek, and other people from the east joined together to fight against the people of Israel. Those people went across the Jordan River and camped in Jezreel Valley. ³⁴The Spirit of the Lord came to Gideon and gave him great power. Gideon blew a trumpet to call the Abiezer family to follow him. ³⁵Gideon sent messengers to all the people of the family group of Manasseh. Those messengers told the people of Manasseh to get their weapons and prepare for battle. Gideon also sent messengers to the family groups of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. The messengers took the same message. So those family groups also went up to meet Gideon and his men.

³⁶Then Gideon said to God, “You said that you would help me save the people of Israel. Give me proof! ³⁷I will put a sheepskin on the threshing floor.* If there is dew only on the sheepskin, while all of the ground is dry, then

I will know that you will use me to save Israel, like you said.”

³⁸And that is exactly what happened. Gideon got up early the next morning and squeezed the sheepskin. He was able to drain a bowl full of water from the sheepskin.

³⁹Then Gideon said to God, “Don’t be angry with me. Let me ask just one more thing. Let me test you one more time with the sheepskin. This time let the sheepskin be dry, while the ground around it gets wet with dew.”

⁴⁰That night God did that very thing. Just the sheepskin was dry, but the ground around it was wet with dew.

7 Early in the morning Jerub Baal (*Gideon*) and all his men set up their camp at the spring of Harod. The people of Midian were camped in the valley at the bottom of the hill called Moreh. This was north of Gideon and his men.

²Then the Lord said to Gideon, “I am going to help your men to defeat the people of Midian. But you have too many men for the job. I don’t want the people of Israel to forget me and brag that they saved themselves. ³So now, make an announcement to your men. Tell them, ‘Anyone that is afraid may leave Mount Gilead. He may go back home.’”

At that time, 22,000 men left Gideon and went back home. But 10,000 still remained.

⁴Then the Lord said to Gideon, “There are still too many men. Take the men down to the water, and I will test them for you there. If I say, ‘This man will go with you,’ he will go. But if I say, ‘That one will not go with you,’ then he will not go.”

⁵So Gideon led the men down to the water. At the water the Lord said to Gideon, “Separate the men like this: The men who drink the water by using their tongue to lap it up like a dog will be in one group. And the men who bend down to drink will be in the other group.”

⁶There were 300 men that used their hands to bring water to their mouth and lapped it like a dog does. All the other people bent down and drank the water. ⁷The Lord said to Gideon, “I will use the 300 men who lapped the water like a dog. I will use those men to save you, and I will allow you to defeat the

altar(s) A stone table used for burning sacrifices that were offered as gifts to God.

Baal The Canaanite people believed that this false god brought the rain and storms. They also thought that he made the land produce good crops.

Asherah An important Canaanite goddess. The people thought she was the wife of El or the lover of Baal.

Jerub Baal This is like the Hebrew words meaning, “Let Baal argue.” The same verb is translated “take one’s side” and “defend” in verse 31.

threshing floor The place where people beat wheat to separate the grain from the other parts of the plants.

people of Midian. Let the other men go to their homes.”

⁸So Gideon sent the other men of Israel home. Gideon kept the 300 men with him. Those 300 men kept the supplies and the trumpets of the other men who went home.

The people of Midian were camped in the valley below Gideon’s camp. ⁹During the night the Lord spoke to Gideon. The Lord said to him, “Get up. I will let you defeat the Midianite army. Go down to their camp. ¹⁰If you are afraid to go alone, then take Purah your servant with you. ¹¹Go into the camp of the people of Midian. Listen to the things those people are saying. After that, you will not be afraid to attack them.”

So Gideon and Purah his servant went down to the edge of the enemy camp. ¹²The people of Midian, the people of Amalek, and all the other people from the east were camped in that valley. There were so many people that they seemed like a swarm of locusts.* It seemed like those people had as many camels as there are grains of sand on the seashore.

¹³Gideon came to the enemy camp, and he heard a man talking. That man was telling his friend about a dream that he had. The man was saying, “I dreamed that a round loaf of bread came rolling into the camp of the people of Midian. That loaf of bread hit the tent so hard that the tent turned over and fell flat.”

¹⁴The man’s friend knew the meaning of the dream. He said, “Your dream can only have one meaning. Your dream is about that man from Israel. It is about Gideon son of Joash. It means that God will let Gideon defeat the whole army of Midian.”

¹⁵After he heard the men talking about the dream and what it meant, Gideon bowed down to God. Then Gideon went back to the camp of the people of Israel. Gideon called out to the people, “Get up! The Lord will help us defeat the people of Midian.” ¹⁶Then Gideon divided the 300 men into three groups. Gideon gave each man a trumpet and an empty jar. A burning torch was inside each

jar. ¹⁷Then Gideon told the men, “Watch me and do what I do. Follow me to the edge of the enemy camp. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly what I do. ¹⁸You men surround the enemy camp. I and all the men with me will blow our trumpets. When we blow our trumpets, you blow your trumpets, too. Then shout these words: ‘For the Lord and for Gideon!’”

¹⁹So Gideon and the 100 men with him went to the edge of the enemy camp. They came there just after the enemy changed guards. It was during the middle watch of the night. Gideon and his men blew their trumpets and smashed their jars. ²⁰Then all three groups of Gideon’s men blew their trumpets and smashed their jars. The men held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands. As those men blew their trumpets, they shouted, “A sword for the Lord, and a sword for Gideon!”

²¹Gideon’s men stayed where they were. But inside the camp, the men of Midian began shouting and running away. ²²When Gideon’s 300 men blew their trumpets, the Lord caused the men of Midian to kill each other with their swords. The enemy army ran away to the city of Beth Shittah, which is toward the city of Zererah. Those men ran as far as the border of the city of Abel Meholah, which is near the city of Tabbath.

²³Then soldiers from the family groups of Naphtali, Asher, and all of Manasseh were told to chase the people of Midian. ²⁴Gideon sent messengers through all the hill country of Ephraim. The messengers said, “Come down and attack the people of Midian. Take control of the river as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan River. Do this before the people of Midian get there.”

So they called all men from the family group of Ephraim. They took control of the river as far as Beth Barah. ²⁵The men of Ephraim caught two of the Midianite leaders. These two leaders were named Oreb and Zeeb. The men of Ephraim killed Oreb at a place named the Rock of Oreb. They killed Zeeb at a place named the Winepress of Zeeb. The men of Ephraim continued chasing the people of Midian. But they first cut off the

locusts Insects like grasshoppers. Locusts can destroy a large crop very quickly.

heads of Oreb and Zeeb and took the heads to Gideon. Gideon was at the place where people cross the Jordan River.

8The men of Ephraim were angry at Gideon. When the men of Ephraim found Gideon, they asked Gideon, “Why did you treat us this way? Why didn’t you call us when you went to fight against the people of Midian?”

²But Gideon answered the men of Ephraim, “I have not done as well as you men have done. You people of Ephraim have a much better harvest than my family, the Abiezers. At harvest time, you leave more grapes in the field than my family gathers! Isn’t that true? ³In the same way, you have a better harvest now. God allowed you to capture Oreb and Zeeb, the leaders of Midian! How can I compare my success with what you did?” When the men of Ephraim heard Gideon’s answer, they were not as angry as they had been.

Gideon Captures Two Kings of Midian

⁴Then Gideon and his 300 men came to the Jordan River and went across to the other side. But they were tired and hungry.* ⁵Gideon said to the men of the city of Succoth, “Give my soldiers something to eat. My soldiers are very tired. We are still chasing Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian.”

⁶But the leaders of the city of Succoth said to Gideon, “Why should we give your soldiers something to eat? You haven’t caught Zebah and Zalmunna yet.”

⁷Then Gideon said, “You won’t give us food. The Lord will help me capture Zebah and Zalmunna. After that, I will come back here. And I will beat your skin with thorns and briars from the desert.”

⁸Gideon left the city of Succoth and went to the city of Penuel. Gideon asked the men of Penuel for food, just as he had asked the men of Succoth. But the men of Penuel gave Gideon the same answer that the men of Succoth had given. ⁹So Gideon said to the

men of Penuel, “After I win the victory, I will come back here and pull this tower down.”

¹⁰Zebah and Zalmunna and their army were in the city of Karkor. Their army had 15,000 soldiers in it. These soldiers were all that were left of the army of the people of the east. 120,000 strong soldiers of that army had already been killed. ¹¹Gideon and his men used Tent Dwellers’ Road. That road is east of the cities of Nobah and Jogbehah. Gideon came to the city of Karkor and attacked the enemy. The enemy army did not expect the attack. ¹²Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of the people of Midian, ran away. But Gideon chased and caught those kings. Gideon and his men defeated the enemy army.

¹³Then Gideon son of Joash returned from the battle. Gideon and his men returned by going through a mountain pass called the Pass of Heres. ¹⁴Gideon captured a young man from the city of Succoth. Gideon asked the young man some questions. The young man wrote down some names for Gideon. The young man wrote down the names of the leaders and elders of the city of Succoth. He gave the names of 77 men.

¹⁵Then Gideon came to the city of Succoth. He said to the men of that city, “Here are Zebah and Zalmunna. You made fun of me by saying, ‘Why should we give food to your tired soldiers? You have not caught Zebah and Zalmunna yet.’” ¹⁶Gideon took the elders of the city of Succoth, and he beat them with thorns and briars from the desert to punish them. ¹⁷Gideon also pulled down the tower in the city of Penuel. Then he killed the men living in that city.

¹⁸Then Gideon said to Zebah and Zalmunna, “You killed some men on Mount Tabor. What were those men like?”

Zebah and Zalmunna answered, “Those men were like you. Each one of them seemed like a prince.”

¹⁹Gideon said, “Those men were my brothers! My mother’s sons! As the Lord lives, if you had not killed them, then I wouldn’t kill you now.”

²⁰Then Gideon turned to Jether. Jether was Gideon’s oldest son. Gideon said to him, “Kill

hungry This if from the ancient Greek translation. The Hebrew has, “chasing.”

these kings.” But Jether was only a boy and was afraid. So he would not take out his sword.

²¹Then Zebah and Zalmunna said to Gideon, “Come on, kill us yourself. You are a man and strong enough to do the job.” So Gideon got up and killed Zebah and Zalmunna. Then Gideon took the decorations shaped like the moon off their camels’ necks.

Gideon Makes an Ephod

²²The people of Israel said to Gideon, “You saved us from the people of Midian. So now, rule over us. We want you, your son and your grandson to rule over us.”

²³But Gideon told the people of Israel, “The Lord will be your ruler. I will not rule over you. And my son will not rule over you.”

²⁴Some of the people that the men of Israel defeated were Ishmaelites. And the Ishmaelite men wore gold earrings. So Gideon said to the people of Israel, “I want you to do this one thing for me. I want each of you to give me a gold earring from the things you took in the fighting.”

²⁵So the people of Israel said to Gideon, “We will gladly give you what you want.” So they put a coat down on the ground. Each man threw an earring onto the coat. ²⁶When those earrings were gathered up, they weighed about 43 pounds.* This did not include the other gifts the people of Israel gave to Gideon. They also gave him jewelry shaped like the moon and jewelry shaped like teardrops. And they gave him purple robes. These were things that the kings of the people of Midian had worn. They also gave him the chains from the camels of the Midianite kings.

²⁷Gideon used the gold to make an ephod.* He put the ephod in his home town, the town called Ophrah. All the people of Israel worshiped the ephod. In this way, the people of Israel were not faithful to God—they

worshiped the ephod.* The ephod became a trap that caused Gideon and his family to sin.

The Death of Gideon

²⁸The people of Midian were forced to be under the rule of the people of Israel. The people of Midian did not cause trouble any more. And the land was at peace for 40 years, as long as Gideon was alive.

²⁹Jerub Baal (*Gideon*) son of Joash went home. ³⁰Gideon had 70 sons of his own. He had so many sons because he had many wives. ³¹Gideon had a concubine* that lived in the city of Shechem. He had a son with that concubine. He named that son Abimelech.

³²So Gideon son of Joash died at a good old age. Gideon was buried in the tomb that Joash, his father, owned. That tomb is in the city of Ophrah, where the Abiezer family lives. ³³As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel again were not faithful to God—they followed Baal.* They made Baal Berith* their god. ³⁴The people of Israel did not remember the Lord their God, even though the Lord had saved them from all their enemies that were living all around the people of Israel. ³⁵The people of Israel were not loyal to the family of Jerub Baal (*Gideon*), even though he had done many good things for them.

Abimelech Becomes King

9Abimelech was the son of Jerub Baal (*Gideon*). Abimelech went to his uncles that lived in the city of Shechem. He said to his uncles and all of his mother’s family, ²“Ask the leaders of the city of Shechem this question: ‘Is it better for you to be ruled by the 70 sons of Jerub Baal, or to be ruled by only one man? Remember, I am your relative.’”

³Abimelech’s uncles spoke to the leaders of Shechem and asked them that question. The leaders of Shechem decided to follow Abimelech. The leaders said, “After all, he is our brother.” ⁴So the leaders of Shechem gave

43 pounds Literally, “1,700₁shekels₁.”

ephod We do not know exactly what this was. It may have been a special vest or coat, like the High Priest of Israel wore (see Exodus 28). Or it may have been an idol.

were not faithful ... ephod Literally, “acted like a prostitute to it.”

concubine A slave woman that was like a wife to a man.

were not faithful ... Baal Literally, “they acted like a prostitute to Baal.”

Baal Berith The name of this god means “Lord of the Agreement.”

Abimelech 70 pieces of silver. That silver was from the temple of the god Baal Berith.* Abimelech used the silver to hire some men. These men were worthless, reckless men. They followed Abimelech wherever he went.

⁵Abimelech went to his father's house at Ophrah. Abimelech murdered his brothers. Abimelech killed the 70 sons of his father, Jerub Baal (*Gideon*). He killed them all at the same time.* But Jerub Baal's youngest son hid from Abimelech and escaped. The youngest son's name was Jotham.

⁶Then all of the leaders in Shechem and the house of Millo* came together. All those people gathered beside the big tree of the pillar in Shechem and made Abimelech their king.

Jotham's Story

⁷Jotham heard that the leaders of the city of Shechem had made Abimelech king. When he heard this, he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim.* Jotham shouted out this story to the people:

Listen to me you leaders of the city of Shechem. Then let God listen to you.

⁸One day the trees decided to choose a king to rule over them. The trees said to the olive tree, "You be king over us."

⁹But the olive tree said, "Men and gods praise me for my oil. Should I stop making my oil just to go and sway over the other trees?"

¹⁰Then the trees said to the fig tree, "Come and be our king."

¹¹But the fig tree answered, "Should I stop making my good, sweet fruit just to go and sway over the other trees?"

¹²Then the trees said to the vine, "Come and be our king."

¹³But the vine answered, "My wine makes men and kings happy. Should I stop making my wine just to go and sway over the trees?"

¹⁴Finally all the trees said to the thornbush, "Come and be our king."

¹⁵But the thornbush said to the trees, "If you really want to make me king over you, come and find shelter in my shade. But if you do not want to do this, then let fire come out of the thornbush. Let the fire burn even the cedar trees of Lebanon."

¹⁶"Now if you were completely honest when you made Abimelech king, then may you be happy with him. And if you have been fair to Jerub Baal and his family, fine. And if you have treated Jerub Baal as you should, fine. ¹⁷But think what my father did for you. My father fought for you. He risked his life when he saved you from the people of Midian. ¹⁸But now you have turned against my father's family. You have killed 70 of my father's sons all at the same time.* You made Abimelech the new king over the city of Shechem. He is only the son of my father's slave girl. But you made him king because he is your relative. ¹⁹So, if you have been completely honest to Jerub Baal and his family today, then I hope you are happy with Abimelech as your king. And I hope he will be happy with you. ²⁰But leaders of Shechem and house of Millo,* if you have not acted right, then I hope that Abimelech destroys you. And I hope that Abimelech is destroyed too!"

²¹After Jotham had said all of this, he ran away. He escaped to the city named Beer. Jotham stayed in that city because he was afraid of his brother Abimelech.

Abimelech Fights Against Shechem

²²Abimelech ruled the people of Israel for three years. ^{23–24}Abimelech had killed Jerub Baal's 70 sons—and they were Abimelech's own brothers! The leaders of Shechem had supported him in doing this bad thing. So God caused trouble between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem. And the leaders of Shechem began planning ways to hurt Abimelech. ²⁵The leaders of the city of

all at the same time Literally, "on one stone."

Millo This was probably a well protected part of the city. It might have been in the city itself, or somewhere near the city.

Mount Gerizim This mountain is right beside the city of Shechem.

house of Millo Or, "Royal Family of Millo." The Millo was probably a well protected part of the city, perhaps even the palace area.

Shechem did not like Abimelech anymore. Those people put men on the hilltops to attack and rob everyone that went by. Abimelech found out about those attacks.

²⁶A man named Gaal son of Ebed and his brothers moved to the city of Shechem. The leaders of the city of Shechem decided to trust and follow Gaal.

²⁷One day the people of Shechem went out to the fields to pick grapes. The people squeezed the grapes to make wine. And then they had a party at the temple of their god. The people ate and drank and said bad things about Abimelech.

²⁸Then Gaal son of Ebed said, “We are the men of Shechem. Why should we obey Abimelech? Who does he think he is? Abimelech is one of Jerub Baal’s sons, right? And Abimelech made Zebul his officer, right? We should not obey Abimelech! We should follow our own people, men from Hamor.* (Hamor was the father of Shechem.) ²⁹If you make me the commander of these people, then I will destroy Abimelech. I will say to him, ‘Get your army ready and come out to battle.’”

³⁰Zebul was the governor of the city of Shechem. Zebul heard what Gaal son of Ebed said, and Zebul became very angry. ³¹Zebul sent messengers to Abimelech in the city of Arumah.* This is the message:

Gaal son of Ebed and Gaal’s brothers have come to the city of Shechem. They are making trouble for you. Gaal is turning the whole city against you. ³²So now you and your men should come tonight and hide in the fields outside the city. ³³Then, when the sun comes up in the morning, attack the city. Gaal and his men will come out of the city to fight you. When those men come out to fight, do what you can to them.

men from Hamor This refers to native born citizens of Shechem. Hamor was the father of Shechem in a story in Genesis 34. The city of Shechem is said to have been named after Hamor’s son.

in the city of Arumah Or, “secretly” or “in Tormah,” the town where Abimelech lived as king. It was probably about eight miles south of Shechem.

³⁴So Abimelech and all his soldiers got up during the night and went to the city. Those soldiers separated into four groups. They hid near the city of Shechem. ³⁵Gaal son of Ebed went out and was standing at the entrance to the gate of the city of Shechem. While Gaal was standing there, Abimelech and his soldiers came out of their hiding places.

³⁶Gaal saw the soldiers. Gaal said to Zebul, “Look, there are people coming down from the mountains.”

But Zebul said, “You are only seeing the shadows of the mountains. The shadows just look like people.”

³⁷But again Gaal said, “Look, there are some people coming down from that place over there, by Land’s Navel. And there! I saw someone’s head over by Magician’s Tree.*” ³⁸Zebul said to Gaal, “Why aren’t you bragging now? You said, ‘Who is Abimelech? Why should we obey him?’ You made fun of these men. Now go out and fight them.”

³⁹So Gaal led the leaders of Shechem out to fight Abimelech. ⁴⁰Abimelech and his men chased Gaal and his men. Gaal’s men ran back toward the gate of the city of Shechem. Many of Gaal’s men were killed before they could get back to the gate.

⁴¹Then Abimelech returned to the city of Arumah. Zebul forced Gaal and his brothers to leave the city of Shechem.

⁴²The next day the people of Shechem went out to the fields to work. Abimelech found out about that. ⁴³So Abimelech separated his men into three groups. He wanted to attack the people of Shechem by surprise. So he hid his men in the fields. When he saw the people coming out of the city he jumped up and attacked them. ⁴⁴Abimelech and his group ran to a place near the gate to Shechem. The other two groups ran out to the people in the fields and killed them. ⁴⁵Abimelech and his men fought against the city of Shechem all that day. Abimelech and his men captured the city of Shechem and killed the people of that city. Then Abimelech tore down the city and threw salt over the ruins.

Land’s Navel ... Magician’s Tree Two places in the hills near Shechem.

⁴⁶There were some people that lived at the Tower of Shechem.* When the people of that place heard what had happened to Shechem, they gathered together in the safest room* of the temple of the god El Berith.*

⁴⁷Abimelech heard that all the leaders of the Tower of Shechem had gathered together. ⁴⁸So Abimelech and all his men went up to Mount Zalmon.* Abimelech took an axe and cut off some branches. He carried those branches on his shoulders. Then Abimelech said to the men with him, “Hurry! Do the same thing that I have done.” ⁴⁹So all those men cut branches and followed Abimelech. They piled the branches against the safest room* of the temple of the god El Berith.* Then they set the branches on fire and burned the people in the room. So about 1,000 men and women living near the Tower of Shechem died.

Abimelech’s Death

⁵⁰Then Abimelech and his men went to the city of Thebez. Abimelech and his men captured that city. ⁵¹But inside the city there was a strong tower. All the leaders and other men and women of that city ran to the tower. When the people were inside the tower, they locked the door behind them. Then they climbed up to the roof of the tower. ⁵²Abimelech and his men came to the tower to attack it. Abimelech went up to the door of the tower. He wanted to burn the tower. ⁵³But, while Abimelech was standing at the door of the tower, a woman on the roof dropped a grinding stone on his head. The grinding stone crushed Abimelech’s skull. ⁵⁴Abimelech quickly said to the servant that carried his weapons, “Take out your sword and kill me. I want you to kill me so that people won’t say, ‘A woman killed Abimelech.’” So the servant stabbed Abimelech with his sword, and Abimelech died. ⁵⁵The people of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead. So they all went back home.

Tower of Shechem This was probably a place near Shechem, but not actually part of the city.

safest room We are not sure of the meaning of this Hebrew word.

El Berith The name of this god means “God of the Agreement.”

Mount Zalmon This is probably another name for Mount Ebal, a mountain near Shechem.

⁵⁶In that way, God punished Abimelech for all the bad things he did. Abimelech sinned against his own father by killing his 70 brothers. ⁵⁷God also punished the men of the city of Shechem for the bad things they did. So the things Jotham said came true. (Jotham was Jerub Baal’s youngest son. Jerub Baal was Gideon.)

Tola the Judge

10After Abimelech died, God sent another judge to save the people of Israel. That man’s name was Tola. Tola was the son of a man named Puah. Puah was the son of a man named Dodo. Tola was from the family group of Issachar. Tola lived in the city of Shamir. The city of Shamir was in the hill country of Ephraim. ²Tola was a judge for the people of Israel for 23 years. Then Tola died and was buried in the city of Shamir.

Jair the Judge

³After Tola died, another judge was sent by God. That man’s name was Jair. Jair lived in the area of Gilead. Jair was a judge for the people of Israel for 22 years. ⁴Jair had 30 sons. Those 30 sons rode 30 donkeys.* Those 30 sons controlled 30 towns in the area of Gilead. Those towns are called the Towns of Jair to this very day. ⁵Jair died and was buried in the city of Kamon.

The Ammonites Fight Against Israel

⁶Again the people of Israel did things the Lord said are evil. They began worshiping the false gods Baal* and the Ashtoreth.* They also worshiped the gods of the people of Aram, the gods of the people of Sidon, the gods of the people of Moab, the gods of the people of Ammon, and the gods of the

30 sons rode 30 donkeys This showed these men were important leaders, possibly the mayors of the 30 towns in Gilead.

Baal The Canaanite people believed that this false god brought the rain and storms. They also thought that he made the land produce good crops.

Ashtoreth The Canaanite people thought that this false goddess could make people able to have babies. She was their goddess of love and war.

Philistine people. The people of Israel left the Lord and stopped serving him.

⁷So the Lord became angry with the people of Israel. The Lord allowed the Philistine people and the Ammonite people to defeat them. ⁸In that same year those people destroyed the people of Israel that lived on the east side of the Jordan River, in the area of Gilead. That is the land where the Amorite people had lived. Those people of Israel suffered for 18 years. ⁹The Ammonite people then went across the Jordan River. They went to fight against the people of Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim. The Ammonite people brought many troubles to the people of Israel.

¹⁰So the people of Israel cried to the Lord for help. They said, “God, we have sinned against you. We left our God and worshiped the false god Baal.*”

¹¹The Lord answered the people of Israel, “You cried to me when the people of Egypt, the Amorite people, the Ammonite people, and the Philistine people hurt you. I saved you from these people. ¹²You cried to me when the people of Sidon, the Amalekite people, and the Midianite* people hurt you. I also saved you from those people. ¹³But you left me and started worshiping other gods. So I refuse to save you again. ¹⁴You like worshiping those gods, so go call to them for help. Let those gods save you when you are in trouble.”

¹⁵But the people of Israel said to the Lord, “We have sinned. Do whatever you want to do to us. But please save us today.” ¹⁶Then the people of Israel threw away the foreign gods. They started worshiping the Lord again. So the Lord felt sorry for them when he saw them suffering.

Jephthah Is Chosen as a Leader

¹⁷The Ammonite people gathered together for war. Their camp was in the area of Gilead. The people of Israel gathered together. Their camp was at the city of Mizpah. ¹⁸The leaders

Baal The Canaanite people believed that this false god brought the rain and storms. They also thought that he made the land produce good crops.

Midianite This is the ancient Greek translation. The Hebrew has, “The Maonite people.”

of the people living in the area of Gilead said, “Whoever leads us in the attack against the people of Ammon will become the head of all the people living in Gilead.”

1 Jephthah was from the family group of Gilead. He was a strong soldier. But Jephthah was the son of a prostitute. His father was a man named Gilead. ²Gilead’s wife had several sons. When those sons grew up, they did not like Jephthah. Those sons forced Jephthah to leave his home town. They said to him, “You will not get any of our father’s property. You are the son of another woman.” ³So Jephthah went away because of his brothers. He lived in the land of Tob. In the land of Tob, some rough men began to follow Jephthah.

⁴After a time the Ammonite people fought with the people of Israel. ⁵The Ammonite people were fighting against Israel, so the elders (*leaders*) in Gilead went to Jephthah. They wanted Jephthah to leave the land of Tob and come back to Gilead.

⁶The elders said to Jephthah, “Come and be our leader so that we can fight the Ammonite people.”

⁷But Jephthah said to the elders (*leaders*) of the land of Gilead, “You forced me to leave my father’s house. You hate me! So why are you coming to me now that you are having trouble?”

⁸The elders (*leaders*) from Gilead said to Jephthah, “That is the reason that we have come to you now. Please come with us and fight against the Ammonite people. You will be the commander over all the people living in Gilead.”

⁹Then Jephthah said to the elders (*leaders*) from Gilead, “If you want me to come back to Gilead and fight the Ammonite people, fine. But if the Lord helps me win, then I will be your new leader.”

¹⁰The elders (*leaders*) from Gilead said to Jephthah, “The Lord is listening to everything we are saying. And we promise to do all that you tell us to do.”

¹¹So Jephthah went with the elders (*leaders*) from Gilead. Those people made Jephthah their leader and their commander.

Jephthah repeated all of his words in front of the Lord at the city of Mizpah.

Jephthah's Message to the King of Ammon

¹²Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites. The messengers gave the king this message: "What is the problem between the Ammonites and the people of Israel? Why have you come to fight in our land?"

¹³The king of the Ammonite people said to the messengers of Jephthah, "We are fighting Israel because the people of Israel took our land when they came up from Egypt. They took our land from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River to the Jordan River. Now tell the people of Israel to give our land back to us in peace."

¹⁴So the messengers of Jephthah took this message back to Jephthah.* Then Jephthah sent the messengers to the king of the Ammonite people again. ¹⁵They took this message:

This is what Jephthah says: Israel did not take the land of the people of Moab or the land of the people of Ammon. ¹⁶When the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, the people of Israel went into the desert. The people of Israel went to the Red Sea. Then they went to Kadesh. ¹⁷The people of Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom. The messengers asked for a favor. They said, "Let the people of Israel cross through your land." But the king of Edom didn't let us go through their land. We also sent the same message to the king of Moab. But the king of Moab would not let us go through his land either. So the people of Israel stayed at Kadesh.

¹⁸Then the people of Israel went through the desert and around the edges of the land of Edom and the land of Moab. The people of Israel traveled east of the land of Moab. They made their camp on the other side of the Arnon River. They did not cross the border of

the land of Moab. (The Arnon River was the border of the land of Moab.)

¹⁹Then the people of Israel sent messengers to Sihon the king of the Amorite people. Sihon was the king of the city of Heshbon. The messengers asked Sihon, "Let the people of Israel pass through your land. We want to go to our land." ²⁰But Sihon, the king of the Amorite people would not let the people of Israel cross his borders. Sihon gathered all of his people and made a camp at Jahaz. Then the Amorite people fought with the people of Israel. ²¹But the Lord, the God of Israel, helped the people of Israel to defeat Sihon and his army. So the land of the Amorite people became the property of the people of Israel. ²²So the people of Israel got all of the land of the Amorite people. That land went from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River. That land also went from the desert to the Jordan River.

²³It was the Lord, the God of Israel, who forced the Amorite people to leave their land. And the Lord gave the land to the people of Israel. Do you think you can make the people of Israel leave this land? ²⁴Surely you can live in the land which Chemosh* your god has given to you. So we will live in the land that the Lord our God has given to us! ²⁵Are you any better than Balak son of Zippor? He was the king of the land of Moab. Did he argue with the people of Israel? Did he actually fight with the people of Israel? ²⁶The people of Israel have lived in the city of Heshbon and the towns around it for 300 years. The people of Israel have lived in the city of Aroer and the towns around it for 300 years. The people of Israel have lived in all of the cities along the side of the Arnon River for 300 years. Why have you not tried to take these cities in all that time? ²⁷The people of Israel have not sinned against you. But

So the messengers ... Jephthah This is from the ancient Greek translation. The Hebrew text does not have this sentence.

Chemosh The national god of the land of Moab, even though Milcom was the god of the Ammonite people.

Balak son of Zippor See Num. 22–24 for his story.

you are doing a very bad thing against the people of Israel. May the Lord, the true Judge, decide whether the people of Israel are right or the Ammonite people!

²⁸The king of the Ammonite people refused to listen to this message from Jephthah.

Jephthah's Promise

²⁹Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jephthah. Jephthah passed through the area of Gilead and Manasseh. He went to the city of Mizpah in Gilead. From the city of Mizpah in Gilead, Jephthah passed through to the land of the Ammonite people.

³⁰Jephthah made a promise to the Lord. He said, "If you will let me defeat the Ammonite people, ³¹I will give you the first thing that comes out of my house when I come back from the victory. I will give it to the Lord as a burnt offering."

³²Then Jephthah went to the land of the Ammonite people. Jephthah fought the Ammonite people. The Lord helped him defeat them. ³³He defeated them from the city of Aroer to the city of Minnith. Jephthah captured 20 cities. Then he fought the Ammonite people to the city of Abel Keramim. The people of Israel defeated the Ammonite people. It was a very great defeat for the Ammonite people.

³⁴Jephthah went back to Mizpah. Jephthah went to his house and his daughter came out of the house to meet him. She was playing a tambourine and dancing. She was his only daughter. Jephthah loved her very much. Jephthah did not have any other sons or daughters. ³⁵When Jephthah saw that his daughter was the first thing to come out of his house, he tore his clothes to show his sadness. Then he said, "Oh, my daughter! You have ruined me! You have made me very, very sad! I made a promise to the Lord, and I cannot change it!"

³⁶Then his daughter said to Jephthah, "Father, you have made a promise to the Lord. So keep your promise. Do what you said you would do. After all, the Lord did help you defeat your enemies, the Ammonite people."

³⁷Then Jephthah's daughter said to her father, "But do this one thing for me first. Let me be alone for two months. Let me go to the mountains. I will not marry and have children, so let me and my friends go and cry together."

³⁸Jephthah said, "Go and do that." Jephthah sent her away for two months. Jephthah's daughter and her friends stayed in the mountains. They cried for her because she would not marry and have children.

³⁹At the end of two months, Jephthah's daughter returned to her father. Jephthah did what he promised to the Lord. Jephthah's daughter never had sexual relations with anyone. So this became a custom in Israel. ⁴⁰Every year the women of Israel remembered the daughter of Jephthah from Gilead. The women of Israel cried four days every year for Jephthah's daughter.

Jephthah and Ephraim

12The men from the family group of Ephraim called all their soldiers together. Then they went across the river to the city of Zaphon. They said to Jephthah, "Why didn't you call us to help you fight the Ammonite people? We will burn your house down with you in it."

²Jephthah answered them, "The Ammonite people have been giving us many problems. So I and my people fought against them. I called you, but you didn't come to help us. ³I saw that you would not help us. So I risked my own life. I went across the river to fight against the Ammonite people. The Lord helped me to defeat them. Now why have you come to fight against me today?"

⁴Then Jephthah called the men of Gilead together. They fought against the men from the family group of Ephraim. They fought against the men of Ephraim because those men had insulted the men of Gilead. They had said, "You men of Gilead are nothing but survivors of the men of Ephraim. [You don't even have your own land!] Part of you belong to Ephraim, and part of you belong to Manasseh." The men of Gilead defeated the men of Ephraim.

⁵The men of Gilead captured the places where people cross the Jordan River. Those

places led to the country of Ephraim. Any time a survivor from Ephraim came to the river and said, “Let me cross,” the men of Gilead would ask him, “Are you from Ephraim?” If he said, “No,” ⁶they would say, “Say the word ‘Shibboleth.’” The men of Ephraim could not say that word correctly. They pronounced the word “Sibboleth.” So if the person said, “Sibboleth,” then the men of Gilead knew he was from Ephraim. So they would kill him at the crossing place. They killed 42,000 men from Ephraim.

⁷Jephthah was a judge for the people of Israel for six years. Then Jephthah from Gilead died. They buried him in his town in Gilead.

Ibzan, the Judge

⁸After Jephthah, a man named Ibzan was a judge for the people of Israel. Ibzan was from the city of Bethlehem. ⁹Ibzan had 30 sons and 30 daughters. He told his 30 daughters to marry men that were not his relatives. And he found 30 women that were not his relatives, and his sons married these women. Ibzan was a judge for the people of Israel for seven years. ¹⁰Then Ibzan died. He was buried in the city of Bethlehem.

Elon, the Judge

¹¹After Ibzan, a man named Elon was a judge for the people of Israel. Elon was from the family group of Zebulun. He was a judge for the people of Israel for ten years. ¹²Then Elon from the family group of Zebulun died. He was buried in the city of Aijalon, Zebulun.

Abdon, the Judge

¹³After Elon died, a man named Abdon son of Hillel was a judge for the people of Israel. Abdon was from the city of Pirathon. ¹⁴Abdon had 40 sons and 30 grandsons. They rode on 70 donkeys.* Abdon was a judge for the people of Israel for eight years. ¹⁵Then Abdon son of Hillel died. He was buried in the city of Pirathon. Pirathon is in the land of Ephraim. This is in the hill country where the Amalekite people lived.

They rode on 70 donkeys This showed they were important leaders, possibly mayors of their towns.

The Birth of Samson

13 Again the Lord saw the people of Israel doing evil things. So the Lord allowed the Philistine people to rule over them for 40 years.

²There was a man from the city of Zorah. The man’s name was Manoah. He was from the family group of Dan. Manoah had a wife. But she was not able to have any children. ³The Angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah’s wife. He said, “You have not been able to have children. But you will become pregnant and have a son. ⁴Don’t drink any wine or any other strong drink. Don’t eat any food that is unclean.* ⁵Why? Because you are pregnant, and you will have a son. He will be dedicated to God in a special way: He will be a Nazirite.* So you must never cut his hair. He will be God’s special person from before he is born. He will save the people of Israel from the power of the Philistine people.”

⁶Then the woman went to her husband and told him what had happened. She said, “A man of God* came to me. He looked like the Angel of God. He made me afraid. I didn’t ask him where he was from and he didn’t tell me his name. ⁷But he said to me, ‘You are pregnant and will have a son. Don’t drink any wine or other strong drink. Don’t eat any food that is unclean.* Why? Because the boy will be dedicated to God in a special way. The boy will be God’s special person from before he is born until the day he dies.’”

⁸Then Manoah prayed to the Lord. He said, “Lord, I beg you to send the man of God to us again. We want him to teach us what we should do for the boy that will soon be born.”

⁹God heard Manoah’s prayer. The Angel of God came to the woman again. She was sitting in a field and her husband Manoah was not with her. ¹⁰So the woman ran to tell her husband, “The man is back! The man that came to me the other day is here!”

unclean Or, “unacceptable.” Not pure or not able to be used in worshiping God. See Lev. 11–15 for the Old Testament rules about clean and unclean things.

Nazirite A person that made a special promise to God. See Num. 6:1–21 for the rules about the Nazirite promise.

man of God Usually, this is another name for a prophet.

¹¹Manoah got up and followed his wife. When he came to the man, he said, “Are you the same man that spoke to my wife before?”

The angel said, “I am.”

¹²So Manoah said, “I hope that what you say will happen. Tell me what kind of life will the boy live? What will he do?”

¹³The Angel of the Lord said to Manoah, “Your wife must do everything I told her. ¹⁴She must not eat anything that grows on a grapevine. She must not drink any wine or strong drink. She must not eat any food that is unclean.* She must do everything that I have commanded her to do.”

¹⁵Then Manoah said to the Angel of the Lord, “We would like for you to stay a while. We want to cook a young goat for you to eat.”

¹⁶The Angel of the Lord said to Manoah, “Even if you keep me from leaving, I will not eat your food. But if you want to prepare something, then offer a burnt offering to the Lord.” (Manoah did not understand that the man was really the Angel of the Lord.)

¹⁷Then Manoah asked the Angel of the Lord, “What is your name? We want to know so that we can honor you when what you have said really happens.”

¹⁸The Angel of the Lord said, “Why do you ask my name? It is too amazing [for you to believe].*”

¹⁹Then Manoah sacrificed a young goat on a rock. He offered the goat and a grain offering as a gift to the Lord and to the Person Who Does Amazing Things.* ²⁰Manoah and his wife were watching what happened. As the flames went up to the sky from the altar,* the Angel of the Lord went up to heaven in the fire!

When Manoah and his wife saw that, they bowed down with their faces to the ground.

unclean Or, “unacceptable.” Not pure or not able to be used in worshiping God. See Lev. 11–15 for the Old Testament rules about clean and unclean things.

It is too amazing ... to believe Or, “It is Pelei.” This means “amazing,” “wonderful.” This is like the name, “Wonderful Counselor” in Isaiah 9:6.

Lord and to the Person Who Does Amazing Things Or, “The Lord Who Does Amazing Things.” Both of these are names for God, but Manoah didn’t know the man was really the Angel of the Lord.

altar(s) A stone table used for burning sacrifices that were offered as gifts to God.

²¹Manoah finally understood that the man was really the Angel of the Lord. The Angel of the Lord did not appear to Manoah again.

²²Manoah said to his wife, “We have seen God! Surely we will die because of this!”

²³But his wife said to him, “The Lord does not want to kill us. If the Lord wanted to kill us, he would not have accepted our burnt offering and grain offering. He would not have shown us all these things. And he would not have told us these things.”

²⁴So the woman had a boy. She named him Samson. Samson grew and the Lord blessed him. ²⁵The Spirit of the Lord began to work in Samson while he was in the city of Mahaneh Dan. That city is between the cities of Zorah and Eshtaol.

Samson's Marriage

14 Samson went down to the city of Timnah. He saw a young Philistine woman there. ²When he got back home he said to his father and mother, “I saw a Philistine woman in Timnah. I want you to get her for me. I want to marry her.”

³His father and his mother answered, “But surely there is a woman from the people of Israel that you can marry. Do you have to marry a woman from the Philistine people? Those people are not even circumcised.”*

But Samson said, “Get that woman for me! She is the one I want!” ⁴(Samson’s parents did not know that the Lord wanted this to happen. The Lord was looking for a way to do something against the Philistine people. The Philistine people were ruling over the people of Israel at that time.)

⁵Samson went down with his father and mother to the city of Timnah. They went as far as the grape fields near that city. At that place, a young lion suddenly roared and jumped at Samson! ⁶The Spirit of the Lord came on Samson with great power. He tore the lion apart with his bare hands. It seemed easy to him. It was as easy as tearing apart a

circumcise(d) Cutting the foreskin from a man. In Israel this was proof that a man had made a special agreement to obey God’s laws and teachings.

young goat. But Samson did not tell his father or mother what he had done.

⁷So Samson went down to the city and talked to the Philistine woman. She pleased him. ⁸Several days later, Samson came back to marry the Philistine woman. On his way, he went over to look at the dead lion. He found a swarm of bees in the dead lion's body. They had made some honey. ⁹Samson got some of the honey with his hands. He walked along eating the honey. When he came to his parents, he gave them some of the honey. They ate it too. But Samson did not tell his parents that he had taken the honey from the body of the dead lion.

¹⁰Samson's father went down to see the Philistine woman. The custom was for the bridegroom to give a party. So Samson gave a party. ¹¹When the [Philistine] people saw that he was having a party, they sent 30 men to be with him.

¹²Then Samson said to the 30 men, "I want to tell you a story. This party will last for seven days. Try to find the answer during that time. If you can answer the riddle in that time, I will give you 30 linen shirts and 30 changes of clothes. ¹³But if you can't find the answer, then you must give me 30 linen shirts and 30 changes of clothes." So the 30 men said, "Tell us your riddle, we want to hear it."

¹⁴Samson told them this riddle:

Out of the eater came something to eat.

Out of the strong came something sweet.

The 30 men tried for three days to find the answer, but they couldn't.

¹⁵On the fourth day,* the men came to Samson's wife. They said, "Did you invite us here just to make us poor? You must trick your husband into telling us the answer to the riddle. If you don't get the answer for us, we will burn you and all the people in your father's house to death."

¹⁶So Samson's wife went to him and began crying. She said, "You just hate me! You don't really love me! You told my people a

riddle, and you won't tell me the answer."

¹⁷Samson's wife cried for the rest of the seven days of the party. So he finally gave her the answer to the riddle on the seventh day. He told her because she kept bothering him. Then she went to her people and told them the answer to the riddle.

¹⁸So before the sun went down on the seventh day of the party, the Philistine men had the answer. They came to Samson and said,

"What is sweeter than honey?

What is stronger than a lion?"

Then Samson said to them,

"If you had not plowed with my cow,
you would not have solved my riddle!"

¹⁹Samson was very angry. The Spirit of the Lord came on Samson with great power. He went down to the city of Ashkelon. In that city he killed 30 [Philistine] men. Then he took all of the clothes and property from the dead bodies. He brought those clothes back and gave them to the men that had answered his riddle. Then he went to his father's house. ²⁰Samson did not take his wife. The best man at the wedding kept her.

Samson Makes Trouble for the Philistines

15 At the time of the wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife. He took a young goat with him as a gift. He said, "I am going to my wife's room."

But her father would not let Samson go in. ²Her father said to Samson, "I thought you hated her. So I let her marry the best man at the wedding. Her younger sister is more beautiful. Take her younger sister."

³But Samson said to him, "Now I have a good reason to hurt you Philistine people. No one will blame me now."

⁴So Samson went out and caught 300 foxes. He took two foxes at a time and tied their tails together to make pairs. Then he tied a torch between the tails of each pair of foxes.

⁵Samson lit the torches that were between the foxes' tails. Then he let the foxes run through the grain fields of the Philistine people. In this way, he burned up the plants growing in their fields and the stacks of grain they had cut. He

fourth day This is from the ancient Greek translation. The Hebrew has, "seventh day."

also burned up their fields of grapes and their olive trees.

⁶The Philistine people asked, “Who did this?”

Someone told them, “Samson, the son-in-law of the man from Timnah, did this. He did this because his father-in-law gave Samson’s wife to the best man at his wedding.” So the Philistine people burned Samson’s wife and her father to death.

⁷Then Samson said to the Philistine people, “You did this bad thing to me. So now I will do bad things to you. Then I will be finished with you!”

⁸Then Samson attacked the Philistine people. He killed many of them. Then he went and stayed in a cave. The cave was in a place named the Rock of Etam.

⁹Then the Philistine people went to the land of Judah. They stopped near a place named Lehi. Their army camped there and prepared for war. ¹⁰The men of the family group of Judah asked them, “Why have you Philistine people come here to fight us?”

They answered, “We have come to get Samson. We want to make him our prisoner. We want to punish him for the things he did to our people.”

¹¹Then 3000 men from the family group of Judah went to Samson. They went to the cave near the Rock of Etam. They said to him, “What have you done to us? Don’t you know that the Philistine people rule over us?”

Samson answered, “I only punished them for the things they did to me.”

¹²Then they said to Samson, “We have come to tie you up. We will give you to the Philistine people.”

Samson said to the men from Judah, “Promise me that you yourselves will not hurt me.”

¹³The men from Judah said, “We agree. We will just tie you up and give you to the Philistine people. We promise that we will not kill you.” So they tied Samson with two new ropes. They led him up from the cave in the rock.

¹⁴When Samson came to the place called Lehi, the Philistine people came to meet him. They were shouting from joy. Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Samson with great power. Samson broke the ropes. The ropes

seemed weak like burnt strings. The ropes fell off his arms as if they had melted. ¹⁵Samson found a jawbone of a donkey that had died. He took the jawbone and killed 1,000 Philistine men with it.

¹⁶Then Samson said,

With a donkey’s jawbone

I killed 1,000 men!

With a donkey’s jawbone

I piled* them into a tall pile.

¹⁷When Samson finished speaking, he threw the jawbone down. So that place was named Ramath Lehi.*

¹⁸Samson was very thirsty. So he cried to the Lord. He said, “I am your servant. You gave me this great victory. Please don’t let me die from thirst now! Please don’t let me be captured by men who are not even circumcised!”

¹⁹There is a hole in the ground at Lehi. God made that hole crack open, and water came out. Samson drank that water and felt better. He felt strong again. So he named that water spring En Hakkore.* It is still there in the city of Lehi today.

²⁰So Samson was a judge for the people of Israel for 20 years. That was during the time of the Philistine people.

Samson Goes to the City of Gaza

16One day Samson went to the city of Gaza. He saw a prostitute there. He went in to stay the night with her. ²Someone told the people of Gaza, “Samson has come here.” They wanted to kill Samson, so they surrounded the city. They hid near the city gate and waited all night for Samson. They were very quiet all night long. They had said to each other, “When morning comes, we will kill Samson.”

³But Samson only stayed with the prostitute until midnight. Samson got up at midnight. Samson grabbed the doors of the city gate and pulled them loose from the wall. Samson pulled down the doors, the two posts, and the bars that lock the door shut. Samson put those

piled In Hebrew, the word “pile” is like the word, “donkey.”

Ramath Lehi This name means “Jawbone Heights.”

En Hakkore This means “The spring of the one that calls.”

things on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill near the city of Hebron.

Samson and Delilah

⁴Later, Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah. She was from Sorek Valley.

⁵The rulers of the Philistine people went to Delilah. They said, “We want to know what makes Samson so strong. Try to trick him into telling you his secret. Then we will know how to capture him and tie him up. Then we will be able to control him. If you do this, each one of us will give you 28 pounds* of silver.”

⁶So Delilah said to Samson, “Tell me why you are so strong. How could someone tie you up and make you helpless?”

⁷Samson answered, “Someone would have to tie me up with seven fresh, new bowstrings.* If someone did that, I would be weak like any other man.”

⁸Then the rulers of the Philistine people brought seven fresh, new bowstrings to Delilah. Delilah tied up Samson with the bowstrings. ⁹Some men were hiding in the next room. Delilah said to Samson, “Samson, the Philistine men are going to capture you!” But Samson easily broke the bowstrings. They snapped like a string when it comes too close to a flame. So the Philistine people did not find out the secret of Samson’s strength.

¹⁰Then Delilah said to Samson, “You lied to me! You made me look foolish. Please tell me the truth, how could someone tie you up?”

¹¹Samson said, “Someone would have to tie me up with new ropes. They would have to tie me with ropes that have not been used before. If someone did that, I would become as weak as any other man.”

¹²So Delilah took some new ropes and tied up Samson. Some men were hiding in the next room. Then Delilah called out to him, “Samson, the Philistine men are going to capture you!” But he broke the ropes easily. He broke them like they were threads.

¹³Then Delilah said to Samson, “You lied to me again! You made me look foolish. Now, tell me how someone could tie you up.”

Samson said, “If you use the loom* to weave the seven braids* of hair on my head and tighten it with a pin, I will become as weak as any other man.”

Later, Samson went to sleep. So Delilah used the loom to weave the seven braids of hair on his head.* ¹⁴Then Delilah fastened [the loom to the ground] with a tent peg. Again she called out to him, “Samson, the Philistine men are going to capture you!” Samson pulled up the tent peg, the loom,* and the shuttle!*

¹⁵Then Delilah said to Samson, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when you don’t even trust me? You refuse to tell me your secret. This is the third time you made me look foolish. You haven’t told me the secret of your great strength.” ¹⁶She kept bothering Samson day after day. He got so tired of her asking him about his secret that he felt like he was going to die. ¹⁷Finally, Samson told Delilah everything. He said, “I have never had my hair cut. I was dedicated to God before I was born. If someone shaved my head, then I would lose my strength. I would become as weak as any other man.”

¹⁸Delilah saw that Samson had told her his secret. She sent a message to the rulers of the Philistine people. She said, “Come back again. Samson has told me everything.” So the rulers of the Philistine people came back to Delilah. They brought the money that they had promised to give her.

¹⁹Delilah got Samson to go to sleep while he was lying in her lap. Then she called in a man to shave off the seven braids* of Samson’s hair. In this way she made Samson weak. Samson’s strength left him. ²⁰Then Delilah called out to him, “Samson, the Philistine men are going to capture you!” He

loom A machine for making cloth from thread.

braids Hair that has been twisted together like a rope.

So Delilah ... head This is found in the ancient Greek translation. It is not in the Hebrew text.

shuttle The tool used to pull the threads back and forth on a loom to make cloth.

28 pounds Literally, “1,100 [shekels].”

fresh, new bowstrings Bowstrings were often made from sinew which is brittle after it becomes old and dry.

woke up and thought, “I will escape like I did before and free myself.” But Samson did not know that the Lord had left him.

²¹The Philistine men captured Samson. They tore out his eyes, and took him down to the city of Gaza. Then they put chains on him to keep him from running away. They put Samson in prison and made him work grinding grain. ²²But Samson’s hair began to grow again.

²³The rulers of the Philistine people came together to celebrate. They were going to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon.* They said, “Our god helped us defeat Samson our enemy.” ²⁴When the Philistine people saw Samson, they praised their god. They said,

This man destroyed our people!
This man killed many of our people!
But our god helped us take our enemy!

²⁵The people were having a good time at the celebration. So they said, “Bring Samson out. We want to make fun of him.” So they brought Samson from the prison and made fun of him. They made Samson stand between the columns in the temple of the god Dagon. ²⁶A servant was holding Samson’s hand. Samson said to him, “Put me where I can feel the columns that hold this temple up. I want to lean against them.”

²⁷The temple was crowded with men and women. All the rulers of the Philistine people were there. There were about 3,000 men and women on the roof* of the temple. They were laughing and making fun of Samson. ²⁸Then Samson said a prayer to the Lord. He said, “Lord All-Powerful, remember me. God, please give me strength one more time. Let me do this one thing to punish these Philistines for tearing out my two eyes!” ²⁹Then Samson held the two columns in the center of the temple. These two columns supported the whole temple. He braced himself between the two columns. One

column was at his right side and the other at his left side. ³⁰Samson said, “Let me die with these Philistines!” Then he pushed as hard as he could. And the temple fell on the rulers and all the people in it. In this way, Samson killed many more Philistine people when he died than when he was alive.

³¹Samson’s brothers and all the people in his father’s family went down to get his body. They brought him back and buried him in his father’s tomb. That tomb is between the cities of Zorah and Eshtaol. Samson was a judge for the people of Israel for 20 years.

Micah’s Idols

17 There was a man named Micah that lived in the hill country of Ephraim. ²Micah said to his mother, “Do you remember that someone stole 28 pounds* of silver from you. I heard you say a curse about that. Well, I have the silver. I took it.”

His mother said, “The Lord bless you, my son.”

³Micah gave the 28 pounds* of silver back to his mother. Then she said, “I will give this silver as a special gift to the Lord. I will give it to my son so he can make a statue and cover it with the silver. So now, son, I give the silver back to you.”

⁴But Micah gave the silver back to his mother. So she took about 5 pounds* of the silver and gave them to a silversmith.* The silversmith used the silver to make a statue covered with silver. The statue was put in Micah’s house. ⁵Micah had a temple for worshiping idols. He made an ephod* and some house idols. Then Micah chose one of his sons to be his priest. (⁶At that time, the people of Israel did not have a king. So each person did what he himself thought was right.)

⁷There was a young man that was a Levite.* He was from the city of Bethlehem,

28 pounds Literally, “1,100 {shekels}.”

5 pounds Literally, “200 {shekels}.”

silversmith A person that makes things from silver.

ephod We do not know exactly what this was. It may have been a special vest or coat, like the High Priest of Israel wore (see Exodus 28). Or it may have been an idol.

Levite A person from the tribe of Levi. The Levites helped the priests in the temple and also worked for the civil government.

Dagon The Canaanite people worshiped this false god hoping he would give them a good harvest of grain. This was probably the most important god for the Philistine people.

roof In ancient Israel, a roof was often flat and used like another room.

Judah. He had been living among the family group of Judah. ⁸That young man left Bethlehem, Judah. He was looking for another place to live. As he was traveling, he came to Micah's house. Micah's house was in the hill country of the land of Ephraim. ⁹Micah asked him, "Where have you come from?"

The young man answered, "I am a Levite* from the city of Bethlehem, Judah. I am looking for a place to live."

¹⁰Then Micah said to him, "Live with me. Be my father and my priest. I will give you 4 ounces* of silver each year. I will also give you clothes and food."

The Levite* did what Micah asked. ¹¹The young Levite agreed to live with Micah. The young man became like one of Micah's own sons. ¹²Micah chose him to be his priest. So the young man became a priest and lived in Micah's house. ¹³And Micah said, "Now I know that the Lord will be good to me. I know this because I have a man from the family group of Levi to be my priest."

Dan Captures the City of Laish

18At that time, the people of Israel did not have a king. And at that time, the family group of Dan was still looking for a place to live. They did not have their own land yet. The other family groups of Israel already had their land. But the family group of Dan had not taken their land yet.

²So the family group of Dan sent five soldiers to look for some land. They went to search for a good place to live. Those five men were from the cities of Zorah and Eshtaol. They were chosen because they were from all the families of Dan. They were told, "Go, look for some land."

The five men came to the hill country of Ephraim. They came to Micah's house and spent the night there. ³When the five men came close to Micah's house, they heard the voice of the young Levite* man. They recognized his voice, so they stopped at Micah's house. They asked the young man,

"Who brought you to this place? What are you doing here? What is your business here?"

⁴The young man told them about the things Micah had done for him. "Micah hired me," the young man said. "I am his priest."

⁵So they said to him, "Please ask God something for us. We want to know something: Will our search for a place to live be successful?"

⁶The priest said to the five men, "Yes. Go in peace. The Lord will lead you on your way."

⁷So the five men left. They came to the city of Laish. They saw that the people of that city lived in safety. They were ruled by the people of Sidon. Everything was peaceful and quiet. The people had plenty of everything. And they didn't have any enemies nearby to hurt them. Also, they lived a long way from the city of Sidon and they did not have any agreements with the people of Aram.*

⁸The five men went back to the cities of Zorah and Eshtaol. Their relatives asked them, "What did you learn?"

⁹The five men answered, "We have found some land, and it is very good. We should attack them. Don't wait! Let's go and take that land! ¹⁰When you come to that place, you will see that there is plenty of land. There is plenty of everything there. You will also see that the people are not expecting an attack. Surely God has given that land to us."

¹¹So 600 men from the family group of Dan left the cities of Zorah and Eshtaol. They were ready for war. ¹²On their way to the city of Laish, they stopped near the city of Kiriath Jearim in the land of Judah. They set up a camp there. That is why the place west of Kiriath Jearim is named Mahaneh Dan* to this very day. ¹³From that place, the 600 men traveled on to the hill country of Ephraim. Then they came to Micah's house.

¹⁴So the five men that had explored the land around Laish spoke. They said to their relatives, "There is an ephod* in one of these

they did not have ... Aram Or, "they did not have any dealings with people."

Mahaneh Dan This name means "The Camp of Dan."

ephod We do not know exactly what this was. It may have been a special vest or coat, like the High Priest of Israel wore (see Exodus 28). Or it may have been an idol.

Levite A person from the tribe of Levi. The Levites helped the priests in the temple and also worked for the civil government.

4 ounces Literally, "10 {shekels}."

houses. And there are also household gods, a carved statue, and a silver idol. You know what to do—go get them.”¹⁵ So they stopped at Micah’s house, where the young Levite man lived. They asked the young man how he was.¹⁶ The 600 men from the family group of Dan stood at the entrance of the gate. They all had their weapons and were ready for war.^{17–18} The five spies went into the house. The priest stood just outside by the gate with the 600 men that were ready for war. The men took the carved idol, the ephod, the house idols, and the silver idol. The young Levite priest said, “What are you doing?”

¹⁹ The five men answered, “Be quiet! Don’t say a word. Come with us. Be our father and our priest. You must choose. Is it better for you to be a priest for just one man? Or is it better for you to be a priest for a whole family group of Israelite people?”

²⁰ This made the Levite man happy. So he took the ephod*, the house idols, and the idol. He went with those men from the family group of Dan.

²¹ Then the 600 men from the family group of Dan, with the Levite priest, turned and left Micah’s house. They put their little children, their animals, and all their things in front of them.

²² The men from the family group of Dan went a long way from that place. But the people living near Micah met together. Then they began chasing the men of Dan and caught up with them.²³ The men with Micah were shouting at the men of Dan. The men of Dan turned around. They said to Micah, “What’s the problem? Why are you shouting?”

²⁴ Micah answered, “You men from Dan took my idols. I made those idols for myself. You have also taken my priest. What do I have left now? How can you ask me, ‘What’s the problem?’”

²⁵ The men from the family group of Dan answered, “You had better not argue with us. Some of our men have hot tempers. If you

shout at us, those men might attack you. You and your families might get killed.”

²⁶ Then the men of Dan turned around and went on their way. Micah knew that those men were too strong for him. So he went back home.

²⁷ So the men of Dan took the idols that Micah made. They also took the priest that had been with Micah. Then they came to Laish. They attacked the people living in Laish. Those people were at peace. They were not expecting an attack. The men of Dan killed those people with their swords. Then they burned the city.²⁸ The people living in Laish did not have anyone to rescue them. They lived too far from the city of Sidon for those people to help. And the people of Laish did not have any agreements with the people of Aram—so those people did not help them. The city of Laish was in a valley which belonged to the town of Beth Rehob. The people from Dan built a new city in that place. And that city became their home.²⁹ The people of Dan gave that city a new name. That city had been called Laish, but they changed the name to Dan. They named the city after their ancestor* Dan, one of the sons of Israel.

³⁰ The people of the family group of Dan set up the idol in the city of Dan. They made Jonathan son of Gershom their priest. Gershom was the son of Moses.* Jonathan and his sons were priests for the family group of Dan until the time when the Israelite people were taken into captivity.³¹ The people of Dan set up for themselves the idol that Micah had made. That idol was there in the city of Dan the whole time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

A Levite Man and His Woman Servant

19 At that time, the people of Israel did not have a king.

There was a Levite* man that lived far back in the hill country of Ephraim. That man had a woman as a servant that was like a wife

ancestor Literally, “father.” This means a person that people are descended from.

Moses Or, “Manasseh.”

Levite A person from the tribe of Levi. The Levites helped the priests in the temple and also worked for the civil government.

ephod We do not know exactly what this was. It may have been a special vest or coat, like the High Priest of Israel wore (see Exodus 28). Or it may have been an idol.

to him. That woman servant* was from the city of Bethlehem in the country of Judah. ²But his woman servant had an argument with the Levite man. She left him and went back to her father's house in Bethlehem, Judah. She stayed there for four months. ³Then her husband went after her. He wanted to speak kindly to her so that she would come back to him. He took with him his servant and two donkeys. The Levite man came to her father's house. Her father saw the Levite man and came out to greet him. The father was very happy. ⁴The woman's father led the Levite man into his house. The Levite's father-in-law invited him to stay. So the Levite man stayed for three days. He ate, drank, and slept in his father-in-law's house.

⁵On the fourth day, they got up early in the morning. The Levite* man was getting ready to leave. But the young woman's father said to his son-in-law, "Eat something first. After you eat, then you can go." ⁶So the Levite man and his father-in-law sat down to eat and drink together. After that, the young woman's father said to the Levite man, "Please stay tonight. Relax and enjoy yourself. Wait until this afternoon to leave." So the two men ate together. ⁷The Levite got up to leave, but his father-in-law persuaded him to stay the night again.

⁸Then, on the fifth day, the Levite* man got up early in the morning. He was ready to leave. But the woman's father said to his son-in-law, "Eat something first. Relax and stay until this afternoon." So they both ate together again.

⁹Then the Levite* man, his woman servant,* and his servant got up to leave. But the young woman's father said, "It is almost dark. The day is almost gone. So stay the night here and enjoy yourself. Tomorrow morning you can get up early and go on your way."

¹⁰But the Levite* man did not want to stay another night. He took his two donkeys and his woman servant.* He traveled as far as the city of Jebus. (Jebus is another name for Jerusalem). ¹¹The day was almost over. They were near the

city of Jebus. So the servant said to his master, the Levite man, "Let's stop at this Jebusite city. Let's stay the night here."

¹²But his master, the Levite* man, said, "No. We won't go inside a strange city. Those people are not Israelite people. We will go to the city of Gibeah."* ¹³The Levite man said, "Come on. Let's try to make it to Gibeah or Ramah. We can stay the night in one of those cities."

¹⁴So the Levite* man and the people with him traveled on. The sun was going down just as they entered the city of Gibeah. Gibeah is in the area that belongs to the family group of Benjamin. ¹⁵So they stopped at Gibeah. They planned to stay the night in that city. They came to the city square* in the city and sat down there. But no one invited them home to stay the night.

¹⁶That evening an old man came into the city from the fields. His home was in the hill country of Ephraim. But now he was living in the city of Gibeah. (The men of Gibeah were from the family group of Benjamin.) ¹⁷The old man saw the traveler (the Levite man), in the public square. The old man asked, "Where are you going? Where did you come from?"

¹⁸The Levite* man answered, "We are traveling from the city Bethlehem, Judah. We are going home. I am from far back in the hill country of Ephraim. I have been to Bethlehem, Judah. And now, I am going to my house.*" ¹⁹We already have straw and food for our donkeys. There is also bread and wine for me, the young woman and my servant. We don't need anything."

²⁰The old man said, "You are welcome to stay at my house. I will give you anything you need. Only, don't stay the night in the public square!" ²¹Then the old man took the Levite* man and the people with him to his house. He fed their donkeys. They washed their feet. Then they had something to eat and drink.

²²While the Levite* man and those that were with him were enjoying themselves,

woman servant Or, "concubine," a slave woman who was like a wife to a man.

Levite A person from the tribe of Levi. The Levites helped the priests in the temple and also worked for the civil government.

Gibeah Gibeah was a few miles north of Jebus.

square A public place near the city gates. The people of the city had meetings there, and visitors often camped there.

my house This is from the ancient Greek translation. The Hebrew has, "the Lord's house."

some of the men from that city surrounded the house. They were very bad men. They began beating on the door. They shouted at the old man that owned the house. They said, “Bring out the man that came to your house. We want to have sex with him.”

²³The old man went outside and spoke to those bad men. He said, “No, my friends, don’t do such bad things! That man is a guest in my house.* Don’t do this terrible sin. ²⁴Look, here is my daughter. She has never had sex before. I will bring her out to you now. You can use her any way you want. But don’t do such a terrible sin against this man.”

²⁵But those bad men would not listen to the old man. So the Levite* man took his woman servant* and put her outside with those evil men. Those evil men hurt her and raped her all night long. Then, at dawn, they let her go. ²⁶At dawn, the woman came back to the house where her master was staying. She fell down at the front door. She lay there until it was daylight.

²⁷The Levite* man got up early the next morning. He wanted to go home. He opened the door to go outside. And a hand fell across the threshold of the door. There was his woman servant.* She had fallen down against the door. ²⁸The Levite man said to her, “Get up, let’s go!” But she did not answer—she was dead.

The Levite* man put his woman servant* on his donkey and went home. ²⁹When he arrived at his house, he took a knife and cut his woman servant into 12 parts. Then he sent those 12 parts of the woman to all the areas where the people of Israel lived. ³⁰Everyone that saw this said, “Nothing like this has ever happened in Israel before. We haven’t seen anything like this from the time we came out of Egypt. Discuss this and tell us what to do.”

That man ... my house At this time, it was a custom that if you invited people to be your guests, then you had to protect and care for those people.

Levite A person from the tribe of Levi. The Levites helped the priests in the temple and also worked for the civil government.

woman servant Or, “concubine,” a slave woman who was like a wife to a man.

The War Between Israel and Benjamin

20So all the people of Israel joined together. They all came together to stand before the Lord in the city of Mizpah. People came from everywhere in Israel.* Even the Israelite people from Gilead* were there. ²The leaders of all the family groups of Israel were there. They took their places in the public meeting of God’s people. There were 400,000 soldiers with swords in that place. ³The people from the family group of Benjamin heard that the people of Israel were meeting together in Mizpah. The people of Israel said, “Tell us how this terrible thing happened.”

⁴So the husband of the woman that had been murdered told them the story. He said, “My woman servant* and I came to the city of Gibeah in the area of Benjamin. We spent the night there. ⁵But during the night the leaders of the city of Gibeah came to the house where I was staying. They surrounded the house, and they wanted to kill me. They raped my woman servant, and she died. ⁶So I took my woman servant and cut her into pieces. Then I sent one piece to each of the family groups of Israel. I sent the 12 pieces to the lands we have received. I did that because the people of Benjamin have done this terrible thing in Israel. ⁷Now, all you men of Israel, speak up. Give your decision about what we should do.”

⁸Then all the people stood up at the same time. They said together, “None of us will go home. No, not one of us will go back to his house. ⁹Now this is what we will do to the city of Gibeah: We will throw lots* to let God show us what to do to those people. ¹⁰We will choose ten men from every 100 from all the family groups of Israel. And we will choose 100 men from every 1,000. We will choose 1,000 men from every 10,000. Those men we have chosen will get supplies for the army. Then the army will go to the city of Gibeah in the area of Benjamin. The army will punish

from everywhere in Israel Literally, “from Dan to Beersheba.

Gilead This area was east of the Jordan River.

lots Sticks, stones, or pieces of bone used like dice for making decisions. See Proverbs 16:33.

those people for the terrible thing they did among the people of Israel.”

¹¹So all the men of Israel gathered together at the city of Gibeah. They were all agreed to what they were doing. ¹²The family groups of Israel sent men to the family group of Benjamin with a message. The message was: “What about this terrible thing that some of your men have done? ¹³Send those bad men from the city of Gibeah to us. Give us those men so that we can put them to death. We must remove the evil from among the people of Israel.”

But the people from the family group of Benjamin would not listen to the messengers from their relatives, the other people of Israel. ¹⁴The people from the family group of Benjamin left their cities and went to the city of Gibeah. They went to Gibeah to fight against the other family groups of Israel. ¹⁵The people from the family group of Benjamin got 26,000 soldiers together. All those soldiers were trained for war. They also had 700 trained soldiers from the city of Gibeah. ¹⁶There were also 700 trained soldiers that were trained to fight with their left hand*. Each one of them could use a sling* with great skill. They all could use a sling to throw a stone at a hair and not miss!

¹⁷All the family groups of Israel, except Benjamin, gathered together 400,000 fighting men. Those 400,000 men had swords. Each one was a trained soldier. ¹⁸The people of Israel went up to the city of Bethel. At Bethel they asked God, “Which family group will be first to attack the family group of Benjamin?”

The Lord answered, “The family group of Judah will go first.”

¹⁹The next morning the people of Israel got up. They made a camp near the city of Gibeah. ²⁰Then the army of Israel went out to fight the army of Benjamin. The army of Israel got ready for a battle against the army of Benjamin at the city of Gibeah. ²¹Then the army of Benjamin came out of the city of Gibeah. The army of Benjamin killed 22,000 men in the army of Israel during the battle that day.

trained ... left hand Literally, “restrained in their right hand.”
sling A strip of leather for throwing rocks.

^{22–23}The people of Israel went to the Lord. They cried until evening. They asked the Lord, “Should we go to fight the people of Benjamin again? Those people are our relatives.”

The Lord answered, “Go fight against them.” The men of Israel encouraged each other. Then they again went out to fight, like they did the first day.

²⁴Then the army of Israel came near the army of Benjamin. This was the second day of the war. ²⁵The army of Benjamin came out of the city of Gibeah to attack the army of Israel on the second day. This time, the army of Benjamin killed another 18,000 men from the army of Israel. All of those men in the army of Israel were trained soldiers.

²⁶Then all the people of Israel went up to the city of Bethel. At that place they sat down and cried to the Lord. They did not eat anything all day, until evening. They also offered burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the Lord. ²⁷The men of Israel asked the Lord a question. (In those days God’s Box of the Agreement* was there at Bethel. ²⁸Phinehas was the priest that served God there. Phinehas was the son of Eleazar. Eleazar was the son of Aaron.) The people of Israel asked, “The people of Benjamin are our relatives. Should we again go to fight against them? Or should we stop fighting?”

The Lord answered, “Go. Tomorrow I will help you to defeat them.”

²⁹Then the army of Israel hid some men all around the city of Gibeah. ³⁰The army of Israel went to fight against the city of Gibeah on the third day. They got ready for battle, like they did before. ³¹The army of Benjamin came out of the city of Gibeah to fight the army of Israel. The army of Israel backed up and let the army of Benjamin chase them. In this way, the army of Benjamin was tricked into leaving the city far behind them.

The army of Benjamin began to kill some of the men in the army of Israel, like they did before. They killed about 30 men from Israel.

Box of the Agreement Or, “ark of the Covenant,” the box containing the flat stones with the Ten Commandments written on them and other things that proved God was with the people of Israel during their time in the Sinai desert.

They killed some of those men in the fields, and they killed some of those men on the roads. One road led to the city of Bethel. The other road led to the city of Gibeah. ³²The men of Benjamin said, “We are winning like before!”

The men of Israel were running away, but it was a trick. They wanted to lead the men of Benjamin away from their city and onto the roads. ³³So all the men ran away. They stopped at a place named Baal Tamar. Some of the men of Israel were hiding west of Gibeah. They ran from their hiding places and attacked Gibeah. ³⁴10,000 of Israel’s best trained soldiers attacked the city of Gibeah. The fighting was very heavy. But the army of Benjamin did not know what terrible thing was going to happen to them.

³⁵The Lord used the army of Israel and defeated the army of Benjamin. On that day, the army of Israel killed 25,100 soldiers from Benjamin. All those soldiers had been trained for war. ³⁶So the people of Benjamin saw that they were defeated.

The army of Israel had moved back. They moved back because they were depending on the surprise attack. They had men hiding near Gibeah. ³⁷The men that were hiding rushed into the city of Gibeah. They spread out and killed everyone in the city with their swords. ³⁸Now the men of Israel had made a plan with the men that were hiding. The men that were hiding were supposed to send a special signal. The men were supposed to make a big cloud of smoke.

^{39–41}The army of Benjamin had killed about 30 Israelite soldiers. So the men of Benjamin were saying, “We are winning, like before.” But then a big cloud of smoke began to rise from the city. The men of Benjamin turned around and saw the smoke. The whole city was on fire. Then the army of Israel stopped running away. They turned around and began to fight. The men of Benjamin were afraid. Now they knew what terrible thing had happened to them.

⁴²So the army of Benjamin ran away from the army of Israel. They ran toward the desert. But they could not escape the fighting. And the men of Israel came out of the cities and killed them. ⁴³The men of Israel surrounded

the men of Benjamin and began chasing them. They did not let them rest. They defeated them in the area east of Gibeah. ⁴⁴So 18,000 brave and strong fighters from the army of Benjamin were killed.

⁴⁵The army of Benjamin turned around and ran toward the desert. They ran to a place called the Rock of Rimmon. But the army of Israel killed 5,000 soldiers from Benjamin along the roads. They kept chasing the men of Benjamin. They chased them as far as a place named Gidom. The army of Israel killed 2,000 more men from Benjamin in that place.

⁴⁶On that day, 25,000 men of the army of Benjamin were killed. All those men fought bravely with their swords. ⁴⁷But 600 men from Benjamin ran into the desert. They went to the place called the Rock of Rimmon and stayed there for four months. ⁴⁸The men of Israel went back to the land of Benjamin. They killed the people in every city they came to. They also killed all the animals. They destroyed everything they could find. They burned every city they came to.

Getting Wives for the Men of Benjamin

21 At Mizpah, the men of Israel made a promise. This was their promise: “Not one of us will let his daughter marry a man from the family group of Benjamin.”

²The people of Israel went to the city of Bethel. There they sat before God until evening. They cried loudly as they sat there. ³They said to God, “Lord, you are the God of the people of Israel. Why has this terrible thing happened to us? Why has one family group of the people of Israel been taken away?”

⁴Early the next day, the people of Israel built an altar.* They put burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to God on that altar. ⁵Then the people of Israel said, “Are there any family groups of Israel that did not come here to meet with us before the Lord?” They asked this question because they had made a serious promise. They had promised that anyone that did not come together with the

altar(s) A stone table used for burning sacrifices that were offered as gifts to God.

other family groups at the city of Mizpah would be killed.

⁶Then the people of Israel felt sorry for their relatives, the people of Benjamin. They said, “Today, one family group has been separated from Israel. ⁷We made a promise before the Lord. We promised not to allow our daughters to marry a man from Benjamin. How can we make sure that the men of Benjamin will have wives?

⁸Then the people of Israel asked, “Which one of the family groups of Israel did not come here to Mizpah? We have come together before the Lord. Surely one family was not here!” Then they found that no one from the city of Jabesh Gilead had met together with the other people of Israel. ⁹The people of Israel counted everyone to see who was there and who was not. They found that no one from Jabesh Gilead was there. ¹⁰So the people of Israel sent 12,000 soldiers to the city of Jabesh Gilead. They told those soldiers, “Go to Jabesh Gilead, and use your swords to kill every person that lives there, even the women and children. ¹¹You must do this! You must kill every man in Jabesh Gilead. Also kill every woman that has had sexual relations with a man. But do not kill any woman that has never had sex with a man.” So the soldiers did those things.* ¹²Those 12,000 soldiers found 400 young women in the city of Jabesh Gilead, that had never had sex with a man. The soldiers brought those women to the camp at Shiloh. Shiloh is in the land of Canaan.

¹³Then the people of Israel sent a message to the men of Benjamin. They offered to make peace with the men of Benjamin. The men of Benjamin were at the place named the Rock of Rimmon. ¹⁴So the men of Benjamin came back to Israel. The people of Israel gave them the women from Jabesh Gilead that they had not killed. But there were not enough women for all the men of Benjamin.

¹⁵The people of Israel felt sorry for the men of Benjamin. They felt sorry for them because the Lord had separated them from the other family groups of Israel. ¹⁶The elders (*leaders*)

of the people of Israel said, “The women of the family group of Benjamin have been killed. Where can we get wives for the men of Benjamin that are still alive? ¹⁷The men of Benjamin that are still alive must have children to continue their families. This must be done so that a family group in Israel will not die out! ¹⁸But we cannot allow our daughters to marry the men of Benjamin. We have made this promise: ‘Bad things will happen to anyone that gives a wife to a man of Benjamin.’ ¹⁹We have an idea! This is the time for the festival of the Lord at the city of Shiloh. This festival is celebrated every year there.” (The city of Shiloh is north of the city of Bethel, and east of the road that goes from Bethel to Shechem. And it is also to the south of the city of Lebonah.)

²⁰So the elders (*leaders*) told the men of Benjamin about their idea. They said, “Go and hide in the vineyards. ²¹Watch for the time during the festival when the young women from Shiloh come out to join the dancing. Then run out from where you are hiding in the vineyards. Each of you should take one of the young women from the city of Shiloh. Take those young women to the land of Benjamin and marry them. ²²The fathers or brothers of those young women will come and complain to us. But we will say, ‘Be kind to the men of Benjamin. Let them marry those women. They took women from you, but they did not make war against you. They took the women, so you didn’t break your promise to God. You promised that you would not give them women to marry—you did not give the women to the men of Benjamin, they took the women from you! So you did not break your promise.’”

²³So that is what the men of the family group of Benjamin did. While the young women were dancing, each man caught one of them. They took those young women away and married them. They went back to their land. The men of Benjamin built cities again in that land, and they lived in those cities. ²⁴Then the people of Israel went home. They went to their own land and family group.

²⁵In those days the people of Israel did not have a king. So everyone did whatever he thought was right.

But do not kill ... those things This is in the ancient Greek translation, but not in the Hebrew.