

The Book of JUDGES

INTRODUCTION

1. Title. The book of Judges takes its name from the titles of the men who governed Israel after the death of Joshua. Moses, in giving directions as to the government of the Israelites after their settlement in Canaan, had ordered, “Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the Lord thy God giveth thee” (Deut. 16:18). Accordingly, after Moses no longer lived to exercise legislative, nor Joshua, executive functions, judges were appointed, who constituted the highest civil authority in the land. The book of Judges is the history of the period that immediately followed the death of Joshua. In that period the governing authority in Israel was vested in judges.

The men after whom this book was named filled a larger office than the civil functions of the judges stipulated in the Mosaic law. They were, in most cases, summoned directly to their great work by divine appointment (ch. 3:15; 4:6; 6:12; etc.), and entered upon it more as deliverers from foreign bondage than as civil rulers. In fact, the very necessity for their call and their great deeds arose from the anarchy that rendered all ordinary procedures unavailing against the prevalent apostasy and oppression. The most illustrious of them were national heroes rather than civil or religious guides. “Generals,” or “chieftains,” would probably be a more accurate title for them inasmuch as their exploits were largely military. However, after each judge “delivered” the people, he ruled over them for the rest of his life. Hence the name Judges seemed most appropriate for the book when it was written. Centuries later in Carthage, where the people were of the same racial and linguistic stock as the Hebrews, a political ruler was also known as a “judge,” *sufet* (Heb. *shaphat*; cf. English “suffete”).

2. Authorship. It is not known who wrote the book of Judges. According to ancient Jewish tradition, it was written by Samuel (see Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Bathra* 14b, 15a). This is an obvious conjecture, and although it accords with many of the facts, other factors militate against the view. A favorite saying of the author of the Judges was, “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (ch. 17:6; 21:25; cf. ch. 18:1; 19:1). This is thought to suggest that the author may have been in favor of the kingship, as if he had said, in effect, “Such things would not be tolerated, but at that time there was no king in Israel to keep order, and everyone was able to do as he pleased.” Because Samuel was opposed to the idea of a king for Israel, some have thought it improbable that he was the author of these words.

Internal evidence points to the possible time limits between which Judges may have been written. The statement quoted above, “In those days there was no king in Israel” (ch. 17:6), indicates that the book was written after the institution of the monarchy under Saul. On the other hand, there is evidence that it must have been written before the reign of David, or at least early in his reign. Chapter 1:21 notes that the Jebusites had not been driven out from Jerusalem, but dwelt there with the children of Benjamin “unto this day.” Bible history points out that the Jebusites remained in possession of Jerusalem, or, at least the citadel of Zion, until the time of the capture of the city by David after the conclusion of his seven-year reign at Hebron (2 Sam. 5:6–9; 1 Chron. 11:4–9). The book of Judges, therefore, was possibly written during the first seven years of David’s reign prior to his capture of Jerusalem.

3. Historical Setting. Although it is impossible to fix with any real certainty the exact time in the stream of Near Eastern history when the events recorded in the book of Judges took place, one would not miss it far to say that the book covers the period from 1400 to 1050 B.C. The exact time cannot be accurately determined until the date of the Exodus has been definitely fixed, and at the present time sufficient historical data are not available to enable one to decide with absolute certainty between the conflicting theories. For further comment on this point see Vol. I, pp. 188–196; Vol. II, pp. 124–126.

The Amarna tablets and other inscriptions reveal that the Canaanites who held possession of the land had been settled there for centuries preceding the Hebrew invasion. Their civilization was of long standing, and under the influence of the great empires of Mesopotamia and Egypt had attained a considerable degree of development. The people were organized under petty rulers who owed common allegiance to Pharaoh. But despite this they fought constantly among themselves, thus becoming skilled in the art of war. Yet in the face of common danger they would more or less unite under one leader. Their fortified cities protected them in the hills and their chariots of iron made them formidable on the plains, as is evident from the material remains of their civilization that the archeologists have excavated. Art and architecture seem to show an immediate and marked decline after the invasion of the Hebrews. However, in the realm of spiritual truth, and thus in morals and philosophy of life, the Hebrews showed a vast superiority over the native inhabitants. The Canaanites were known all over the Near East as merchants and traders (later on in Hebrew the word *Canaanite* came to mean “trader”), but they were proficient in agricultural skills as well.

Lacking the requisite faith in God, the Israelites were unable to drive out the Canaanites, so they settled down, after the first few years of war, to live beside them. During all this period the Hebrews were not a solidly united nation. Occasionally two or three tribes were able to form a temporary alliance against a common enemy. The song of Deborah in Judges 5 shows that even in time of great peril it was impossible to unite all the tribes into one federation. Inter-tribal strife was rather common (chs. 8:1–3; 12:1–6; 20:1–48). This was due in part to the lack of communication and intercourse between the tribes because of the chains of Canaanite forts that divided up the land.

Rather quickly the newcomers began to learn from the older inhabitants their methods of agriculture, for the Hebrews had been largely a nomadic people up to this time. The Canaanite religion centered around rites to ensure the fertility of the soil. There were many celebrations honoring agricultural deities for the rich harvests they had granted. In taking over the agricultural methods of the people of the land, many of the Hebrews were led to accept also the religion interlocked with these methods.

4. Theme. This book recounts the varied fortunes of the Hebrew people in the period after the death of Joshua until the time of Samuel, in whose days the monarchy came into existence. Joshua had been, in a special sense, chosen to carry out and bring to completion the program begun by Moses. When Joshua died, the Israelites—deprived of both the authoritative direction of Moses and the executive experience of Joshua—entered upon a period of independent management and attempted consolidation of their newly won homeland.

Prior to this time the Hebrews had existed in a varied condition of unrest and movement, undergoing first enslavement, then prolonged wandering in the desert, and finally the hardships of camp and conquest. The book of Joshua, which is largely a

biography of that great leader, recounts the final phases of this conquest. The book of Judges gives the next step in the history of the Israelites, exhibiting them as they met the challenges of making the transition from a migratory, pastoral people into a settled, agricultural nation.

As we open the book we find ourselves in an atmosphere of warlike ardor. We are plunged at once into military preparations as the tribes begin to disperse after the united campaigns under Joshua. Councils of war meet; and then, as the tribes go up from the Jordan valley to take possession of the districts which had fallen to their lot to conquer, the clash of weapons is heard. Battle follows battle. Iron chariots hurtle along the valleys; the hillsides bristle with armed men. The songs are of strife and conquest; the great heroes are those who smite the enemies of Israel hip and thigh. Though the Hebrew tribes win the mountain country, they cannot drive the Canaanites from the plains.

When the din of battle faded away the Canaanites were still in possession of a strong chain of fortified towns running east and west from Mt. Heres through Aijalon, Shaalbim, Gibeon, Beeroth, Kirjath-jearim, and Jerusalem. Farther to the north Issachar, Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali were separated from the tribes in central Canaan by another barrier of strongholds from the sea through Dor, Harosheth, Megiddo, Taanach, and Ibleam to the Jordan River. The rich Valley of Jezreel leading down to the Jordan by the strong fortress of Beth-shan was still in the hands of the Canaanites. These two chains of strongholds intersected the land and made communication and unity among the tribes virtually impossible. Cut off as they were from one another by these unconquered cities, the Hebrew tribes were exposed to attack and could only with difficulty form partial confederations against their enemies in order to hold onto the centers they had won in the midst of a hostile population.

Constantly recurring invasions of hostile peoples brought strife and bondage to the Hebrew tribesmen. From the northeast came Mesopotamian invaders; from the southeast, the Moabites; from the east, Midianites and Ammonites; and from the southwest, the Philistines. Because apostasy and idolatry had weakened the bonds of national unity that loyalty to their religion had wrought, the Hebrews were unable to resist these onslaughts. However, the sufferings of bondage produced repentance, causing the people to return to the worship of the Lord once more. Then, in pity for them, God would raise up a deliverer or "judge," who would break the yoke of bondage and judge the people until his death. This is the subject material of the book.

The main theme that the author of Judges expounds is that sin and apostasy from true religion bring upon a people the displeasure of God. In order to bring about a turning from sin, God permits suffering and disaster, which can only be averted by genuine repentance and a return to God. When true repentance occurs, God raises up persons or circumstances that bring deliverance and relief. The history of the period is recorded on a framework that sets forth these broad propositions: that righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is the reproach of any people; that evil companions ruin good intentions and training; that moral degeneracy always brings with it national weakness; that the affairs of the chosen people, Israel, were under the immediate care of divine Providence; that national sin brings divine punishment; that the punishment which sin involves is intended by the Lord to be educational, not vindictive; that the retribution is withdrawn when it has produced sincere repentance; that deliverance never comes from unaided human efforts, but from the strength and enthusiasm inspired by the Spirit of God. These principles of

God's rule explain, the author tells us, the alternations of apostasy and servitude, repentance and deliverance characteristic of the history of this period.

These propositions, so admirably illustrated by the author in the stories he recounted, elevate the book of Judges from the realm of historical narratives to the position of a sacred philosophy of history. The inspired author of the book was more concerned about pointing out the lessons to be learned from the history he recorded than about the history itself. Even a cursory reading of the book of Judges reveals that the author intended to demonstrate that the hand of God was manifest in the events that befell the Israelites in their new homeland. The outcome was in God's control, and He guided the experiences that came to the people in such a way that they should learn by experience that their only happiness and safety lay in serving Him.

A minor theme in the book is that the troubles of Israel were due in a large measure to the evil influence of their heathen neighbors. Someone might ask why, if the idolatrous inhabitants of the land were agents leading the Hebrews into temptation, God did not drive out the Canaanites and Amorites, and thus prevent the apostasy of His people. The author evidently offers an answer to this objection in one section of the book (ch. 3:1–4). Here he states that the Lord recognizes the value of difficulties in the formation of character. For this reason God left the Canaanites in the land to prove whether Israel would serve Him.

A further purpose of the author was to describe how, under the leadership and blessing of God, a number of small tribes were able to achieve a permanent settlement in a strange and hostile land; how their heroes acquired fame; and how, in the midst of diverse interests and molding influences, loyalty to their one God prevented their absorption by other peoples.

The book of Judges falls into five well-marked sections. It begins with a general historical preface (chs. 1:1 to 2:5) or survey of the partial conquest of the land after it had been parceled out to the different tribes by Joshua. The tribes attacked their particular inheritance alone, or sometimes several of them banded together when confronted by strong resistance. Despite their efforts, the Israelites were only partially successful in taking possession of the portions of the land allotted to them. The author presents the narrative in a way to show that the failure of the people was due to their lack of trust and faithfulness to the Lord. In this way he informs the reader of the basis of all the subsequent troubles of Israel, and why the Canaanites were allowed to remain in the land. The relations of Israel with the remaining Canaanites form the background of the history of the ensuing chapters and explain why the judges were necessary.

This historical sketch is followed with a second introduction (chs. 2:6 to 3:6), the object of which is to show how the religious apostasy that followed the death of Joshua continued unabated. The people sank into idolatry and provoked divine retribution. When the people repented, the Lord sent deliverance by means of successive judges.

Having stated his theme, the author then proceeds to recount the history of the tribes under 12 judges (chs. 3:7 to 16:31). It is a history of sin, ever repeating itself, and of divine grace, constantly devising new means of deliverance. The heroic deeds of six of these deliverers are related fully, and those of six are merely mentioned with brief detail. The episode of Abimelech's usurpations is given at length to warn the people of the peril of choosing a monarch who does not meet the divine specifications (see Deut. 17:15).

The book ends with two appendixes, both of which describe events that happened in the early part of the judges period. The first (chs. 17 and 18) gives the narrative of Micah's idolatry and of the northern sanctuary that housed his images in the tribe of Dan until the death of Eli. The second appendix (chs. 19 to 21) records the vile deed of the Benjamites at Gibeah, and the vengeance inflicted on that tribe by the other tribes. It ends with an account of the means taken to save the tribe of Benjamin from extinction after they were virtually extirpated for their support of the guilty Gibeonites.

5. Outline.

- I. General Historical Preface: The State of Affairs When the History Begins, 1:1 to 2:5.
 - A. The tribes endeavor to consolidate their allotments in Palestine, 1:1–36.
 1. Judah and the Kenites, 1:1–20.
 2. Benjamin, 1:21.
 3. Manasseh and Ephraim, 1:22–29.
 4. Zebulun, 1:30.
 5. Asher, 1:31, 32.
 6. Naphtali, 1:33.
 7. Dan (in the south), 1:34–36.
 - B. The reason for their failure, 2:1–5.
- II. Thematic Introduction: The Author's Summary and Interpretation of Hebrew History During This Period, 2:6 to 3:6.
 - A. A historical prologue tying onto the book of Joshua, 2:6–10.
 - B. The writer's interpretation of the history that he is now beginning to relate, 2:11 to 3:6.
- III. The Story of the Judges, 3:7 to 16:31.
 - A. Othniel breaks the oppression of invaders from the northeast (Mesopotamians), 3:7–11.
 - B. Ehud effects deliverance from invaders from the southeast (Moabites), 3:12–30.
 - C. Shamgar, 3:31.
 - D. Deborah and Barak throw off the oppression of northern Canaanites, 4:1 to 5:31.
 - E. Gideon, 6:1 to 8:32.
 1. Repels an invasion of Midianites from the east, 6:1 to 8:21.
 2. Subsequent events of Gideon's career, 8:22–32.
 - F. The usurpation of Abimelech, Gideon's son, 8:33 to 9:57.
 - G. Tola, 10:1, 2.
 - H. Jair, 10:3–5.
 - I. Jephthah, 10:6 to 12:7.
 1. He destroys the Ammonite invasion from the east, 10:6 to 11:33.
 2. He sacrifices his daughter, 11:34–40.
 3. Intertribal strife during the judgeship of Jephthah, 12:1–7.
 - J. Ibzan, 12:8–10.
 - K. Elon, 12:11, 12.
 - L. Abdon, 12:13–15.
 - M. Samson's birth and adventures, 13:1 to 16:31.
- IV. A Double Appendix; Two Events That Occurred During the Period of the Judges, 17:1 to 21:25.
 - A. The origin of Micah's idolatry and of the sanctuary of his idols in Dan (in the north), 17:1 to 18:31.
 1. The construction of the images, 17:1–6.

2. A renegade Levite becomes priest, 17:7–13.
3. The transference of the images to Dan (Laish) through the migration of the Danites, 18:1–31.
- B. An evil deed of the Benjamites and its terrible consequences, 19:1 to 21:25.
 1. The Benjamites of Gibeah abuse and cause the death of the concubine belonging to a Levite, 19:1–28.
 2. The punishment of the people of Benjamin by the other tribes, 19:29 to 20:48.
 3. The method of circumventing the oath of the tribes so that the tribe of Benjamin could be preserved from extinction, 21:1–25.

CHAPTER 1

1 *The acts of Judah and Simeon.* 4 *Adoni-bezek justly requited.* 8 *Jerusalem taken.* 10 *Hebron taken.* 11 *Othniel hath Achsah to wife for taking of Debir.* 16 *The Kenites dwell in Judah.* 17 *Hormah, Gaza, Askelon and Ekron taken.* 21 *The acts of Benjamin.* 22 *Of the house of Joseph, who take Beth-el.* 30 *Of Zebulun.* 31 *Of Asher.* 33 *Of Naphtali.* 34 *Of Dan.*

1. Death of Joshua. The clause, “now after the death of Joshua it came to pass,” forms the heading for the entire book. With these words the author takes up the narrative where the book of Joshua left it. Joshua begins in exactly the same way: “Now after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord it came to pass” (Joshua 1:1). The events and incidents that the author of Judges will relate belong to the period or epoch after the death of Joshua. Precisely how long after Joshua’s death the first of these events occurred, cannot be determined; but it was probably not long, for the book of Judges opens with an account of the dispersion of the tribes to their respective inheritances after Joshua allotted a portion to each one of them.

Children of Israel. Presumably only the tribes west of the Jordan.

Asked the Lord. The Hebrew word here translated “asked” is frequently also rendered “to inquire of,” or “to ask counsel of” (see chs. 18:5; 20:18). The word is used for the priest’s inquiry of Urim and Thummim (Num. 27:21), which was possibly the method employed here. It is noteworthy that the Israelites did ask counsel of the Lord. While Joshua was alive they had leaned on him. Now, left leaderless and confronted with danger, they did not rely on their own wisdom, but in harmony with the instruction of Moses, they asked God to direct them (see James 1:5). Theirs was a simple and direct request, devoid of “vain repetitions” (Matt. 6:7). The eloquence of prayer is in its sense of need and its directness. It is as imperative in the 20th century as in the days of the judges that God’s people seek divine guidance before making vital decisions. This seeking must not be done hurriedly, carelessly, or with the mind made up and the decision already reached beforehand. Such prayer for guidance is mockery. God honors only those who come to Him sincerely and with an open mind—those who are willing to follow in the path He marks out.

Go up. These words suggest that the tribes were encamped in the low plains around Jericho and Gilgal. This is borne out by the later narrative (chs. 1:16; 2:1). The two cities were 800 ft. below sea level, but some of the places the Israelites were to attack were 2,500 to 3,600 ft. above sea level. The Heb. *‘alah*, here translated, “go up,” is also often used to express the thought “to go forth to battle.” The idea of “go up” in connection with battle may have originated in the fact that the defense usually occupied the high ground.

First. The question, “Who shall go up ... first?” reveals the uncertainty of the group who now had no one person to look to as leader. They recognized that each tribe must launch out on its own to secure the portion of the land granted them by the lot. But which tribe was it that should make the needed progress to give courage to the others? They wanted a divinely appointed leader for the campaign.

2. Judah shall go up. This answer, we would presume, came to them through Phinehas, the high priest, who may have inquired by Urim and Thummim. The men of Judah were to take the lead perhaps because they were the most numerous tribe (Num. 2); they may also have been the most courageous, for they had in their number Caleb, who alone, with Joshua, of all the ten spies wanted to press ahead to invade the land many years before. In the desert wanderings Judah had always marched first. Now they were chosen to open the campaign.

Delivered the land. This is a prophetic statement. That which is sure to happen is expressed as if it were already accomplished. “The land” here means Judah’s lot.

3. Come up with me. Both Judah and Simeon were sons of Leah (Gen. 29:33, 35). It was natural that the two tribes should help each other, for their lots were contiguous; indeed, the lot of Simeon is said to lie “within the inheritance of the children of Judah” (Joshua 19:1). The portion of the two tribes fell roughly within two lines drawn to the Mediterranean from the northern and southern extremities of the Dead Sea. Although the federation of southern Canaanites had been defeated during the campaigns of Joshua, there remained many strongholds that the individual tribes needed to conquer.

Cooperation between brethren is the wisest course when there are difficult tasks to do. The strongest should not despise but desire the assistance of others, even of those who may be weaker. Judah was the largest and Simeon the smallest of the tribes, yet Judah asked Simeon’s aid. We should also note that those who ask assistance must be ready to give it in return, just as Judah in this instance offered to help Simeon later. Christians should strengthen one another’s hands against the destructive devices of Satan’s kingdom. Those who thus help one another in the spirit of love have reason to hope that God will graciously bless their combined efforts.

4. Bezek. This place has not been located. It seems to have been near Jerusalem, for immediately after this battle the Israelites attacked that city. Some have thought that it may have been the name of a territory and not of a city, and have suggested the region between Jericho and Jerusalem as its location. There is a town named Bezek, mentioned in 1 Sam. 11:8, but this is probably a different place, for it is northeast of Shechem and lies outside the region of a southern campaign such as Judah was conducting. However, the Perizzites are included as participants in this battle, and are usually mentioned in connection with the wooded highlands north and east of Shechem (Joshua 17:15). The name Perizzite comes from a word meaning “open country,” and might be considered an equivalent of our modern word Bedouin, which means “a nomadic tribesman.”

5. Adoni-bezek. Literally, “lord of Bezek,” that is, the ruler of Bezek.

6. Cut off his thumbs. Anciently hostilities were marked by barbarities such as this to prevent captured prisoners from again engaging in warfare. The Greeks are reported at times to have mutilated the hands of prisoners just enough so that they could not throw a spear or handle a bow but could still work. The punishment inflicted upon Adoni-bezek would deprive him of his kingship. The great toes were cut off to hinder the ability to run, which was an essential qualification for warriors of that time.

7. Threescore and ten kings. The various royal personages that at different times during Adoni-bezek's reign constituted the retinue of subjugated rulers that he supported miserably in his court after having mutilated them. The kingdoms of Palestine were small, often consisting of only a city and the territory around it.

Gathered. A better translation would be "gleaned," or, "picked up crumbs."

As I have done. Adoni-bezek testified that he deserved the punishment that was meted out to him. Like many others since his time, he read his crime in his punishment. Although God does not always immediately requite men according to their deserts, but defers long, hoping for repentance, eventually all will be constrained to admit their guilt before His judgment bar. How much better it is to plead guilty before the mercy seat now, and thus be delivered from the wrath to come

Jerusalem. There is no suggestion that the tribes endeavored to maintain their hold on the city at this time. In fact, the Bible record shows that the city continued in the hands of the Jebusites until captured by David several hundred years later (2 Sam. 5:6, 7). Not until the reign of David did Judah actually dominate southern Palestine. Inasmuch as Jerusalem was not situated within the lot of Judah or Simeon, these tribes probably abandoned the city after they had captured and burned it.

There he died. The author does not say how long Adoni-bezek lived after being brought to Jerusalem. Presumably his death occurred soon after.

9. Went down. In the first part of the campaign they "went up" to battle from the lowland around Jericho and Gilgal into the central highlands. Now, from the hills they "went down" to fight in the three distinctive regions of southern Palestine, the "mountain," the "south" (Negeb), and "valley" (Shephelah).

The mountain. This term is used in the OT for the highlands of Judea, which are a continuation of the central mountain chain that runs throughout the length of the country from north to south.

The south. Heb. *negeb*. South of Hebron the mountains slope downward and become less rugged, the valleys less deep, and the hills round off and gradually merge with the southern desert. This arid, sparsely settled region extends from north of Beersheba southward to Kadesh-barnea and westward toward the sea. It was often termed *negeb* in the Hebrew OT, a name that it still bears today. The word itself means a dry, arid land. So familiar was this region of southern Canaan to the Hebrews that they came to use the word *negeb* as a general expression for "south" (Gen. 24:62; Joshua 15:4, 21; Eze. 47:19). In this verse the word, however, stands for the geographical area described previously.

Valley. Heb. *shephelah*. Between the highlands of Judah and the Philistine plain that borders the sea there is a region of low, rounded hills a few hundred feet in elevation. This fringe of foothills on the border of Philistia was called the Shephelah, that is, the lowland.

10. Hebron. This city was about halfway between Jerusalem and Beersheba, 20 mi. from either city, in the highest part of the mountains of Judah, 3,040 ft. above sea level. The earlier name of the city was Kirjath-arba, which means "city of Arba." Arba was the father of Anak (Joshua 15:13; 21:11; cf. ch. 14:15). Hebron was the burial place of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah.

The author, in this verse, is evidently making a general statement or survey concerning the capture of Hebron, for later in the chapter he states that Caleb captured Hebron and slew the three sons of Anak (v. 20).

Sheshai. The three giants listed are also mentioned in connection with Caleb's visit to the city years before in company with the ten spies (Num. 13:22, 28). In Judges 1:20 they are called the sons of Anak, which may mean that they were three clans of the Anakim.

11. He went against. The use of the singular personal pronoun here supports what was stated above, that the author is referring to Caleb and his clan rather than to the whole tribe of Judah and Simeon.

Debir. The former name of Debir was Kirjath-sepher (Joshua 15:15), which means "city of books." Because of this meaning scholars have speculated that the city housed a famous library similar to the royal libraries that the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal built up to magnificent proportions. Most scholars agree that the city may be correctly identified as the present *Tell Beit Mirsim*, excavated by Dr. W. F. Albright. The ruins revealed no library, although the city was not completely excavated. The archeological evidence shows an unusually devastating conflagration, followed by a settlement of Hebrew people who rebuilt the city.

12. Will I give. The city was evidently stubbornly defended, and Caleb endeavored to rouse the ambitious young men among the different clans of the tribe to greater valor by offering his daughter in marriage to the one whose group broke into the city first. From what follows, it appears that the captured city also became the territory of the fortunate victor. This story gives some evidence of the strength of the southern cities in these mountains. Earlier, when Joshua was assigning sections of the land to the tribes, Caleb referred to his unbroken strength, and accordingly gained permission to win the region by the sword (Joshua 14:11).

13. Caleb's younger brother. Grammatically, these words may refer to Kenaz or to Othniel. If they refer to Kenaz, then Othniel was the nephew, not the brother, of Caleb. It is impossible to tell which is correct. The writer specifically uses the word "younger" in order to explain that there was no great disparity in age between Othniel and Achsah. If affection for a woman animates men to such strenuous efforts and perilous adventures, what should love for the Lord lead them to hazard for Him?

14. When she came. Achsah had no doubt been kept far behind the battle area with the other women and children in a place of safety, but now she was doubtless bidden by her father to come and be publicly presented to her husband in honor of his valor and as an example to the troops. In those times parents arranged the marriages and gave their daughters to whomever they wished. However, unless the custom was abused, a maiden was not required to marry someone she could not love (Gen. 24:57, 58; PP 171).

She moved him to ask. Verse 15 records that Achsah was the one who asked her father for a field. It would be more natural here to read, "and he moved her to ask," and this is how the LXX reads. However, the passage could mean that she requested permission from her husband to ask her father for a field or persuaded him that they should ask.

Lighted from. Achsah revered her father, and so dismounted when speaking to him. Among the Bedouins of today custom still demands that one asking a favor of a sheik must dismount and approach him on foot.

15. South land. Perhaps, better, “arid land.” The Hebrew word for “south” is *negeb*, a dry, arid land (see on v. 9). Her section was in the dry Negeb, so she was in need of springs for the flocks. Her new husband did not feel disposed to ask for these springs, but, feeling secure as a favored daughter, Achsah made her request immediately as the young couple were about to take over their territory. In response to her petition Caleb gave her the “upper springs and the nether springs.” In the territory between Debir and Hebron there is a region today containing about 14 springs in 3 groups. These may be the ones from which Caleb gave two groups to his newly married daughter.

Apparently Achsah’s request was fit and proper, and Caleb, recognizing it as such, granted it. Our heavenly Father, who apportions our lot, is surely as reasonable and affectionate as any earthly parent. It is for us to exercise the same wisdom as Achsah, and request that God give us such betterment to our portion in life as is fit and proper. God is willing to give us springs of water to moisten a sun-parched experience. He will bestow upon us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, if we call upon Him (Eph. 3:20).

16. The Kenite. Or, “the Midianite” (Num. 10:29). From Moses’ time onward the clan was closely allied with Israel without losing its independent and separate existence. Because they were in alliance with Israel and joined with them in the campaign, they were allowed to share in the rewards and settle in the territory of Judah. Later one branch of their clan settled far to the north in the territory of Naphtali (ch. 4:11, 17).

City of palm trees. Jericho is commonly referred to as the “city of palm trees” (Deut. 34:3; 2 Chron. 28:15). But old Jericho had been destroyed and new Jericho had not yet been built (1 Kings 16:34). It is therefore probable that this “city of palm trees” was another city in the same general vicinity (see on Joshua 6:26). The place was once famous for its palms and gardens. Josephus gives a glowing description of its beauty (*Wars* iv. 8. 3).

Arad. This place, where the Kenites settled, is in the Negeb about 17 mi. (27 km.) south by east of Hebron.

17. Hormah. Signifying “devoted,” that is, devoted to utter destruction. This is the new name that the Hebrews gave to Zephath. As yet the site of the city has not been definitely determined by archaeologists. However, *Tell esh–Sheri’ah* (also called *Tell el–Mshāsh*), near Beersheba and Ziklag, has been suggested. Hormah was in the territory of Simeon (Joshua 19:4), which accords with the statement of this verse.

18. Judah took Gaza. It seems that the tribe of Judah now carried on the campaign alone. They swung from the Negeb over to the maritime plain and headed north, attacking the coastal cities. The southernmost of these was Gaza, which they captured by storm, along with Askelon and Ekron. Thus three centers of the Philistine confederacy fell before the Israelites. However, it seems that the Hebrews overthrew these strongholds by swift, surprise attacks, but were not able to hold them after the Philistines regrouped and counter-attacked, for the next verse states that Judah could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley (see also ch. 3:3).

19. With Judah. Judah was able to succeed only partially because of a seeming superiority in the weapons of the enemy. Why was this when chariots of iron are nothing before the might of God, whose chariots are ten thousands of angels? Infinite power was

available, yet the tribe of Judah was not able to gain complete mastery over its enemies. The author of the book of Judges later explains why (see on ch. 2:14–23).

Chariots of iron. On the mountains where horses and chariots could not maneuver, the mobile, daring bands of Hebrews were victorious; but in the broad valleys of the maritime plain the better armed Canaanites were able to repel their incursions. The use of iron was just becoming common among the Canaanites, who were ahead of the nomadic Hebrews in the art of metal working. They had recently learned the use of chariots and horses from the Hittites and Hurrians, and employed them to good advantage against the foot soldiers of the Hebrews, who were unable to cope with this superior weapon.

21. Inhabited Jerusalem. According to v. 8 the tribe of Judah had already taken Jerusalem. Perhaps the reason they did not consolidate their gains there was that the city really lay in the territory of Benjamin. The boundary line between two tribes ran just south of the city through the Valley of Hinnon (Joshua 15:8). After the Jebusites had been humbled by their defeat at the hands of Judah, they offered no resistance to the men of Benjamin who settled around the city. Lacking the necessary resolution to capture the city, the people of Benjamin mingled together peaceably with the heathen Jebusites. Several hundred years later David, sensing the importance of having the citadel in his hands, assaulted and captured it. Even after this the two groups seemed to live together amicably in the area, for the late in David's reign, Araunah the Jebusite was spoken of in a way that suggests he was a respected citizen; he certainly conducted himself as one (2 Sam. 24:18). However, during the judges period the city was predominantly Jebusite (Judges 19:11, 12). The people of Benjamin failed to take full advantage of their opportunities.

Unto this day. This expression suggests that the book of Judges was written before David's capture of the city.

22. House of Joseph. The tribe of Ephraim and the half tribe of Manasseh in western Palestine. Half of the tribe of Manasseh had settled in Transjordan.

Beth-el. Signifying, "house of God." Situated about 10 1/4 mi. (16.4 km.) north of Jerusalem in the central mountains. This city was celebrated as the place where Jacob had seen his vision of the ladder, from which event it had received its name (Gen. 28:10–22). Later, it was to be famous as a seat of the idolatrous worship established by Jeroboam, who made it one of the national shrines of the northern kingdom of Israel (see 1 Kings 12:29).

Lord was with them. Unlike Benjamin, who never ventured out in faith, these tribes launched out and won victories through God's blessing.

23. Sent to descry Beth-el. That is, they reconnoitered thoroughly before venturing an attack, to find the best way to conquer it. A historical note is added that the former name of the city was Luz. After conquering the town the Hebrews renamed it Bethel in honor of the experience of Jacob there (see on v. 22). The new town evidently was not on the same spot as the old, for in the book of Joshua the two cities are described as different, though adjoining, places (Joshua 16:2). The town was originally in the territory of Benjamin but in close proximity to the border of Ephraim (Joshua 18:13, 21, 22).

24. Spies. Literally, "watchers." Before taking advantage of the terror that gripped the captured man's soul in anticipation of being put to death, the watchers made the traveler an offer of personal safety. Because of his betrayal of a secret entrance to the city, the

Hebrews easily captured the place and put its inhabitants to the sword, saving alive only this man and his family.

26. *Built a city.* Nothing is known of the city that this man founded. Perhaps to quiet his conscience for his deed of betrayal, he went into a far country and built a city that he renamed after the one he had betrayed.

27. *Neither did Manasseh.* The author advances in his narrative from the southern section of the land, assaulted by Judah, upward to central and northern Palestine. At this point the narrative reveals a new trend. Previously the Hebrews had gained victories as well as suffered defeats. Now there simply follows a list of Canaanite strongholds that the different tribes were unable to capture. The towns whose inhabitants Manasseh was unable to expel, consisted of a chain of fortified cities guarding all the passes.

Beth-shean. At the eastern end of this “Canaanite line” was the ancient city of Beth-shean. It was at the place where the rather level country at the end of the Valley of Jezreel began to fall off toward the Jordan River. It is one of the oldest cities of Palestine, and at various times was the center for the worship of numerous heathen deities. It was an extremely strong fortress situated on a high hill built up by the ruins of previous eras. Because of its strategic location it commanded the roads to Damascus. Excavations at the site reveal that it was an Egyptian garrison city for several centuries, to about the 12th century B.C. In the days of Saul it was in the possession of the Philistines, whose main centers lay far to the south. Later David may have captured it, for it is mentioned as one of Solomon’s cities (1 Kings 4:12). For a long time it was known as Scythopolis, after the Scythians who captured it about the time of Jeremiah. Today it is called *Tell el Hūṣn*. The neighboring Arab town of *Beisān* perpetuates the ancient name.

The other fortified cities named in this verse commanded the passes leading from the central mountains of Samaria into the fertile plain of Esdraelon (or Megiddo). Megiddo, on the western end of the line, commanded the great highway between Egypt and Mesopotamia. Because of this it figured prominently in Egyptian campaigns against the great northern and eastern empires. Taanach, which bears the same name today, was 4 3/4 mi. (7.6 km.) southeast of Megiddo.

Her towns. Literally, “her daughters,” the small villages clustered around these fortress cities.

Canaanites would dwell. That is, they stubbornly resisted and repelled the attempts of the Hebrews to dislodge them. They realized correctly that if they could hold this chain of fortresses, they could command all the main routes of travel and commerce, and in addition, could separate the different tribes from one another and thus prevent a united confederation of the Hebrews. They applied the military rule of divide and conquer.

28. *Tribute.* Heb. *mas*. “Tribute” does not represent the true idea of this Hebrew word, which means “labor gangs.” The word signifies a levy of men impressed for taskwork, not the taskwork itself. Both David and Solomon used compulsory labor levies in their building projects and in the work of fortifying cities (1 Kings 5:13; 9:15, 21). At this time the Hebrews, in the areas in which they were dominant, forced the defeated Canaanites to work in rebuilding the captured cities and strengthening fortifications.

Not utterly drive. That is, even in the regions where the Hebrews were strong, a large number of Canaanites who submitted to forced labor for the privilege of living in their

villages or on their farms were permitted to remain. The danger of this to Israelite religion and morals is apparent in the later history of this book.

29. Gezer. An ancient Canaanite city on the southwestern border of Ephraim near the Philistine country, 19 1/4 mi. (30.8 km.) northwest of Jerusalem. The Canaanites retained possession of the city (1 Sam. 27:8; 2 Sam. 5:25; 1 Chron. 20:4) until a certain Pharaoh captured it and gave it as a present to his daughter, Solomon's wife (1 Kings 9:16). Solomon then rebuilt it as a border fortress. The excavation of this city has revealed a vast amount of Canaanite household articles, an extensive Canaanite temple, and numerous examples of the Canaanite practice of burying infants in the foundations of houses that were being built.

30. Neither did Zebulun. The author now begins to relate the experiences of the tribes whose portions were situated in northern Palestine beyond the plain of Esdraelon. Nothing is said of the tribe of Issachar, although in the song of Deborah (ch. 5) it is represented as one of the more aggressive tribes. The story with respect to each of these tribes as given here is about the same. They were not strong enough to attack the fortresses in their allotted territories. Even in the mountains they were unable to gain the mastery as the tribes farther to the south had done. They merely whittled out little sections here and there wherever they could, and thus wedged themselves in among the older settlements.

31. Neither did Asher. The tribe of Asher was no more successful than Zebulun. Its allotment consisted of the maritime plain and the low hills north of Carmel. It was the territory of the Phoenicians, who had not yet risen to fame as sea traders. Having settled down among the Canaanites there, the people of Asher seem to have been exposed to cultural and religious absorption perhaps more than any other tribe. Within a short time they seemed to have lost much of their religious separateness, so that when Deborah called on the tribes to join in a united front against the Canaanites, "Asher," she says, "continued on the sea shore, and abode in his breaches" (ch. 5:17).

Joshua 19:30 states that 22 towns in this region fell to the lot of Asher. The text before us lists at least seven of them that were not taken, including the well-known cities of Acre and Sidon. Thus it is evident that the Asherites did not make much progress toward conquering the territory assigned to them.

32. Dwelt among the Canaanites. Verses 29 and 30 stated that the Canaanites dwelt among the Hebrews, showing that the latter were the more powerful; but here the author changes his phrase and says that the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites. This seems to indicate that the Canaanites were the dominant power in that area.

33. Neither did Naphtali. The same unhappy narrative is repeated. The places that Naphtali failed to conquer were ancient cities that took their name from the famous temples to the goddess Anath and the sun-god Shamash situated therein. The Hebrews were strong enough, however, to force these cities to tribute. The territory of Naphtali later became known as Galilee, where the heathen element was so numerous that the region was called "Galilee of the nations" (Isa. 9:1), that is, "the foreign district."

34. Children of Dan. The lot of the tribe of Dan was a narrow strip of valley and low hills between the inheritance of Ephraim and Judah. The Danites tried at first to push toward the lowlands, and, under the blessing of God, should have extended their boundaries to the sea. Instead, the native inhabitants drove them back into the hills where they consolidated their position around the towns of Zorah and Eshtaol. It was from this

tribe and this district that Samson sallied forth on his exploits against the Philistines (chs. 13 to 16). However, this region was so small that when the tribe grew in population, the main body migrated to the northern part of Palestine around the headwaters of the Jordan, where they captured the city of Laish and renamed it Dan (Judges 18 and 19; see on Joshua 19:47).

it should be noticed that the author of the book here designates the native population as Amorites instead of Canaanites. Some believe that the two names refer to the same people. It is held that the native population, known as the Canaanites, came originally from the same area as the Amorites. But it seems that Amorites represent a later migration. Since they had arrived more recently than the Canaanites, their culture was probably more nomadic than that of the older Canaanite culture. An ancient Sumerian poem describes the Amorites thus:

“The weapon is his companion ...

Who knows no submission,

Who eats uncooked flesh,

Who has no house in his life-time,

Who does not bury his dead companion.”

The Amorites of the time of the judges probably had developed a more sedentary culture than that so vividly illustrated in this poem. They were spread all over the Near Eastern area, with Amorite kings ruling over both large and small kingdoms. The famous king of Babylonia, Hammurabi, was an Amorite. The name Amorite means “westerner” and was given this people by the Sumerians, the earliest known inhabitants of Babylonia.

35. *Mount Heres.* Believed to be the same as Beth-shemesh in the Shephelah.

Aijalon. A town situated about 13 mi. (20.8 km.) west-northwest of Jerusalem (see on Joshua 10:12).

Prevailed. Literally, “rested heavily.” The tribe of Dan was unable to hold its own against the native population, gradually being forced back into a restricted area. Seeing this, the Hebrews from the tribe of Ephraim, whose territory was adjacent, came to the aid of the Danites and launched aggressive attacks against the Amorites. So successful were the men of Ephraim that the Amorite and Canaanite towns made treaties of submission to them, supplying labor gangs to the Israelite towns in return for cessation of hostilities. This tributary status continued for several centuries until the towns actually became Israelite territory by the time of Solomon (1 Kings 4:9). Beth-shemesh fell into Israelite hands considerably earlier (1 Sam. 6:12).

36. *Coast of the Amorites.* Rather, “boundary of the Amorites.” This verse has no connection with the preceding one except that, having mentioned the Amorites, the author pauses to explain that the Amorite territory formerly extended as far south as these places, which, in the main, constitute the Edomite frontier. The southern tribes of the Israelites had conquered territory as far south as this old border.

The going up to Akrabbim. Literally, “scorpion pass.”

The rock. That is, “the cliff.” Many take this as a reference to Petra, the cliff citadel of the Edomites and Nabataeans, but it more likely refers to a landmark on the Judean side of the Arabah. The entire verse is somewhat obscure.

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CHAPTER 2

1 *An Angel rebuketh the people at Bochim.* 6 *The wickedness of the new generation after Joshua.* 14 *God's anger and pity towards them.* 20 *The Canaanites are left to prove Israel.*

1. An angel. The following five verses of Judges properly belong to the first chapter. They are a fitting close to the account of the conquest and settlement recorded in ch. 1. In them the author explains why the chosen people were unable to make a complete conquest of the land. The main theme of these verses is a rebuke to the Israelites for mingling the heathen religious practices of the people among whom they settled, with their own God-given religious forms. Instead of destroying the heathen altars, the Israelites worshiped before them.

It is difficult to ascertain of whom the writer is speaking when he refers to “an angel of the Lord.” The word “angel” literally means “messenger.” The term “messenger of the Lord” may refer to a prophet whom God used to give His message to Israel (Haggai 1:13), but it may also refer to the Lord Himself, who is sometimes referred to by this title (see Ex. 23:20, 23; 33:2). The fact that the message is not introduced with a “Thus saith the Lord,” which was the custom of later prophets, suggests that the speaker was the Lord Himself. The use of the first person also supports the latter view.

From Gilgal. The city that had served as the temporary headquarters of the tribes (Joshua 4:19; 9:6; 10:6; etc.). It was at this camp, on the western bank of the Jordan between Jericho and the river, that the mysterious “captain of the host” had appeared to Joshua (Joshua 5:13–15). That captain was Christ (PP 488). It is possible, but by no means certain, that the same visitant is here presented.

Bochim. Literally, “weepers.” This name was given to the place following the experience that is now being recorded (see vs. 4, 5). No place by this name is known today, nor is it mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. The LXX, after the word “Bochim” adds the explanation, “and to Bethel.” The event may have happened at Bethel, but the fact that they offered sacrifice there (v. 5) suggests that most likely the place was Shiloh, where the tabernacle was pitched at that time. The context indicates a great assembly, and it is possible that these events occurred in connection with one of the great religious assemblies such as the Passover or ingathering festival. In this event the place would have been either Shiloh or a small village near it.

Which I swear. The promise was given in Gen. 12:7; 13:14–16; 15:18; 26:3; 28:13.

My covenant. See Ex. 34:10–16.

2. Make no league. See Ex. 34:12. It is evident from the record of the first chapter of Judges that the Israelites had made many leagues with the heathen inhabitants of Palestine. The Israelites probably argued that these leagues were forced upon them because of their inability to drive the native inhabitants from their strong positions.

Throw down their altars. See Ex. 34:13. These “altars” were the peculiar stone pillar altars so prevalent in Palestine. Social intercourse with the local inhabitants was the first step in Israel's unfaithfulness. The next step was taken when some of the people, through this means, were led to join in festivities around heathen altars, sacred trees, and pillars. Once the barriers were broken down, apostasy, like a flood, swept in among them. In only a short time their course of fusion had wrought havoc with high religious principles. The same results follow a similar course today. The Lord has warned, “Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4).

Why have ye done this? The messenger had begun by relating the things God had done for His people by delivering them from Egyptian bondage and establishing them in the Land of Promise. Now the question is raised, What had they done for God in return? Their ingratitude was apparent in the religious apostasy that had become boldly evident within the space of only a few years. Israel had flagrantly disobeyed in important matters that God had specifically commanded. They had broken the compact; therefore God could not fulfill His part of the agreement.

3. I also said. That is, God had given a previous warning (see Num. 33:55; Joshua 23:13). That threat was now to be carried out. God would withdraw His conditional promises made in Ex. 23:31 and other places.

Shall be a snare. The worship of these heathen deities would result in gross corruption, which would cause the ruin of the entire nation (see Ex. 23:33; Ex. 34:12; Deut. 7:16; Joshua 23:13).

The failure to drive out the inhabitants of the land brought its own punishment. So it is with all sin. Lust and corruption not only cut off the grace of God but bring retribution and punishment as a result of the sin itself. God often punishes sin with sin (see PP 728).

5. Bochim. See on v. 1. The stern rebuke administered by the messenger caused the people to break into weeping. It was a weeping of shame, and only partially of repentance. The name served thenceforth to recall the tears of disappointment and disgrace. The place and the incidents connected with it remind us of the modern wailing wall in Jerusalem. Like the Hebrews in this experience at Bochim, many today melt under the preaching of repentance, only to harden again before they can be cast into a new mold.

It is noteworthy how quickly these erring people were touched by the preaching of this messenger. The Word of God has the power to move and convert men, and one who is thus moved may properly weep over his past failures and mistakes. "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4). However, it would be much better if, instead of naming the place in such a way as to lay the principal stress on the feelings and demonstrations of sorrow, it might be called "Repentance." It is this latter experience that God is looking for. This expectation is well expressed in the words of Paul: "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of" (2 Cor. 7:10). Too often religion is an experience of sentiment and emotion rather than of faith and obedience.

6. When Joshua. By narrating the first efforts of the tribes to consolidate their position in Palestine, and the divine rebuke for Israel's failure to obey God's directions, the author has given the historical background that explains why it was that God raised up judges. Now he turns to the main theme of the book, namely, to show how the alternating periods of oppression followed by deliverance were the result of God's efforts to turn Israel from idolatry to loyal obedience to God and His law. Before beginning the fluctuating history of oppressions and deliverances, the author ties his narrative to that of the book of Joshua. Verses 6–10 are a recapitulation that picks up the story at the time of Joshua's death and briefly fills in the history until the experience at Bochim related previously.

7. Served the Lord. At least with outward deference and on a national basis. The memory of the mighty interpositions of God in their behalf for a time held the Israelites outwardly loyal to their faith.

Joshua. It is gratifying to realize how far-reaching the influence of a godly leader may be. His weight and influence over Israel were such that while Joshua lived they sufficed to keep the people loyal to their promises to the Lord.

Elders. The elders were the headmen of families and clans. They held official authority in social and religious matters and took a leading part in maintaining loyalty to the customs and religion defined by Moses. When they died, religious apostasy set in quickly. This passage helps us to realize that not only great, renowned leaders may wield an influence for good but lesser officers as well may mold the pattern of religious life.

8. Hundred and ten years. The record does not state how long Joshua lived after the assembly at Shechem. His death probably occurred soon thereafter, for he was “old and stricken in age” (Joshua 23:1, 2) when he called this meeting of the heads and representatives of the tribes. The occasion for calling the assembly was probably his realization that death was near. After telling of the breakup of the gathering, the narrator reports that Joshua died (Joshua 24:29), thus indicating he lived but a short time thereafter.

9. In Timnath-heres. Literally, “portion of the sun.” In Joshua 19:50 and 24:30, Timnath-serah, “extra portion” (first and last letters of the second part transposed). It cannot be definitely known which represents the correct spelling. The town was named Timnath, and because it was situated in a mountainous section known as Heres (see Judges 1:35), it is thought that the latter name may have been added to keep it from being confused with other towns named Timnath. The place is now called *Khirbet Tibneh* and is 9 3/4 mi. (15.6 km.) northwest of Bethel in the central highlands.

10. Another generation. This was a generation that had grown up in the land of Canaan subject to the corrupting influences of social and religious association with the idolatrous people of the land. The children were reaping in abundant measure what their parents had sown.

Knew not the Lord. They did not know from experience the mighty working of God, and their environment, with its corrupting influences, had not developed in them independent strength of character. Joshua and the elders of the former day had served as buttresses for their weak faith. When those buttresses were taken away by death, the people stumbled and fell because they had no strong religious foundation.

It is imperative that all Christians examine well the foundations of their faith to see whether their experience is a personal and direct relationship with God, or merely an outward endeavor based upon the experience of another. Unless the former is true, they may suffer the same fate as these second-generation Israelites. Moreover, Christians do well to remember what Israel forgot, namely, the providential leadings of God in the past. “We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history” (LS 196).

11. Baalim. This is a plural form of the Heb. *ba'al*, which is variously rendered “husband,” “man,” “master,” “lord.” The term is also applied to heathen deities. At that time the Baal that was the most widely worshipped in Canaan was a god of agricultural fertility. He was thought to be the giver of rain, whose energizing power caused plants and animals to grow. He was worshiped in many places and under different guises. The name gave rise to various terms such as Baal-peor, Baal-hermon, Baal-zebub, etc. In the myths of the Canaanite people Baal was an opponent of the god Death (Mot). He was aided and abetted by two female deities, Anath, his sister, and the sun-god Shamash.

Sometimes Baal was equated with Hadad, the Syrian rain or storm god. Since Canaan was predominantly an agricultural country, the worship of Baal under different titles was the supreme form of worship. Sometimes the Hebrew writers used his name as the equivalent of any heathen deity, and that may be the case here.

The Israelites must have known of the terrible results of such worship, and of the eventual punishment to be meted out to those who took part in it. They could hardly be ignorant of the experience of Baal-peor, when the plague carried off 24,000 people as a result of Baal worship and practices connected with it (Num. 25:3–9).

12. *Forsook the Lord.* Their sin consisted not only of forsaking the God they had covenanted to worship but also of base ingratitude for their deliverance from abject servitude in Egypt from which God had delivered them. From this servitude they could never have become free by their own power. They owed worship to the true God for what He was and for what He had done. His works for His people gave Him a right to their allegiance.

Gods of the people. Not only the deities of the peoples among whom they dwelt in Canaan, but, perhaps, the deities of the surrounding nations as well. When men forsake God there seems to be no limit to the extent to which they will go in their apostasy.

13. *Baal.* See on v. 11.

Ashtaroth. The plural of Ashtoreth. This goddess was known also by the name of Astarte. In Babylonia she was called Ishtar. She was the goddess of sexual love, maternity, and fecundity. In the Ras Shamra tablets she appears also as a goddess of war and of the chase. Her worship was widespread all over the Near Eastern world, from Moab (her name is found on the Moabite Stone) to Babylonia. She was worshiped in Canaan in the days of Abraham (Gen. 14:5); Saul's armor was placed by the Philistines in her temple as a trophy of their victory (1 Sam. 31:10); Solomon paid homage to her in his heyday (1 Kings 11:5). The numerous female figurines found by archeologists in Hebrew and Canaanite dwellings are thought to be representations of her in her role of mother goddess. In the OT the names Baal and Ashtoreth are used almost synonymously for all the false gods and goddesses of Palestine. The Hebrew language has no word for goddess. Ashtoreth was apparently used instead for the concept.

14. *Spoilers.* This word is a general summary of the various nations within Canaan and around its borders that raided, invaded, oppressed, or otherwise molested Israel. The Hebrew word used here is the same that the Egyptians used of the Bedouin robber bands that harassed their borders.

15. *Whithersoever they went.* That is, whenever they went out to fight or embarked upon a military campaign, they were beaten because God was no longer with them. Victories might have been interpreted as the sanction of God upon their sinful course and would thus have served only to confirm and to harden the Israelites in their apostasy. This was one of the reasons why God allowed the heathen peoples to win and thus to punish His disobedient people. Yet in all this the purposes of God were salutary. His punishments were corrective, designed to lead the Israelites back to their God.

16. *Judges.* Their experience makes their name synonymous with "deliverer." They were champions or leaders whom the Lord called to meet special situations (see Introduction, p. 301). After a period of punishment God would give the Israelites respite by enduing a chosen man with power and leadership sufficient to drive off the

oppressors. Later experiences would reveal whether or not the people had learned the lessons from the consequences of their religious apostasy.

17. *Would not hearken.* Their defeats at the hands of enemies and the consequent oppression did not avail to teach the Hebrew people obedience. In God's efforts to save them He had allowed disaster to strike them. When He caused a lessening of their misery by the work of the judges, He found the people as impenitent as ever.

Went a whoring. This is a frequent metaphor in the Bible for religious apostasy. Inasmuch as the worship of heathen deities in the Near East was often accompanied by sexual immorality in their temples and groves, the term was not only metaphorically but literally exact.

18. *It repented the Lord.* That is, the Lord was grieved that they had to suffer oppression. The basic meaning of the word translated "repented" is "to be grieved," "to have compassion," "to pity." It does not mean that God changed His mind. God allowed the punishment for their good. When the punishment brought forth desired effects, God's pity raised up deliverance for the oppressed. God's purpose was to have the suffering bring about a change in conduct. When the objective was achieved, the oppression was removed or mitigated. This was entirely consistent with His original purpose.

19. *They returned.* That is, they returned to their former apostasies. They left off the worship of God and turned to the worship of heathen deities and the practice of corrupting idolatries. In the setting of these facts the writer of the book of Judges presents his thesis, namely, that God allowed trouble to come as a result of sin to arouse His people to see the evil of their ways. These troubles produced a form of sorrow and repentance. Then the Lord raised up a deliverer. During the respite, He provided for a test of the genuineness of Israel's repentance. After the death of the judge the ungrateful people soon fell back into their former ways. It is this viewpoint that makes the book of Judges more than a mere history. It is a philosophy of history. The author is not interested in merely recounting what happened after the settlement in Canaan. He is a preacher more than a historian. He wants the reader to see why these things happened. He says that the period after the entrance to Canaan was unsettled, and in the main, disastrous for the Hebrews. For a time they would be free; then again they would be in servitude or suffering invasion. Why was this? It was because the people had turned from God, and He, in an effort to bring them back, allowed disaster to come. In other words, the author tells us that the hand of God was shaping history to bring about His desired ends. The author of Judges was one of the first real historians. He sought to record for future generations the meaning of events.

More than their fathers. One of the striking characteristics of sin is the way it mushrooms. Allow it a little beginning, and it soon chokes the ability to resist it, and overwhelms the entire life.

Ceased not. The sentence reads literally, "they let nothing fall of their deeds." They were unwilling to put off any of their evil habits and practices. Their hearts had not really been changed. If they had actually received a new spirit, it would have forced off these old practices as the rising sap in a tree forces off the dead leaves.

20. *Anger of the Lord.* The passage is intended to portray God's hatred of sin. The anger is not that of impulse, but expressive rather of God's abhorrence of evil, an abhorrence that has its foundation in the holiness of His character. Man's anger is a fire, burning with impulsive and selfish passion; God's anger springs from eternal principles

of righteousness and benevolence. If God is infinitely good and holy, and if He knows the full misery that sin has brought into His creation, with what other sentiment can He regard sin than that of hatred and indignation that will ultimately doom it to annihilation? In the meantime, God is seeking to save the sinner lest he too be consumed in the purifying fires (Eze. 33:11; 2 Peter 3:9).

Transgressed my covenant. God's displeasure was not without cause. The fact that the people had taken part in and agreed to the covenant made at Sinai imposed on them obligations that were tantamount to commands. The specific obligation they were so flagrantly ignoring was that which forbade the worship of any other god.

21. *Not henceforth drive.* The only victories they had gained had been won by the help of the Lord. Israel had broken the terms of the covenant by worshiping other gods, so the Lord was free from His part of the contract and not under obligation to fulfill His promise to drive out the remaining native inhabitants of the land (Ex. 23:27, 31).

22. *Prove Israel.* The object of leaving these heathen nations was not to ascertain whether Israel, thus exposed to close and constant contact with heathenism, would remain faithful to its own religion. "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man" (James 1:13). Rather, from the first it was evident that Israel was not remaining faithful. God left the nations as instruments to afflict the Israelites, to punish them, and to teach them that the way of apostasy does not pay. Through the afflictions God was endeavoring to turn the minds of His people back to Him. This seems to be the connotation the word "prove" holds here. It means "to try" in the sense of bringing trying experiences that will awaken the people to their true state.

Similar experiences have been the lot of men in all ages. Periods of suffering and disappointment have served to turn the thoughts of the tempted back upon the seriousness of duty and the great purpose of God in their existence. These experiences were not to show up men's characters to God, for He knows their hearts, but rather to "prove" to them their true estate.

Notwithstanding the repeated failures of Israel during this period, the discipline was not an entire failure. The chastisements by foreign nations must have wrought salutary changes in the lives of some of the Hebrews. The stern and consistent punishments, no doubt, instilled in many the feeling that the way of sin was a way of sorrow. To borrow Bunyan's phrases, God made "By-path Meadow" rougher than the "King's highway." After having been seized by "Giant Despair" several times, the Israelites were often glad to return again by the way they had departed. These chastisements taught the people sufficiently hard lessons so that by the time of Samuel the Israelites seem to have made some progress spiritually. At the end of the period of the judges, when Samuel's judgeship was ushered in, we hear less of apostasies than formerly. Furthermore, all these troubles tended to cause different tribes to draw closer together, so that by Samuel's time a strong nationalistic feeling was discernible.

Keep the way. The natural tendency to do "every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes" (Deut. 12:8; cf. Judges 17:6; 21:25) was fully demonstrated by Israel during the centuries they were ruled over by the judges, and later under the monarchy. The ways of a man are usually "right in his own eyes" (Prov. 21:2). As a result, "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" (Isa. 53:6).

23. *Left those nations.* Obstacles are necessary to the development of character. It was well for the Israelites to learn how to live a holy life in the midst of a corrupt

environment. Continued conflict with the powers of evil would, if correctly met, develop true faith in God. Because of this God had not fully prospered the first efforts of the tribes to consolidate their allotments. It was for the same cause that He had not allowed Joshua to obtain absolute mastery of all the Canaanite territory. The Lord had helped the Israelites to drive out as many of the Canaanites as were necessary in order to provide room for the tribes to settle. His plan was that as the people increased in number and learned the lessons of obedience and faith, they were to be given power to drive out the remaining Canaanites. In the history of Israel under David and Solomon this objective was, to a degree, at least, accomplished.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

2 MYP 432

7 PP 544

10–19PP 545

22 AH 205, 221; LS 323

CHAPTER 3

1 *The nations which were left to prove Israel.* 6 *By communion with them they commit idolatry.* 8 *Othniel delivereth them from Chushan-rishathaim.* 12 *Ehud from Eglon.* 31 *Shamgar from the Philistines.*

1. *These are the nations.* The writer, having finished his interpretation of the history of the entire period of the judges, now turns to enumerate the different peoples that were left in Canaan with whom the Israelites had to contend. In doing so, he adds another reason why these Canaanites were left, and also shows how social and religious fusion with the heathen went on apace (vs. 1–6).

2. *Teach them war.* The ones who belonged to the new generation of Israel did not know the horrors of war, nor were they personally acquainted with the mighty deliverances that God had wrought for their forefathers. Having grown up in comparative ease, they turned their backs upon the God in whom their fathers had trusted for deliverance from a numerically superior enemy. God purposed through the nations that remained in and around Canaan, to repeat the lessons of His former mighty deliverances and of the impotency of heathen gods. By the wars that ensued, the younger generation of Israelites learned from bitter experiences that they could fight and conquer these numerous and warlike people only with the aid of the God of their fathers.

3. *Lords.* Heb. *seren*. Used in the Bible of the rulers of these Philistine cities, with but one exception (1 Kings 7:30). It was evidently a Philistine word or title, inasmuch as it is generally used only of these rulers, and does not appear elsewhere. There were five main centers of the Philistine confederacy: Gaza, Ashdod, Ekron, Gath, and Askelon (1 Sam. 6:16–18). Three of the cities had been overrun by Judah (Judges 1:18), but evidently were lost again.

All the Canaanites. That is, the groups of Canaanites that remained in all parts of the land. Much of their territory had, of course, been overrun.

Hivites. See Joshua 11:3. Elsewhere the Hivites are mentioned in connection with cities in the central part of Palestine, at Shechem (Gen. 34:2) and Gibeon (Joshua 9:7). Archeologists are unable definitely to identify these people. It has been suggested that the Hivites were a segment of the Horites or Hurrians (see on Joshua 9:3).

Mount Lebanon. The Hivites are here described as living in the area around Mt. Hermon (in northern Palestine) up to the entering in of Hamath. The latter expression was

frequently used in the Bible to designate the northern boundary of Canaan. The city of Hamath itself was on the Orontes River about 140 mi. north of Mt. Hermon. However, its territory stretched a number of miles to the south of the city.

The entering in of Hamath. See or Num. 34:8.

4. To prove Israel. See on ch. 2:22, 23.

5. Amorites. See on ch. 1:35, 36.

Perizzites. See on ch. 1:4.

Jebusites. See on ch. 1:21.

6. Took their daughters. Intermarriage between those who honored God and those who did not is mentioned in the book of Genesis as one factor that accounts for the wickedness that prevailed on the earth prior to the Flood (Gen.6:2–4). Yahweh had strictly forbidden intermarriage with the unbelieving nations of Canaan (Deut. 7:3), but the people often ignored this precept. The results of such intermarriage are evident from Solomon's experience (1 Kings 11:1–8). The danger of similar tragic results exists today. Too often the marriage of a believer and unbeliever corrupts the faith of the believing party. It could hardly be otherwise (see 2 Cor. 6:14–17).

7. The groves. Heb. *'ashereth*, or in the singular, *'asherah*. The meaning is not conveyed by the translation "groves" (see 2 Kings 23:6). A "grove" could hardly be carried out of the house of the Lord. These *'ashereth* (frequently *'asherim*) apparently were wooden poles or tree trunks, one of which was generally set up beside heathen altars and venerated as an object of worship. Perhaps it was regarded as the dwelling place of the deity (see Deut. 16:21; 2 Kings 17:10). Such images were common in Canaanite sanctuaries and gradually came to be used in connection with Hebrew worship. We read of one by the altar of Baal in Gideon's home town (Judges 6:25), of others located in Samaria, Jerusalem, and Bethel (2 Kings 13:6; 23:6, 15). They seemed to have derived their name from a famous goddess of the Canaanites by the name of Asherah, who, in the Ras Shamra tablets, is described as the mother of the gods and frequently called the Lady of the Sea. It is not known how a tree trunk or wooden pole became her symbol.

8. He sold them. That is, permitted them to be defeated and to be made a subject people who retained their territories only by paying tribute.

From this point begins the actual narrative of the book of Judges. Thus far the book has, by means of two prefaces (chs. 1:1 to 2:5 and 2:6 to 3:7), laid the historical background and stated the principle, that the sins of the people led to oppression, but that God provided a deliverance through a "judge" to grant a further opportunity for Israel to accept her high destiny. The narrative of the judge Othniel, like that of the other judges, is given to illustrate this truth.

Chushan-rishathaim. Historical records contain no information about the invasion of Canaan by a Mesopotamian king by this name. The title means "Chushan of double wickedness." The latter part of the name was probably added by the Israelites to show their aversion for him. The invasion came from the northeast, from *'Aram Naharayim*, as it is given in the Hebrew. The word means "Aram of the two rivers." This was the common designation for the region between the upper Euphrates and the *Khābūr* rivers. The word Mesopotamia later came to signify all the region between the Tigris and

Euphrates rivers. Inasmuch as 'Aram Naharayim was at that time ruled by kings of Mitanni, it is probable that Chushan-rishathaim was a Mitanni king.

9. Cried unto the Lord. With self-confidence gone, illusive dreams of pleasure vanished, the people at last turned to their God. They suddenly came to the realization that idolatry had betrayed them and that heathen idols were entirely impotent to help them. With this realization, they turned again to the God of their fathers.

It has been aptly remarked that affliction makes those cry to God with importunity who before would scarcely speak to Him. Yet that is the divine purpose of trials. That the people did turn to the Lord in their trouble is to their credit. No sincere cry for help is ever lost. Though the affliction is not in every case removed, yet to those who love God, to those who are completely surrendered to Him, He will work all things for their good (Rom. 8:28). Nevertheless there will come a time when, though men "shall cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them" (Jer. 11:11). Therefore we should call on the Lord while He is near (Isa. 55:6). Today is the day of salvation.

Raised up a deliverer. When the Israelites cried to God in their distress, He heard and raised up for them a national deliverer, Othniel, the son-in-law of Caleb (ch. 1:13).

10. Spirit of the Lord. God did not reserve the special endowments of the Holy Spirit for NT times alone. Anciently, as well, He equipped His servants for their tasks through the bestowal of the Holy Spirit.

Othniel is truly an outstanding judge in that no indiscretion or unhallowed deed is recorded of him. On many of the other judges, notwithstanding their victories, fell the shadow of error, of grief, or of a tragic end.

Judged Israel. When the Spirit of the Lord came upon Othniel, he first judged Israel and then went out to war. This indicates that he put things right among the people before he essayed to fight the enemy. This is as it should be. Sin, the worst of all enemies, needs first to be conquered. Only with this foe subdued can we expect victory over the enemies abroad.

Went out to war. We do not conquer by sitting still even if the Spirit of the Lord has come upon us. Action is required by those who have the presence of God's Spirit with them. The Spirit of the Lord is the originator of everything good and of all great achievements, but He works through human agencies.

His hand prevailed. No details are given of this war, but it must have been a struggle of no mean magnitude considering the status of the oppressing king. However, now that the Lord was again helping the Israelites, their efforts were crowned with victory.

12. Did evil again. Upon the death of the faithful judge Othniel, the Israelites gradually succumbed to their propensity for idolatry. Thus it is seen how powerful the presence of one good man in a church or state may be. A just and honest leader is one of the greatest blessings a nation can have, not only for the decisions he makes, but for the influence he exerts, by the example of his life, upon others. The world today needs men like Othniel—men filled with the Spirit—to direct it back to God.

The Lord strengthened. This is the beginning of the second period of oppression. When Othniel was gone and the nation had returned to its sinful ways, God allowed other peoples to oppress the Hebrews again. The oppression was designed to be salutary.

Eglon. The Moabites were close relatives of the Hebrews (Gen. 19:36–38). Prior to this time the two peoples had never engaged in active warfare with each other. Eglon allied himself with the Ammonites (whose kingdom lay to the north of Moab) and with

the Amalekites (migrant Bedouins to the south). The first attack of Eglon was launched against Jericho, the city of palm trees (see on Judges 1:16), and resulted in his conquering that city and the territory of Benjamin round about. Probably about 60 years had passed after the invading Hebrews had destroyed the city. Either the city had been rebuilt, at least to some extent, or another city had arisen in its environs.

15. Ehud. After serving this foreign king for 18 years the Israelites became sufficiently weary of their status to realize again that their troubles were due to their religious apostasy, and with a degree of contrition they cried to God for help. Although they had betrayed His trust once, God responded by raising up a deliverer for them from the tribe of Benjamin. The first judge had been from Judah, the leading tribe. Now Judah seemingly has no champion for the oppressed people. At least the Lord used a man from the smallest tribe, the tribe that had borne the brunt of the Moabite oppression.

Lefthanded. Ehud, whom the Lord chose as deliverer, is described as left-handed (literally, “bound as to his right hand”). This fact has a bearing on what follows, for a left-handed person would bind his dagger on the opposite side to that on which it was usually carried, a distinct aid in concealing the weapon.

A present. Likely the payment of the yearly tribute. It was probably paid in kind, and therefore required a number of Israelites to carry it and to guard it from robbers on the way.

16. Cubit. The Hebrew word here used for “cubit” is found nowhere else in the OT. It is therefore difficult to determine how long this unit of measure was. From what follows, we may conclude that it was about a foot long.

17. Very fat man. A fact of importance in the sequel, being introduced parenthetically here in anticipation of the climax of the narrative.

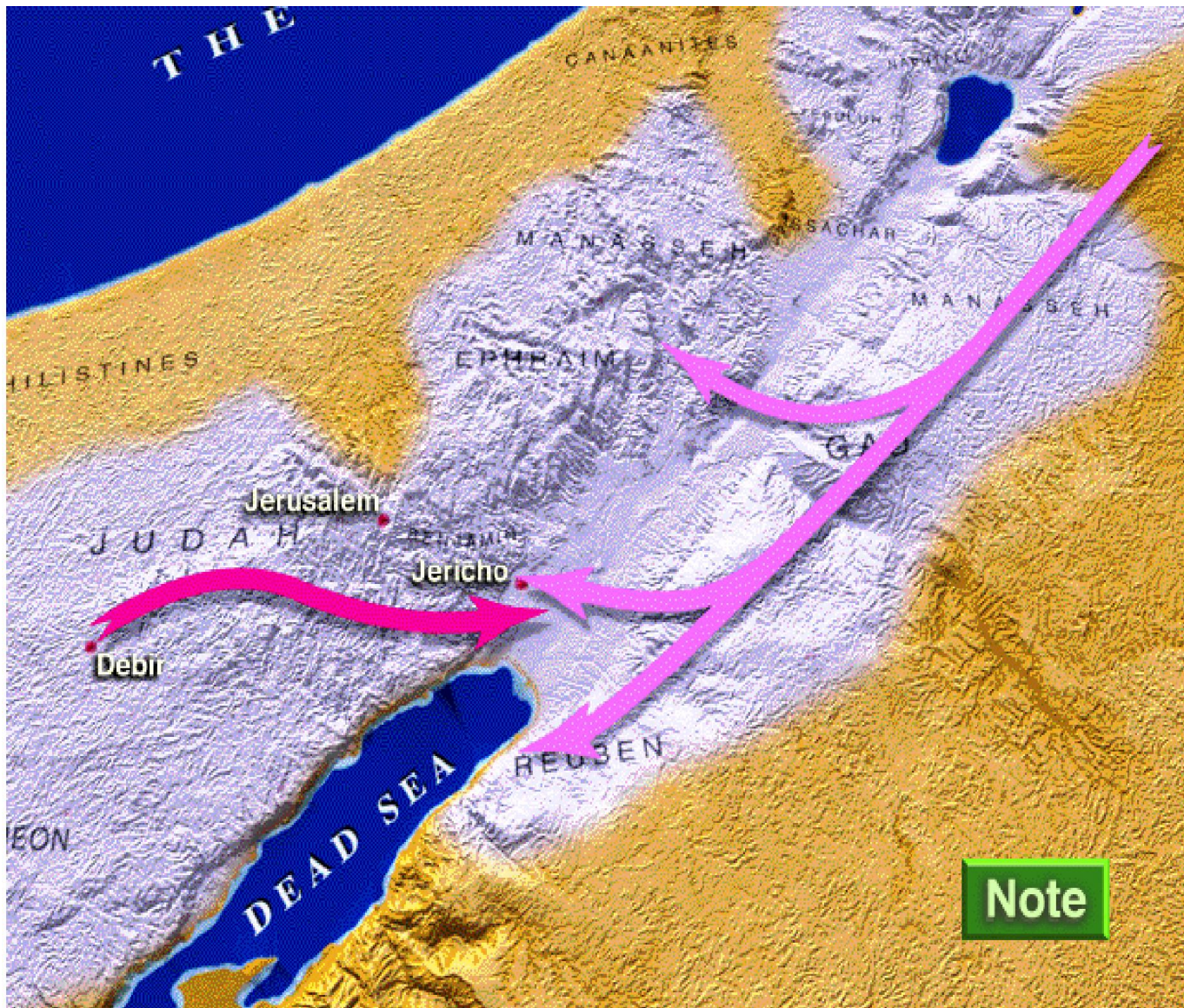
18. Sent away. After having delivered the tribute Ehud and the Israelite carriers who were with him departed for home. When they were a safe distance away, Ehud sent the porters on while he returned to try to carry out his dangerous mission. The record does not state the location of the king’s residence. The setting indicates that it was in a town of Moab not far across the Jordan from Gilgal.

19. Quarries. Literally, “graven images,” or, “engraved stones.” These may have been engraved boundary stones or perhaps a heathen sanctuary erected near Gilgal by the Moabites. Either would have been considered idolatrous by the Israelites. The translation “quarries” dates back to the Jewish Targums, which rendered the Hebrew word thus, perhaps, to avoid the possibility of an inference that Ehud might have lingered around the idols, or an inference that they were the stones set up by Joshua (Joshua 4:20). To this monument the description “carved stones” would not apply. They are, perhaps, mentioned merely as a familiar landmark.

Servitude Under Cushan (Judges 3)

¹

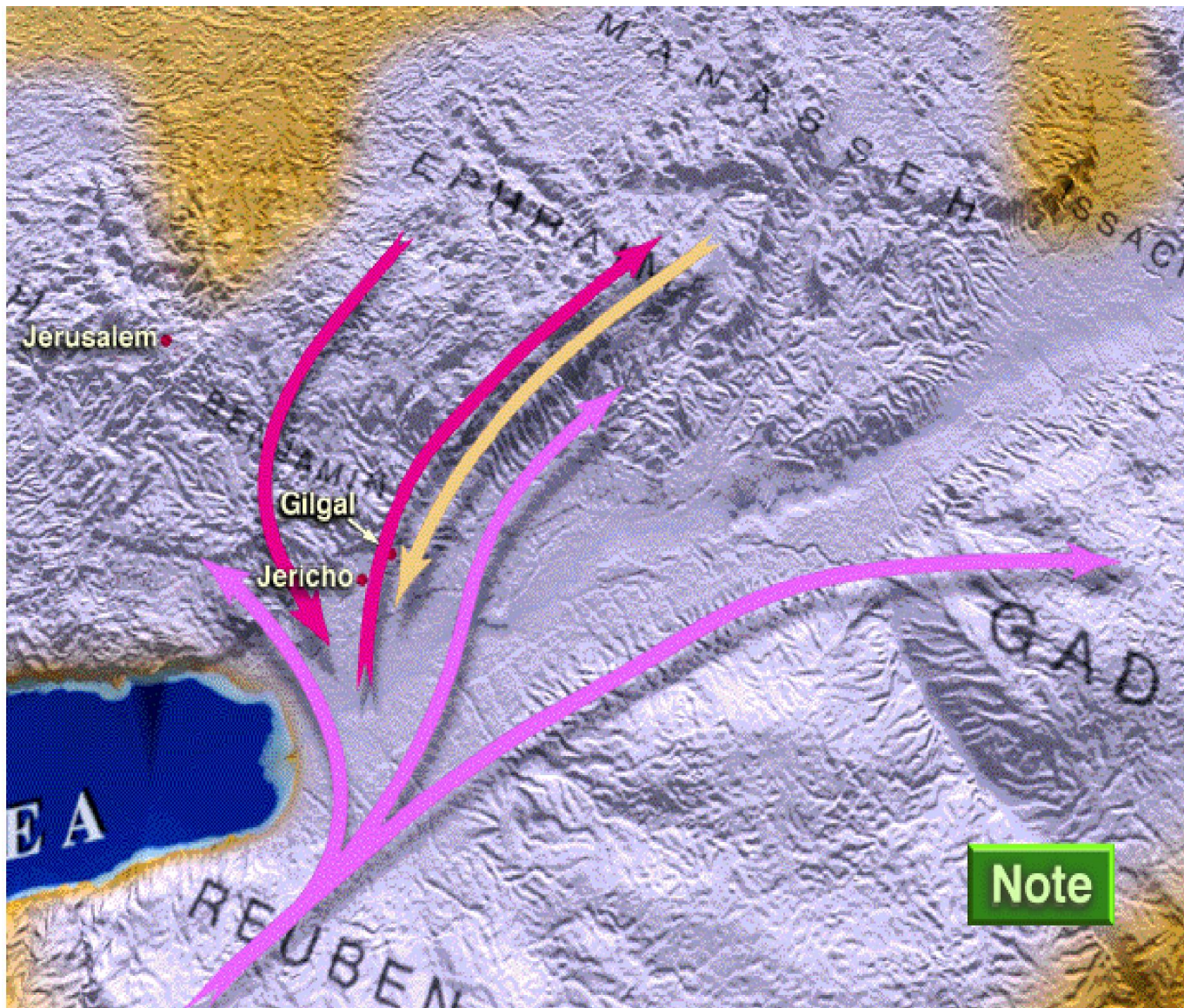
¹Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Jdg 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



The oppressor was Cushan-rishathaim; deliverer, Othniel of Debir; no places are mentioned. Arrows show direction of invasion; the extent is not known.

Servitude Under Eglon (**Judges 3**)

²Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

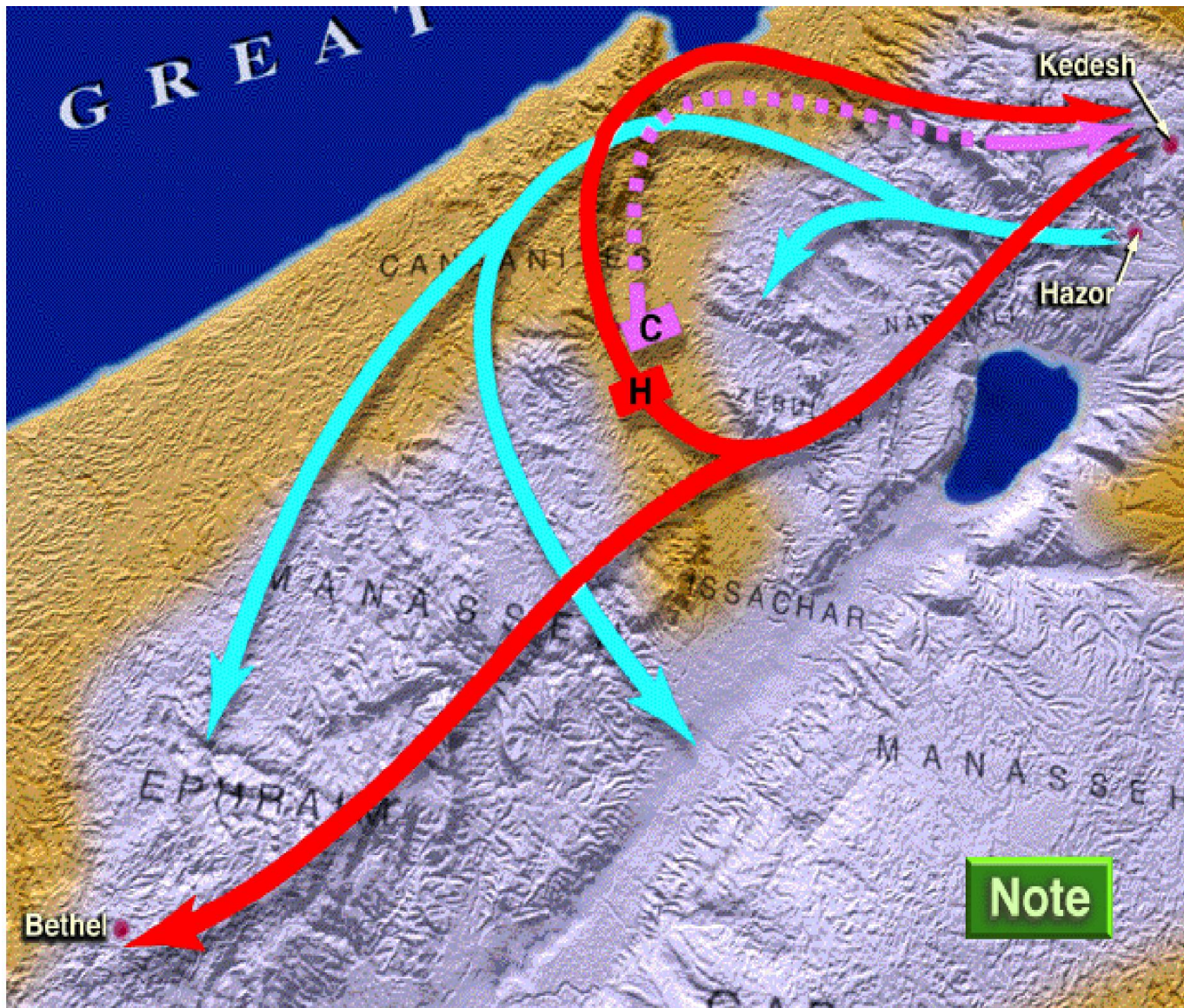


Eglon, king of Moab, invaded at least Reuben and Benjamin. Ehud, a Benjamite, slew Eglon, raised a revolt in Ephraim, and cut off Moabite garrisons at Jordan fords. Arrows show direction of invasions; extent is not known.

³

Servitude Under Jabin (**Judges 4**)

³Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



Jabin of Hazor oppressed northern Israel. Barak of Kedesh, summoned to Ephraim by Deborah, defeated the foe at the Kishon. Sisera, fleeing, was killed by Jael at Zaanaim. Arrows show direction of invasions; extent is not known.

⁴

Secret errand. Or, “secret message.” The pretext appeared valid, and the king probably accepted it without suspicion inasmuch as Ehud had brought the tribute and the king probably supposed that he was about to betray some secret concerning conditions among the Israelites. The king had probably been informed that Ehud had sent his companions on ahead, and he would naturally conclude that Ehud had acted thus in order

⁴Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

not to be observed by them as he delivered the secret message. Naturally Ehud could not have been expected to deliver such a message at the earlier public audience.

Keep silence. The Hebrew word imitates a sound. It corresponds to our English *hush* or *ssh*. The command was addressed to Eglon's retinue. Ehud would not dare ask that the attendants of the court withdraw; hence he probably acted as if he were on the point of telling his secret before all. Of course, the king would not want a secret message to be delivered thus. He therefore dismissed his attendants, using this expression.

20. Summer parlour. Literally, "an upper chamber of cooling." In modern Arabic, this room is still called by the same name as is used here in the Hebrew. It is an additional story, ordinarily a third, raised above the flat roof of the house at one corner, or upon a towerlike annex to the building. Its high elevation and latticed windows on all sides rendered it well ventilated and comfortable even in hot weather.

It is apparent that some details of the narrative have been omitted. Evidently after ordering the servants to leave, the king retired to his private chamber, where he bade Ehud follow, or perhaps the first words of Ehud (v. 19) were conveyed to the king by messengers.

Message from God. This statement was a shrewd ruse on the part of Ehud to enable him to get close to the king. At these words the king stood up as a sign of respect for the divine oracle.

21. His left hand. The natural circumstance of being left-handed helped prevent the king from getting suspicious as he reached under his robe to remove the dagger. The mighty thrust pierced the monarch's abdomen with such force that the whole dagger disappeared from view. The king's extreme obesity, probably due to lasciviousness and luxury, rendered him incapable of defending himself.

23. Porch. The Hebrew word here rendered "porch" occurs only this once in the OT. It comes from a root word meaning "to arrange" and hence may mean a "colonnade." All that can be known with certainty is that it referred to some part of the building.

Locked them. Likely made possible only by the fact that the servants had withdrawn completely to another section of the house. However, we infer that they saw Ehud leaving the house, for they returned to the room where the king was. Upon finding the doors locked, they decided that the king desired privacy for awhile.

24. Covereth his feet. A euphemism for having a bowel movement. The same expression is found in 1 Sam. 24:3. Naturally attendants were hesitant about knocking on the locked door of their king.

26. Escaped. The indecision and waiting on the part of the king's attendants gave Ehud enough of a head start to enable him to make his escape. Likely, too, the royal residence was near the Jordan, permitting Ehud soon to be safely on the other side.

Seirath. Location not known. It seems to have been in the nearby highlands of Ephraim.

27. Mountain of Ephraim. In view of the fact that Ehud was of the tribe of Benjamin, it may seem strange that he did not go to the nearer settlements of his own tribe. Either strong Moabite garrisons were stationed there, or he felt the Benjamites were too cowed to respond to his call to battle. The tribe of Ephraim, the most numerous and most aggressive of the tribes, responded quickly to his battle call.

28. Fords of Jordan. The fords directly east of Jericho near Gilgal seem to be the ones indicated. This move was to prevent reinforcements being sent from Moab and also to cut off the escape of the Moabite garrisons on the Israelite side of the river.

29. Escaped not a man. So general and immediate was the uprising of the Hebrews that the Moabite garrisons, consisting of picked men, were completely destroyed.

30. Moab was subdued. The Moabite power on the Israelite side of the Jordan was broken to such a degree that there was no longer any danger from that quarter.

31. Shamgar. Evidently he was the next national hero to come on the scene of action. His exploits were only local, being directed against the Philistines in southern Palestine. He probably lived at the same time that Deborah and Barak were fighting the Canaanites in the northern part of the country. Chapter 4:1 states that Deborah and Barak performed their deliverance after Ehud was dead, but makes no reference to Shamgar. Deborah implies that Shamgar was a contemporary (ch. 5:6). This fact is further suggested by the observation that Shamgar is not included in the chronological scheme of the narrative, no years being assigned to him at all. By his daring feats he saved the Israelites in his area from being oppressed and enslaved by the Philistines. He was a deliverer, a national hero, but he was not called a judge of Israel.

The name Shamgar appears to be foreign and has been thought probably to be Hurrian or Hittite. The foreign name may be due to the fact that his mother was an Israelite married to a Hurrian or Canaanite. The author has already observed that intermarriages were common. His father was named Anath, the name of a pagan goddess, and it is thought unlikely that a Hebrew would be given this name, unless by backslidden parents.

Ox goad. An instrument for urging oxen forward. These were often as much as 8 ft. long so that the one holding the plow could reach the oxen. Pointed as they were on one end with a metal tip, and having a chisel-shaped blade on the other for scraping the plowshare, such goads could effectively be used in place of a spear. It was a humble weapon, yet an “ox goad,” with God’s blessing, accomplishes infinitely more than a “sword of Goliath” without His blessing. And sometimes God chooses to work by such unlikely means, that the power may truly stand revealed as of God.

CHAPTER 4

1 *Deborah and Barak deliver them from Jabin and Sisera.* 18 *Jael killeth Sisera.*

2. Jabin. Following the 80 years of peace that ensued after Ehud broke the Moabite oppression, the Israelites grew careless in their spiritual life and again forsook their God. To awaken His people, the Lord allowed the Canaanite ruler commanding the strong chain of fortresses in northern Palestine to oppress the northern Hebrew tribes for a period of 20 years. The story of how this yoke of oppression was broken by Deborah and Barak is told twice, once in prose form in ch. 4 and again in poetic form in ch. 5.

The book of Joshua mentions a Jabin as king of Hazor (Joshua 11:1-9). The city was captured by the Israelites at that time, but it had probably since been retaken by the Canaanites before the Israelites could consolidate their position in this region. Another Jabin, possibly the grandson of the king Joshua had destroyed, now held a loose suzerainty over the entire Canaanite forces of northern Palestine.

Sisera. From this point onward in the narrative we hear no more of Jabin, except for a brief mention in v. 23. He had turned supervision of his forces over to a field commander by the name of Sisera. This general may have been a king in his own right, ruling over

the city in which he dwelt. Harosheth was 16 mi. northwest of Megiddo, where the plain of Jezreel narrows down before joining the coastal plain of Acre. The plain represented a natural terrain for Sisera's formidable task force of 900 chariots of iron (ch. 4:3). Against such a threatening foe the Israelites, in their state of sinful rebellion, could not stand, and they were soon overcome and forced to pay tribute.

Harosheth. Tell 'Amr, on the Kishon.

4. Deborah. Literally, "bee." Of the judges whose exploits are recorded in this book she is the only one mentioned as possessing the prophetic gift.

Lapidoth. Signifying "torches" or "flashes." Some have thought the phrase "wife of Lapidoth" should be translated "woman of fiery spirit," which indeed may not have been too inapplicable an appellation in the light of the sequel.

She judged. Perhaps not as a princess by any civil authority conferred upon her, but as a prophetess, correcting abuses and redressing grievances.

5. She dwelt. Literally, "she sat," that is, on the judge's seat. Her favorite place for hearing cases was under a tree between Ramah and Bethel (see on 1 Sam. 1:1). This seems to have been in the vicinity of the famous "tree of mourning," under which Rachel's nurse, Deborah, was buried (Gen. 35:8). This type of courtroom allowed people the freest access to her, and thither they "came up to her for judgment."

6. Kedesh-naphtali. Perhaps the modern Tell Qades, 4 mi. (6.4 km.) northwest of the now drained Lake Huleh in upper Galilee. Kedesh-naphtali had been a Canaanite fortress. Ruins cover the picturesque site of Qades today.

Draw toward. That is, "converge upon," in small groups.

Mount Tabor. A prominent hill (1,929 ft.; 588 m.) many miles to the south of Tell Qades, in the territory of Issachar, about 5 1/2 mi. (8.8 km.) east of Nazareth. It commanded the main road through the narrow valley leading from the plain of Esdraelon down to the plain where the Jordan leaves the Sea of Galilee. Its central location made it the natural rallying place of the northern tribes, and its height made it easy to defend against the chariots of Sisera. The summit, an oblong platform nearly 3,000 ft. (915 m.) from east to west and 1,300 ft. (396 m.) at the widest point, was an excellent marshaling area. Centuries later Antiochus Epiphanes, and later still, Josephus, used this plateau for the same purpose.

Naphtali and ... Zebulun. Chapter 4 mentions only these two tribes as taking part in the battle. In ch. 5, six tribes are mentioned as participants. Naphtali and Zebulun probably furnished the bulk of the troops, and the other four tribes may have sent only small contingents.

7. Kishon. Sisera's march from his headquarters at Harosheth to engage the Israelites at Mt. Tabor would lead him along the partly dry river bed of the Kishon. It was here that the Lord promised to bring about his defeat. It was necessary for the overthrow to take place on the plain, not on Mt. Tabor, in order to effect the destruction of the chariots.

8. Go with me. Barak probably realized that by himself he could not sustain the morale of the Hebrews. Deborah's presence would serve to make clear that the undertaking was of God. He probably wanted it to be clearly understood by all that it was she, the prophetess, who was initiating the campaign, and not he himself. It is to the credit of Barak that he followed prophetic guidance in the dangerous undertaking. It is

also worthy of note that Deborah did not draw back from the course she had prescribed for others. As for Barak, he preferred the humbler role of one who was executing the command that had come from the Lord. He voluntarily retired behind the authority of a woman whom God had animated and inspired. The need today is for men who will obey the divine voice as Barak did.

God does not confine Himself to the male sex in His choice of prophets. Both the OT and the NT mention prophetesses (Ex. 15:20, 21; Num. 12:2; 2 Kings 22:12–20; Luke 2:36; Acts 21:9).

9. *Hand of a woman.* Deborah consented to go along on the military expedition, but before leaving her home in Mt. Ephraim to accompany Barak into northern Palestine, she prophesied that the victory that would ensue would not redound to Barak's glory but to that of a woman. She was not referring to herself, but to Jael (vs. 18–21), who was to slay Sisera.

10. *Went up.* The phrase here means "to advance for battle."

At this feet. The expression means "following him," or, "under his command."

11. *Heber the Kenite.* This verse explains the circumstances by which some of the Kenites happened to be living in this northern area when, according to the author's earlier statement (ch. 1:16), they had settled in southern Palestine. The reason was that these Kenites had separated from the rest of the tribe and sought a home in the lot of Zebulun and Naphtali. One of them named Heber had settled as far north as the region of Kedesh.

Hobab. See on Num. 10:29.

Plain. This Hebrew word means "oak" not "plain." The place was near Kedesh, the home of Barak.

12. *They shewed Sisera.* The "they" should be understood impersonally as, "it was told Sisera." Some think the informants were the Kenites, who were on good terms with Jabin, the Canaanite overlord.

13. *His chariots.* The 900 chariots were the aggregate from all the Canaanite cities in the alliance.

Kishon. The Kishon River itself, though very short, is the largest river in this part of Palestine, fed by numerous small tributaries which traverse the plain of Esdraelon and drain the surrounding hills. From the vicinity of Tabor a northern tributary joins the main stream near Megiddo. It was likely this tributary to which Sisera led his armed chariots, and near which they encamped on the plain along the river.

15. *Discomfited Sisera.* The means God used are not precisely given. The parallel account in ch. 5 states that the river Kishon, along whose banks the Canaanite army had encamped, swept the army away (ch. 5:20, 21). God may have sent a sudden rainstorm soon after the army of Sisera had arrived. Under such rain the clay soil of the plain would be turned into a quagmire of sticky mud in which the chariots of the Canaanites would be unable to maneuver. An excavator, working on the excavation of the ancient city of Megiddo near this site, tells how on rainy days it was virtually impossible to go anywhere even on horseback, because of the mud.

Torrent waters contributed to the defeat of the Turks on this very spot in April, 1799, when numbers of their fleeing troops were swept away and drowned. In World War I, English troops found that even a quarter hour of rain on the clay soil rendered cavalry maneuvers impossible.

16. Barak pursued. The line of retreat led down the valley, for in the hills on either side of the valley were the Hebrew settlements. The valley became progressively more confined as it approached the narrow pass that led to Harosheth. Before the Canaanites could struggle back to their headquarters at Harosheth, their army was wiped out. Not one lived to reach the safety of its walls.

Harosheth. This place seems to have been at the opposite end of the plain of Esdraelon, where the Kishon passes through the mountains into the maritime plain (see on v. 2). The song of Deborah speaks of phases of the battle taking place near Taanach and Megiddo (ch. 5:19).

17. The Kenite. The camp of this tribe was perhaps 30 or 40 mi. (38–64 km.) north of the scene of battle. It may have been a day or two after the battle when the once-proud army commander, hungry and exhausted, reached the tents of these people he considered friendly.

18. Jael. Heber was probably away from home, leaving his wife Jael in charge of the tent encampment. Servants may already have brought word that Jabin's army commander was approaching on foot. Perhaps word of the Hebrew victory had preceded Sisera's coming. Inasmuch as there were peaceful relations between the Kenites and the Canaanites, Sisera would naturally expect to find sustenance and rest among the Kenites.

Fear not. The words suggest probable suspicion, which Jael sought to allay.

Mantle. Sisera lay down and Jael covered him with some sort of blanket or rug. The Hebrew word translated "mantle" occurs only here in the Bible, and its exact meaning is unknown. The context, nevertheless, shows that it describes a covering.

19. Give me. It is an ancient Oriental practice common to all Bedouins that whoever has eaten or drunk anything in the tent is received into the peace of the house. A mortal enemy could rest securely in the tent of his adversary if he had drunk with him. Sisera's request showed him to be cautious and wary. Though exhausted, he dared not sleep until he had some guarantee of Jael's intentions. When Jael opened the goatskin and gave him milk to drink, the army commander felt he could safely yield to sleep.

21. A nail. This was the wooden tent stake by which the cords were fastened to the ground. It must have been with mixed emotions that Jael picked up the sharp stake and the heavy mallet that she was accustomed to use in pitching the tents. As far as we know, she had no personal wrong to avenge, and it is possible that her deed was prompted by the recognition that Sisera was the oppressor of the people of God, with those fortunes her own and those of her family had become identified.

22. Sisera lay dead. We do not know how long it was after the death of Sisera that Barak and some of his band arrived in hot pursuit. Perhaps herdsmen living in the hills had observed the fleeing general and had informed Barak and his men of the direction of his flight. As Barak's eager group followed the trail to the encampment of Heber, great must have been their astonishment when Jael conducted them into her tent and showed them their slain enemy. Thus the narrative that begins with a woman's courage ends on the same note.

23. God subdued. The author does not attribute the Israelite victory to Barak or to Deborah or to Jael, but to God, whose power had enabled the Hebrews to put their foes to rout.

24. Prospered, and prevailed. This battle of the Kishon was the beginning of the complete deliverance of Israel from the yoke of the Canaanites. In subsequent

engagements the Hebrews exerted more and more pressure upon Jabin's kingdom until the power of this Canaanite king was completely broken.

CHAPTER 5

The song of Deborah and Barak.

1. *Then sang.* It has been a favorite method of many nations to celebrate national victories by martial songs. The national anthems of many countries illustrate the type of song found in ch. 5. In a day when textbooks were rare or non-existent this song was doubtless an effective instrument in preserving the narrative of the victory of Israel over Jabin. It stands as one of the greatest martial poems ever written.

The statement is made that Deborah and Barak sang the song. Some have thought that the poem was written originally by Deborah to be sung as a duet in which Deborah would sing first and then Barak would answer in song. However, it cannot be definitely known that this was the case.

This song is one of the most difficult passages of the whole Bible to translate. It embodies many Hebrew words that have since dropped out of use; hence, their meaning is difficult to ascertain. The song was probably handed down unchanged from its original composition and thus incorporated into the book of Judges when this book was written, perhaps a long time afterward. As in the case today, languages anciently underwent changes, so that in the course of a few centuries, many words were dropped from common usage.

The poem begins with words of praise to God for victory (vs. 2–5), followed by a description of the state of affairs that preceded the battle (vs. 6–8). There is rich praise for the tribes that took part in the uprising, while reproaches are hurled at those who failed to respond in the crisis hour (vs. 14–17). This is followed by a description of the battle (vs. 18–22), the death of Sisera at the hand of Jael (vs. 24–27), and the anxiety of Sisera's mother as she awaits his return from the engagement (vs. 28–31).

2. *Avenging.* Heb. *peroa' pera'oth*. Both of these words come from the root *para'* which signifies "to lead." Hence these Hebrew words may be translated, "the leading of the leaders," which is similar to the rendering found in several versions. "The leaders took the lead" (RSV).

3. *Hear, O ye kings.* This verse exhibits clearly the parallelism that marks Hebrew poetry. The verse is divided into two parts, the division being made after the word "princes." Each part states the same thought twice in slightly different words. Where our English Bible repeats the word "sing" in the second half of the verse, the Hebrew has two words for the idea, the second having the added connotation of singing accompanied by stringed musical instruments.

4. *Seir.* The mountainous region that extends from the east of the Dead Sea southward toward the Red Sea. The reference to this mountain seems to be with the object of showing God's presence with the Israelites on their journey toward Canaan. This presence was manifested in miraculous ways; for example, in the supernatural supply of food and water, and in the presence of Christ in the pillar of fire and the cloud that accompanied them. The God who anciently had worked so wonderfully had again intervened and wrought marvelously for His people. In this instance Mt. Tabor, rather than Seir, had been the scene of His exploits.

5. *Mountains melted.* A figure of speech for the quaking of Mt. Sinai at the time of the giving of the law. The memory of this miraculous event is recalled also as an illustration of God's power.

6. *The days of Shamgar.* See on ch. 3:31.

Highways were unoccupied. This and the next two verses describe the miserable plight of the land under Canaanite rule. The state of war disrupted travel and commerce to the extent that the highways were unused and those who had to travel were forced to use unfrequented paths through the countryside. This suspension of travel arose from the presence of Canaanite garrisons situated at strategic places along the main roads. From these the Canaanite were able to hinder the movements of the Hebrews, and thus prevent possible guerrilla warfare and, at the same time, disrupt trade and commerce.

7. *Villages ceased.* Perhaps a better rendering would be, "the villages disappeared." The words "the inhabitants of" are not in the original as is shown by the italics in the KJV. The idea is that people who lived in unwallled hamlets deserted them to dwell in walled towns where they could be protected from indiscriminate plundering, whether by Canaanites or by robbers who multiply in periods of anarchy like this.

8. *Chose new gods.* This statement seems to have been included to explain the reason why the Israelites had been reduced to this state.

Then was war. The Hebrews were given no peace. The Canaanites began to attack the Israelite walled towns, hemming in the people. Evidently the Canaanites, like the Philistines later, had proscribed the trade of the smith and all armament making among the Hebrews, so that there was hardly an effective shield or spear among 40,000 men of military age. This policy effectively eliminated any danger of retaliation by the Hebrews.

9. *Governors.* After depicting the troubles of Israel the poet turns in vs. 9 to 11 to ask various categories of Hebrew citizens to give thanks for those who had helped to put an end to their Canaanite overlords. First of these were the "governors" or, literally, the "lawgivers" or "law enforcers." These were princes like Barak who risked their lives for Israel's victory. They were men in the government of Israel whose duty it was to stand for law and national order, and on this occasion they showed themselves to be worthy of their trust. Deborah could well call upon the people to thank God for the part such men had played in the defeat of their enemies, the Canaanites.

There are many faithful leaders in the churches of today, both lay and clergy, who have given the best years of their lives fully and willingly for the sake of the well-being of the church. Such men deserve the appreciation of the church and of society. We may well bless God for them and their labors, as Deborah did for the leaders who helped to fire with zeal the uprising against the Canaanites.

10. *Ye that ride.* Men of wealth and influence, as indicated by the mounts—choice animals that only such a class could afford. In other words, let the wealthy, those that sit on rich tapestries (this rendering is a suggested alternative for "ye that sit in judgment"), and those that now can travel along the once unfrequented highways, meditate upon and speak of the marvelous victory God wrought for His people upon this memorable occasion.

11. *Rehearse.* Those who lived now under conditions of peace were to pause amid their tranquil surroundings to rehearse this narrative and to give thanks to God for His assistance in defeating the enemy and restoring peace to Israel. The people could now move about unafraid, carrying on the pursuits of everyday life. However, they should

remember that their state of peace was due to the righteous acts of God, whose power aided the brave Israelite leaders to throw off the bondage and oppression of the Canaanites.

12. *Awake.* In poetic terms the call is given to Deborah to rouse herself and summon the tribes.

Utter a song. Not the song of praise for victory but a war song to stir up the tribes and fire them for battle.

Arise, Barak. As the recognized military leader of the Hebrews, Barak is addressed and urged to launch out on a campaign that would result in the captors' being captured.

14. *Ephraim.* Formerly only the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun were named as rallying behind Barak (ch. 4:10). Here it is shown that there were contingents from Ephraim in the central highlands and from Benjamin still farther to the south as well.

Machir. Son of Manasseh (Gen. 50:23). Head of the chief family of the tribe. The family received its inheritance in Gilead, to the east of Jordan. Here, however, the name is thought to be used poetically for the whole tribe of Manasseh (see also Num. 32:40; Deut. 3:15).

Pen of the writer. Literally, "the staff of the scribe." Thought to refer to the insignia of the officer whose duty it was to muster the troops, keeping the count of how many men reported from each place.

15. *Issachar.* Another participant tribe. However, not all the tribes rallied to Deborah and Barak when they issued the call to battle. Some tribes had refused outright to join in the battle, and others hesitated and pondered until the battle was over.

For the divisions. Better, "among the divisions [clans]."

Great thoughts. What probably happened when the summons to battle reached the various clans of the tribe of Reuben, living not so far away across the Jordan River, was a hurried discussion about what to do. Each clan kept sounding out the others to discover their sentiments as to whether the tribe should go to battle or not. Around the folds of their flocks they talked and talked. They reflected on the necessity and feasibility of acting till the time for it was past. They were apparently still hesitating and discussing what they should do when the news of the victory reached them.

17. *Gilead.* The country across the Jordan east and south of the Sea of Galilee. Here spoken of as if it were one of the tribes. The writer apparently used the word "Gilead" in place of Gad, the tribe that inhabited a part of this territory.

Remain in ships. Evidently the migration of the Danites to the north, recorded in Judges 18, had taken place prior to the time of Deborah. The phrase suggests a degree of amalgamation with the seagoing Phoenicians, or, at least, association with them to the degree that the Danites lost their interest in the efforts of their Israelite brethren to regain independence.

Asher continued. Asher, apparently, was also experiencing absorption by the Canaanites and seafaring Phoenicians of Tyre and Sidon to such an extent that they did not feel inclined to join in the Hebrew revolt. Union with the world, breathing its spirit and aims, takes away the desire of many Christians to join in the warfare against the hosts of darkness. While their brethren engage actively in Christian missionary endeavor, they sit back unmoved and uninterested.

In his breaches. Literally, "in his landing places." The phrase has been explained as describing the appearance of the boat piers and the spaces or "breaches between them."

18. High places. These words probably refer to small elevations, or hillocks, on which the hosts of Sisera endeavored to regroup and defend their lines. The men of Zebulun and Naphtali, who, as observed from ch. 4:10, formed the main body of the Israelites, evidently carried these centers of resistance by storm, and thus brought about the complete rout of Sisera's formidable army.

19. Kings of Canaan. Sisera's army may possibly have included kings of the neighboring fortified Canaanite cities like Taanach and Megiddo, two cities on the southern bank of the river; but the daring attacks of the men of Zebulun and Naphtali apparently overran these strongholds in the confusion of battle.

No gain. In the place of receiving rich war booty as a result of joining Sisera's campaign, these kings lost both their cities and their lives.

20. Stars. That is, the forces of nature, either literally or poetically as representing the power of God, who controls the forces of nature.

21. Swept them away. See on ch. 4:15.

Trodden down. The verb may also be translated as an imperative, making the sentence read, "Tread down, O my soul, strength [that is, the mighty]." Deborah seems to imagine herself as present on the battlefield, and with these words encourages herself to press on with courage until victory is assured.

22. Horsehoofs broken. The terror and confusion of the rout evidently caused the horses to stampede wildly over the plain, breaking their unshod hoofs and thereby rendering the horses lame and useless.

23. Meroz. Not identified with any certainty, but apparently near the scene of the battle. In sharp contrast to the patriotic and brave men from the other tribes who dared to oppose the Canaanites, the Israelite inhabitants of Meroz, on the path of the retreating hosts of Sisera, refused to render assistance in any form. With the aid of these men the pursuing Israelites could probably have prevented any of the Canaanites, perhaps even Sisera, from escaping the field of battle. Because of their refusal to help, the angel of the Lord pronounced a curse upon them. Theirs was not a sin of commission but of omission. Their transgression in this instance was that they did nothing in the hour of need, and for this the curse of God fell upon them.

No other verse in the book of Judges constitutes so severe a warning to the members of the church today as the one that here curses those who refuse to help in time of crisis. In the face of a crying need for laborers, many professed Christians are content to follow their leisurely, selfish course, refusing to render any assistance to the church of God as it engages in battle with Satan. They say that the work of the church is to be performed by the ministers, and accept no responsibility for themselves. The curse of Meroz rests upon these unfaithful Christians unless they turn from their listless non-cooperation.

24. Blessed above women. The Hebrew word here translated "blessed" is often used in the sense of "to praise," "to speak highly of," "to celebrate." In contrast with the refusal of the inhabitants of Meroz to help their kindred is Jael, a woman who was not racially connected with the Israelites, who was, in fact, politically allied with their enemies.

Women in the tent. That is, Jael would be the most prominent of all Bedouin women.

25. Lordly dish. A bowl appropriate for men of rank, perhaps one of the exquisite bowls from Crete.

26. With the hammer. By combining this poetic account of Jael's act with the literal account of ch. 4:21 the following picture emerges. While Sisera was fast asleep Jael approached quietly and struck him a terrific blow with the hammer, thus crushing his head. Though mortally wounded he struggled partly to his feet. Then, according to ch. 5:27, he went down on his knees (Heb. *kara'*, "to bow down upon the knees"), and lay there slaughtered (literally, "treated with violence"). Then it was that Jael drove the tent peg through his temples, fastening him to the ground. Yet it is difficult to know how literally the language of this poem should be regarded.

28. Mother of Sisera. It has been fittingly remarked that this passage of dramatic irony, describing the worry and fear of Sisera's mother, could, most likely, have been written only by a woman. Over against the delight in the deed of one woman is presented the misery of another, trying vainly to stifle the presentiment of disaster. While Sisera lies in ignominious death, in his distant capital his mother anxiously wonders what keeps him so long. Filled with worry, she stands looking out of the window down the road for the distant cloud of dust announcing the return of the commander's party. She peers and listens, but the rolling of the victorious chariots is not heard, and this strikes fear to her heart.

30. Divided the prey. To quiet the forebodings of his mother the wise ladies in waiting gave assurances. The mother also sought to reassure herself and them with the thought that their army was delayed in gathering the booty. They picture to themselves the fine garments, the embroidered cloth, the captive maidens, with the distribution of which their men are occupied and so are delayed in their return home. The irony of the appellative "wise ladies" is obvious, for their conjecture was far from the truth. The author of the poem dramatically does not describe the disappointment of the proud women, but leaves the reader, who knows the narrative, to imagine the scene when the message of Sisera's defeat arrives—no booty, no victory; the hero is dead, the army is shattered. All is lost. No more fearful picture of the utter defeat of an enemy could be given.

31. So let all. The striking word in this passage is "so." It brings the whole drama before our eyes again—the proud confidence of the Canaanites, the terrific onslaught of the Hebrews, the terror of the rout, the fleeing Sisera, his death at the hand of a woman, the anxiety of his mother. The song ends with the expressed desire that with like finality all the enemies of God may perish—as indeed they will eventually.

The fearful slaughter of the enemy described in this chapter must be understood in the light of the age in which the events occurred. For a further consideration of the problem see on Deut. 14:26.

As the sun. The glorious picture here presented of those who love and serve the Lord is reflected by the prophets Isaiah (ch. 60:1), Daniel (ch. 12:3), and Malachi (ch. 4:2; cf. GC 632). Christ Himself used similar language to describe those who become citizens of the kingdom (Matt. 13:43). John saw an angel ascending from the east, like the sun, with the seal of God to affix upon those prepared to receive it (Rev. 7:2, 3). Those sealed by this angel "appeared as if the sun had just risen from behind a cloud and shone upon their countenances, causing them to look triumphant, as if their victories were nearly won" (EW 89).

Land had rest. How fitting it would have been if the people, in this period of rest, had walked in the ways of the Lord. There is a lesson for the church of God today. In this

time of comparative peace, we are challenged to live up to the light of present truth, and thereby hasten the finishing of God's work and the consummation of the glorious destiny of the remnant people.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

- 23 CE 70; CH 529; ChS 36; CS 49; CT 210; Ev 112, 237, 397; 2T 166, 216, 217, 247, 284, 395, 427, 626; 3T 57, 525; 5T 77, 381; 6T 40, 461, 464, 475; 7T 237; 8T 41, 80, 246; 9T 133, 140; WM 139

CHAPTER 6

- 1 *The Israelites for their sin are oppressed by Midian. 8 A prophet rebuketh them. 11 An angel sendeth Gideon for their deliverance. 17 Gideon's present is consumed with fire. 25 Gideon destroyeth Baal's altar, and offereth a sacrifice upon the altar Jehovah-shalom. 28 Joash defendeth his son, and calleth him Jerubbaal. 33 Gideon's army. 36 Gideon's signs.*

1. Midian. The Midianites were a nomadic people who ranged from the southern part of the peninsula of Sinai (Ex. 3:1) northward to the Gulf of Aqabah (1 Kings 11:18) and as far as the plains east of Moab (Gen. 36:35; Num. 22:4; 25:1, 6; Joshua 13:21). They were kinsmen of the Hebrews inasmuch as Midian was a son of Abraham by his second wife, Keturah (Gen. 25:1–6). The father of Moses' wife was called the priest of Midian (Ex. 2:15–21).

So strong were the influences of their heathen neighbors, and so weak were their own religious convictions, that the Israelites soon forgot God's wonderful intervention in their behalf on Mt. Tabor and turned to their former evil ways. In a further effort to awaken the people to their sin, the Lord again allowed their territory to be overrun, this time by the Midianites.

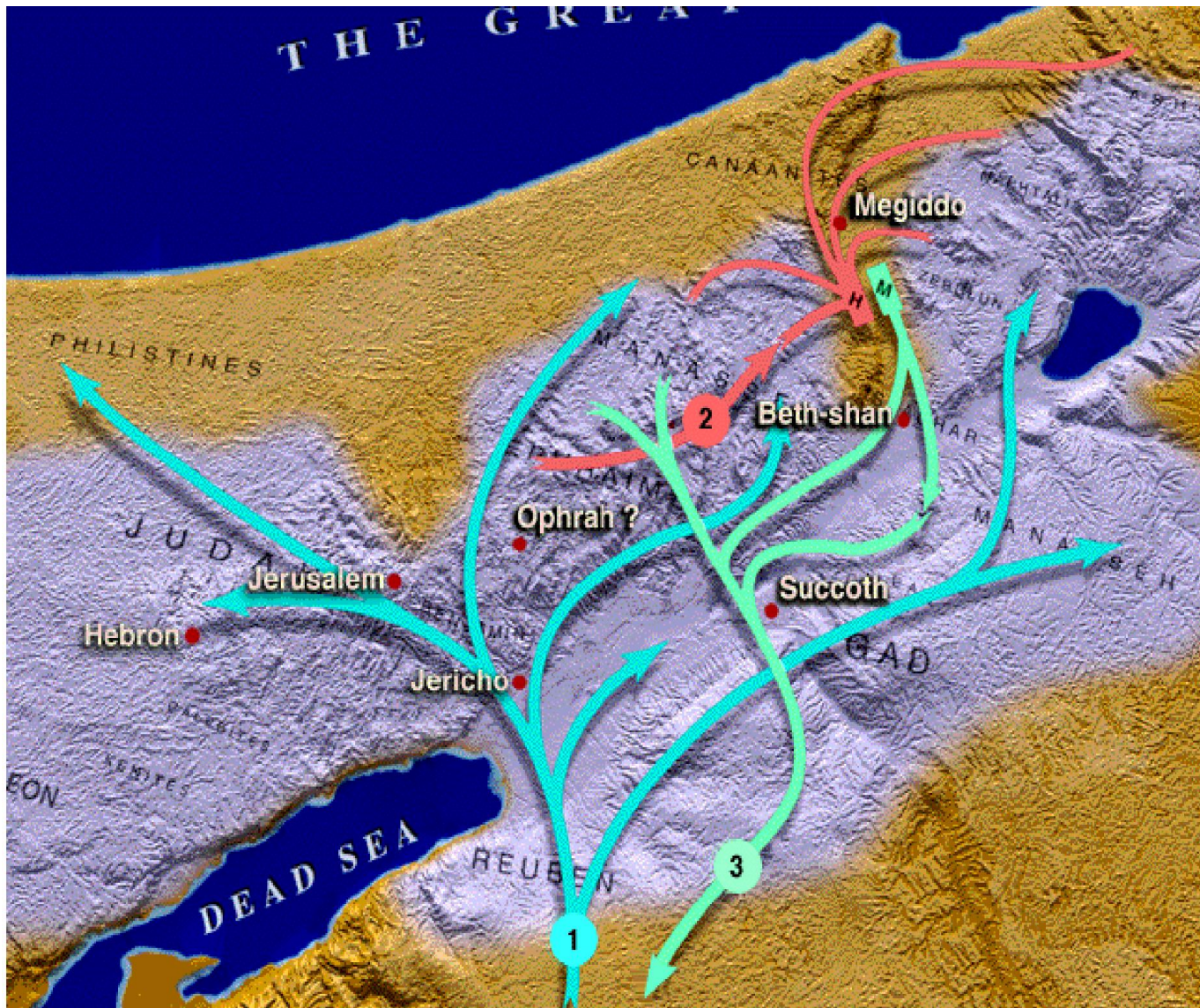
2. Dens. for self-preservation the Hebrews left their homes and lived in mountain hide-outs and caves.

3. When Israel had sown. Inasmuch as the Midianites were nomadic tribes, they did not conquer the land and settle down permanently. Like the Bedouins today, they preferred that the settled peoples should do the work of sowing. Then in a series of raids they would sweep over the land, confiscating the crops and driving off all the farm animals they could find. According to custom, they left the houses undestroyed in order that the farmers would be tempted to return and sow the fields once more.

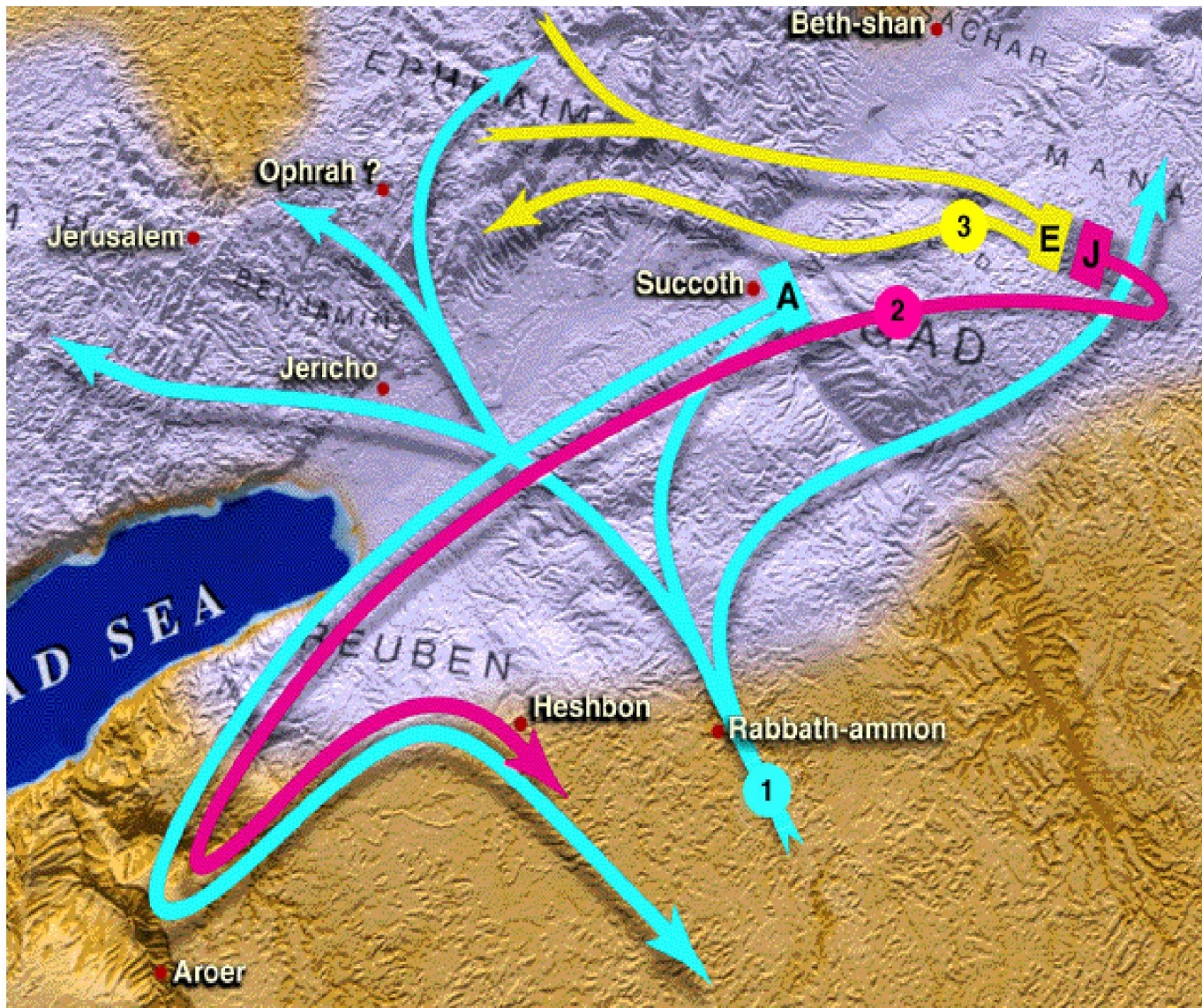
Servitude Under Midian (Judges 6–8)

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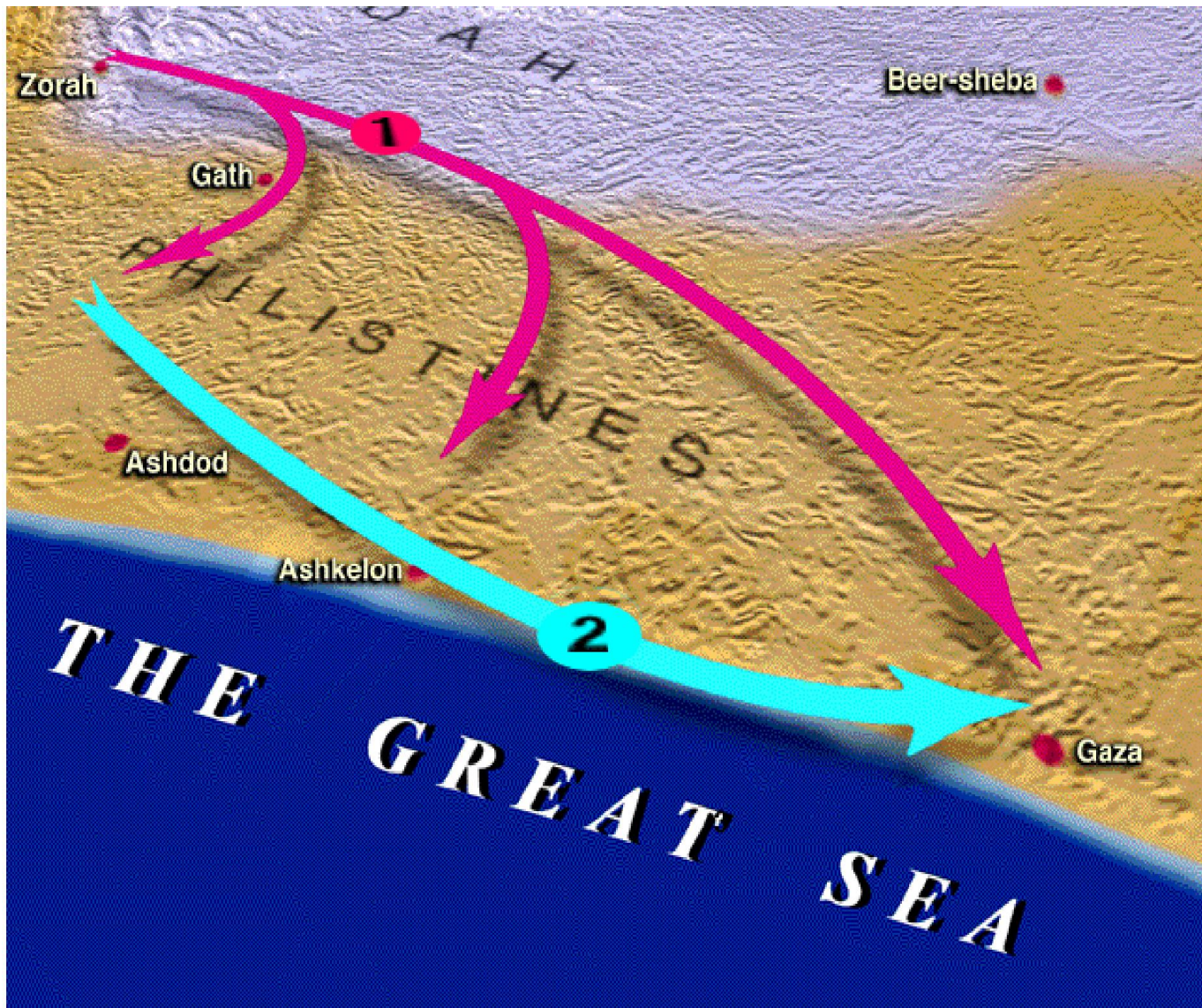
⁵Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Jdg 3:20). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



Servitude Under Ammon (Judges 11, 12)



Samson Under Philistine Servitude (Judges 13–16)



Amalekites. Also nomadic peoples of the deserts south of Palestine (Ex. 17:8).

Children of the east. Literally, “the children of Kedem.” “Kedem” means “east,” but here, apparently, it should be considered a proper name designating the great Syrian Desert to the east of Moab and Ammon. Chapter 8:26 pictures the chiefs of the people of this region in gorgeous robes and golden earrings, mounted on dromedaries and camels, the necks of which were hung with moonshaped ornaments of gold. Inasmuch as the incursions described here were made by quite a number of different tribes, it is thought likely that this was a general movement of nomads caused by a lack of rain in their own districts.

4. Unto Gaza. The route of the plunderers was probably the following: after crossing the Jordan at the fords of Beth-shan at harvesttime these marauding bands would devastate the rich plain of Jezreel and the whole Shephelah as far south as Gaza, which, being a walled town (ch. 16:3), stopped them.

5. As grasshoppers. A pertinent comparison, for the marauders swiftly swept over the land, leaving it stripped and bare (see on Ex. 10:4–15).

6. Cried unto the Lord. After losing their harvest for seven successive years, the Israelites were on the verge of starvation. In this desperate plight they remembered God's help in decades past and called upon Him for assistance. Although they had grievously neglected God and refused to call upon Him until driven to do so by extremity, God still heard their cries. This shows how ready God is to forgive and how inclined He is to hear prayer. Such mercy on God's part should be a great encouragement for sinners to repent and turn to Him.

In all these circumstances the distinction should be borne in mind between God's dealings with the nation of Israel and His relationship to the individual Israelite. National calamity and judgment did not mean the rejection of the individuals comprising the nation. The guilt that brought the disaster rested upon the individual Israelite only in so far as he personally had been a participant in the apostasy. Despite national rejection, the door of mercy stood as wide open for personal salvation as before. Many, no doubt, found their God during these perilous times, and their individual acceptance was in nowise dependent upon the restoration of the nation to divine favor. In other words, the relationship of a nation to God is a matter quite distinct from the personal relationship of the individual citizen to his God, except in so far as God's attitude toward the nation may be determined by the number of individuals in the nation who are seeking to follow out the divine program.

8. A prophet. Whether this prophet spoke to the people when they were assembled at some great religious festival, or traveled from town to town and village to village, we do not know. His message must have met a favorable response, for soon afterward God sent deliverance. His message chided the people for their ingratitude to God, who had done so much for them. However, there is encouragement in God's chidings. They are far better than silence. They remind the recipient that God is still thinking about him, and suggest that His reproofs are designed to bring men back to Him, not to drive them away.

10. Amorites. See on ch. 1:34 (see Joshua 24:15; 1 Kings 21:26).

11. Under an oak. Literally, "under the terebinth." The Hebrew word used here designates the terebinth, or turpentine tree, which resembles the oak when leafless, except that it grows singly and not in clusters. This terebinth was the property, we are told, of Gideon's father.

Ophrah. Although the exact site of this city is unknown, it seems, from the narrative of ch. 9, that it must have been in the vicinity of Shechem. It belonged to the clan of Abiezerites (ch. 6:24), who were of the tribe of Manasseh (Joshua 17:2).

By the winepress. The usual location of threshing floors was in the open fields. But such locations were too vulnerable to attack (1 Sam. 23:1). To avoid detection, Gideon resorted to a wine press, a vat dug out of the ground, hoping that the wandering groups of Midianites would not search in such an unlikely place. Working thus in the wine press, he would be able to thresh only a little at a time.

Mighty man of valour. These words may suggest that Gideon had already distinguished himself by bravery in war. In the statement of ch. 8:18 there is a hint of some earlier clash with the Midianites on Mt. Tabor. Gideon, at this time, was probably nearing middle age, inasmuch as he had a son in his teens (ch. 8:20). He may also have been a man of means as indicated by the fact that he had many servants and even a

personal attendant, or armorbearer (ch. 7:10). But the fact that he may have been a person of means and reputation did not make him feel that the performance of the menial tasks of a farmer was beneath him. It is worthy of note that when God appears to men to call them to a task, or to give them a message from heaven, He generally calls on those who are busy, perhaps with their common everyday tasks, such as the apostles at fishing, or the shepherds keeping their flocks. A person employed in honest business is more likely to receive heavenly visitors than one who spends his time in idleness, for God cannot use lazy men in His cause.

13. *All this befallen us.* Gideon was not only a man of valor and means but a thinking man. It is apparent that he had been reflecting on the inability of the Israelites to defend their country, and trying to formulate plans to drive the invaders out. No doubt that is why the heavenly messenger chose to open the conversation with the words, "The Lord is with thee," as if to say, "God is with you in your brave projects, Gideon." "If God is with us," Gideon asks ironically, "why am I forced to beat out a little wheat in a wine press, when I should be threshing an abundant harvest in the fields?"

Where be all his miracles? The Exodus from Egypt was always the glorious starting point in a recital of God's mighty works in behalf of the Israelites. "At that time," Gideon says, "God was with us, but apparently He is not now, or the same miracles would be wrought to help us." Gideon recognized that the sins of the people had caused God's presence to leave the nation, but his faith did not seem to grasp the truth that when the people cry out to God, He gladly returns to help them.

It was difficult for Gideon to reconcile painful circumstances with the messenger's statement of God's presence. His faith was weak. He wanted to see miracles without launching out by faith. The angel tried to build up his faith by assurances of God's presence. Similarly today many give a false interpretation to events in their lives. "The Lord hath forsaken us," Gideon declared, "and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites." The fact is that neither of these statements was entirely true. God had not forsaken His people, but they had forsaken Him. Furthermore, Israel's own weakness, resulting from their willful departure from the source of their strength, had delivered them into the hands of the Midianites. It is true that God did not work a miracle to keep the Midianites away, but God is limited in the extent to which He can interfere in the affairs of men. He never coerces the will, and when men choose a course contrary to His plan, He does not prevent the natural consequences of such a course. Men have no right in such circumstances to blame God for not intervening in their behalf. On the other hand, when men choose to work with God, He is again able to work in their behalf and accomplish great things for them.

14. *This thy might.* That is, use the might now being expended in threshing wheat, the abilities exercised in eluding the Midianites, yea, the sum total of your human abilities, for the noble task of delivering your people. God will be with you, and supply the enabling power.

15. *Poor.* The word may also be translated "weak" or "small." These meanings seem to fit the context better (see on v. 12). Literally, then, the passage may read, "my family is the weak one," that is, of all the families of the tribe. Repeatedly we find a similar humility and diffidence in those whom God calls to His service (see Ex. 4:10; Jer. 1:6).

The least. Gideon probably meant that he was the youngest son in the family, and doubted that it would be prudent for him to assume leadership in the expedition above older brothers or others.

16. As one man. Gideon was to destroy the Midianites by one powerful encounter, just as effectually as if the enemy were only one person.

17. Shew me a sign. It seems from v. 22 that Gideon may not have been fully convinced that his visitor was a heavenly being. His request, then, was for a miracle to demonstrate that the messenger had power and authority sufficient to back up his assertion that the Midianites could be destroyed.

Present. The word may mean either “offering” “present.” It is used in the latter sense in ch. 3:15, 17, although its more common use is for an offering made to God. Gideon may have purposely intended to be vague. He may have used this ambiguous word, suspecting, but not yet convinced, that the stranger under the terebinth was more than human. If his visitor were merely a man, he would eat the food provided; if he were a heavenly being, he would accept it as a sacrificial offering and not as food.

A kid. In v. 6 it was stated that all Israel was impoverished by the Midianite incursions. The fact that Gideon provided his guest with a roasted kid, and cakes made from more than half of a bushel (our equivalent of an ephah) of flour shows that he sensed the importance of his visitor, and from his scant store he wished to provide a bountiful meal. The cakes were unleavened because they could be made quickly. Even at that, an hour or two may have been required for this preparation.

20. Upon this rock. The rock served as a temporary altar.

22. Have seen an angel. The miracle immediately dispelled Gideon’s doubt, and he recognized that his visitor was a heavenly messenger. Now fear and consternation swept over him. He probably remembered the words of God to Moses, “There shall no man see me, and live” (Ex. 33:20), and feared that death would be the result of looking on the divine being (see Judges 13:22; Gen. 32:30; Deut. 5:24; Heb. 12:29).

24. Jehovah-shalom. To commemorate God’s words of favor to him, Gideon built that night an altar which he named “the Lord is peace,” or “the Lord spoke peace.” The name was an allusion to the words of an angel in v. 23. The altar was intended not alone for the purpose of sacrifice but also to memorialize the divine appearance (see Gen. 33:20; Gen. 35:7; Ex. 17:15). The building of the altar is described in vs. 25–27.

Yet in Ophrah. When the author wrote the book of Judges several centuries later, the altar was still standing to witness to the fact that the Lord speaks peace to those who love and serve Him.

25. Said unto him. We are not told by what means God spoke to Gideon, but Gideon recognized the divine voice. No doubt up till this moment he had been pondering what course to pursue.

Grove. Heb. *’asherah*, a sacred pole set up beside the altar (see on ch. 3:7). First, Baal’s altars must be destroyed. God would not honor a sacrifice to Himself until the idols were overthrown. So it is today. Every idol must be removed from the heart if we would claim God’s blessing today.

26. Build an altar. The following statement gives the reason why God could issue a command contrary to His previous solemn charge (Lev. 17:8, 9): “The offering of sacrifice to God had been committed to the priests, and had been restricted to the altar at

Shiloh; but He who had established the ritual service, and to whom all its offerings pointed, had power to change its requirements” (PP 547).

Ordered place. Perhaps better as in the margin, “orderly manner.”

27. By night. Gideon was as prudent as he was energetic. He chose to do this deed by night, not because he was cowardly, but because he feared he would not be able to complete the task if he essayed to do it by day. During the daylight hours an outcry and a contest would have been inevitable. This would terrify the undecided. An accomplished fact makes an impression and gives courage. His task was not only to tear down Baal’s altar, which may have been massive, but to erect on the rock where the sacrifice had been consumed an ordered, dignified altar to the Lord. This task may have taken most of the night.

Although Gideon was cautious, he did not allow prudence to deter him from doing the will of God even though he knew the consequences might be disastrous to himself. In this respect Gideon put to shame many in our day who allow the fear of man to deter them from doing bold exploits for God.

29. Who hath done this thing? We do not know who betrayed his secret. Suspicion might naturally fall upon Gideon, whose tendencies toward the true worship of God may have been well known.

30. He may die. It is difficult to understand how Israelites could become so attached to Baal worship that they were willing to execute a fellow Israelite who courageously destroyed the altar of Baal and built an altar of the Lord in its place. The altar of Baal belonged to Gideon’s father (v. 25), yet the men of the village felt entitled to sit in judgment on the insult offered to this heathen deity. They demanded that the father himself deliver up Gideon to them so they could slay him without incurring a deadly feud.

31. Will ye plead for Baal? Gideon’s father, who had been told of the angel’s visit (PP 547), had been inspired with courage by his son’s daring act. Now he fearlessly took Gideon’s part. “If Baal is indeed a deity, he can take care of himself,” he reasoned with the angry mob. “Why do you poor villagers have to take Baal’s part? You have worshiped him as the Lord of heaven. Is he not able to take care of himself? By taking his part you would indicate that Baal has no power of himself; so by your own reasoning you are the ones that should be put to death. As for my son who destroyed Baal’s altar, grant Baal a little time for an opportunity to avenge himself.” With this reasoning Gideon’s father persuaded the men to wait and see what Baal would do. He knew that in popular outbreaks like this the intense feeling would die down and the opposition vanish if a little time could be gained. He was probably fully convinced that Baal was powerless to harm his son. His stratagem worked. Popular feeling, which is so changeable, soon swung to the side of Gideon, and he was justified and accepted as a leader in Manasseh.

32. Jerubbaal. Literally, “let Baal fight,” or, “let Baal be an adversary” (see ch. 7:1). The name was a standing rebuke and challenge to Baal worship, for Gideon’s continued life and prosperity was a daily witness to the impotence of the heathen deity to avenge himself. It showed that fear of Baal was groundless. A later writer calls him Jerubbesheth, literally, “let shame contend” (2 Sam. 11:21).

33. All the Midianites. They and the other desert tribes “went over,” that is, the Jordan, perhaps for their usual annual raid to steal the wheat that thousands besides Gideon were doubtless threshing in secret places as soon as it was barely ripe, but

probably also because news of an uprising headed by Gideon had reached their ears. Crossing the Jordan at the fords near Bethshan, they encamped, not in the wide plain west of Jezreel, but in the valley east of Jezreel leading from the Jordan between Mt. Gilboa and the Hill of Moreh up to the broad, fertile plain of Esdraelon. This valley and the broad plain into which it leads divide the central highlands of Palestine from the hills of Galilee.

34. *Came upon.* Literally, “clothed.” Gideon did not begin the campaign “clothed” only in the armor of soldiers, but “clothed” with God’s power. Whom God calls to do His work He also qualifies for it.

Blew a trumpet. Since destroying the altar of Baal, Gideon had, no doubt, been pondering the instructions of the angel to smite the Midianites. Now that the enemies of Israel had entered the country, the Spirit of the Lord moved upon Gideon’s heart to begin the struggle to deliver his people. Taking a *shophar*, or ram’s horn, he sounded the battle signal, and sent messengers throughout his tribe of Manasseh and three other tribes, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, urging them all to join him in the fight against the common enemy. Strong forces from all of these tribes assembled; and Gideon’s own clan, the Abiezerites, backed him to the full.

36. *If thou wilt save.* Gideon recognized that by human strength alone the Israelites would be unable to repel the large host of marauders. He had already demonstrated his faith by calling the Israelites to battle, but now he needed fresh encouragement. One can hardly censure Gideon for desiring reassurance, and yet he had the word of the heavenly messenger, and that attested by a miracle. A mature faith would not have asked for another sign. The experience of the Roman centurion stands over against this experience of Gideon. This heathen soldier asked for no miracle on which to rest his faith. Concerning him, Jesus declared, “I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel” (Luke 7:9). If Gideon had possessed such an experience, he would not have asked for an additional sign after having received convincing evidence in the fire that sprang from the rock. However, God makes use of the best instruments available, and when those who are weak in faith ask for a sign He often honors the request. However, as faith develops, God expects men to take Him at His word and depend less and less upon confirmatory signs. Many have spoiled their religious experience by persistently following chance methods of guidance (see on Joshua 7:14).

39. *Let me prove.* The first sign that Gideon asked was granted. The fleece gathered water, and the ground around it was dry. After thinking it over, Gideon felt that this was, after all, what one would expect, since wool naturally draws water. Hence it might not be a sign at all. He may thus have felt as uncertain as before.

Gideon’s experience is frequently reproduced today. There are some who are continually deciding great issues, not on the basis of the teaching of the Bible or of what is logical and reasonable, but on the basis of signs that they themselves set up. Often the sign asked for may be explainable as a coincidence, rather than as an undeniable miracle. Then men begin to doubt. This was the case with Gideon. He feared that this might be so in his case, so he asked that the sign might be reversed. Recognizing Gideon’s limited faith, the Lord condescended to work a miracle to give him the sign for which he asked. How much better it would have been if Gideon had confidently done what God had asked him to do without hesitation.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–40PP 545–548
1 PP 545
2–13PP 546
11–16GW 333
12 PP 555
14, 17–21PP 547
22, 23 1T 410
25–31PP 547
33–40PP 548

CHAPTER 7

1 *Gideon's army of two and thirty thousand is brought to three hundred. 9 He is encouraged by the dream and interpretation of the barley cake. 16 His stratagem of trumpets and lambs in pitchers. 24 The Ephraimites take Oreb and Zeeb.*

1. Well of Harod. This abundant spring, under another name, still issues from a cave at the foot of a hill along the edge of Mt. Gilboa. A small stream flows from it toward the east. The same fountain is probably alluded to in 1 Sam. 29:1 Harod means “trembling,” and the well may have received its name from the panic and trembling that seized the Midianites when Gideon attacked.

Hill of Moreh. On the opposite side of the valley approximately 4 mi. away. On the north side of this hill was the cave of Endor, where Saul visited the witch. The line of battle was, therefore, the same as at the time Saul and the Hebrews faced the Philistines before that eventful battle of Gilboa many years later (1 Sam. 31).

2. Too many. Gideon had 32,000 men (v. 3), the Midianites, 135,000 (ch. 8:10). Gideon's faith must have been severely tested when the Lord told him that those who were with him were too many.

3. Proclaim. The proclamation was a part of the announcement Moses had commanded to be made (Deut. 20:5–9), prior to a battle inviting the fearful to leave the ranks lest their desertion in the midst of battle cause others to flee also. Because his army was so small in comparison with that of the Midianites, Gideon had refrained from making the usual proclamation (PP 549). Many of the men had enlisted because of the stirring appeals of Gideon, but in their hearts they were fearful and unbelieving. Lest they flee when the battle began, or take the glory of victory to themselves, the Lord asked that they be sent back. The two thirds who left constitute a sad commentary on the extent to which idolatry had destroyed Israel's faith in God.

Gilead. Some have taken this to be a misreading of Gilboa, because Gilead was on the east side of Jordan, far from the scene of this battle. However, there may have been a mountain by this name abutting the Valley of Jezreel. A suggestion of the name may be found in the name of a stream in this area, now known as *Nahr el-Jālūd*.

5. Lappeth of the water. The people, having been led to the brook, evidently expected to cross immediately and advance to the camp of the enemy some distance on the opposite side. A few were eager to begin the engagement, and as they crossed the brook they merely scooped up a little water in their hands and immediately passed forward. Others, fearful of the impending battle and with but little hope in victory, saw here an excuse for tarrying. They knelt down and leisurely drank their fill. Those who hurriedly took a little water in their hand, and sucked it up as they pressed forward toward the camp of the enemy, numbered only 300. With these the Lord promised to bring about the defeat

of the Midianites. The sifting had served to remove those who were tainted with idolatry, and to single out those who were men of courage and faith—men whose confidence in God had not been vitiated by idolatrous worship and practices. They had the faith to believe that with God on their side success could be theirs even though their number was small. As Jonathan later reminded his armor-bearer, their number was of small moment in God's sight (see 1 Sam. 14:6).

9. *The same night.* Perhaps the test at the brookside took place at evening, and the bulk of the Israelite forces departed for their homes under cover of darkness. At any rate, the Midianites did not seem to know that the major part of the Israelite force had gone away.

10. *If thou fear.* God was willing to give added reassurance. Because Gideon was afraid to attack, the Lord offered to give him a sign of encouragement if he would stealthily approach the Midianite camp and listen to what the Midianite soldiers were talking about.

11. *The outside.* That is, to the outposts, or sentries. The Midianite camp probably included women and children. Around the outskirts of the camp the armed men would naturally be posted.

12. *Lay along.* The valley here was not very wide; consequently, the multitude of people which made up the camp were spread out in a long thin line stretching up and down the valley perhaps for several miles. The narrowness of their campground may have made their number appear even larger than it was, like "the sand by the sea side for multitude."

13. *That told a dream.* Inasmuch as Midian was a son of Abraham, these people no doubt spoke a language similar to that of the Hebrews. In any event, God enabled Gideon to understand both the dream and its interpretation. Thus he was inspired with confidence to fulfill the commission entrusted to his care.

A cake. Heb. *salil*, a word found only here in the Bible. The exact meaning is not certain, but the word seems to come from a verb that means "to bake," although others equate it with a similar verb that means "to be round," or "to roll." Barley bread was the food of the very poor. This may be a veiled reference to the Israelites who were impoverished from the seven consecutive years of Midianite oppression.

A tent. Literally, "the tent." Either representing the main tent of the encampment in which the leading general or king lived, or perhaps the tent in which the two men were, or symbolic of the whole encampment.

15. *Worshipped.* Heb. *shachah*, "to bow down," "to prostrate," "to pay adoration." At the recognition of so signal an evidence of the divine presence in his undertaking, Gideon responded as it is proper to do on all such occasions—he worshiped. No doubt his prayer expressed freely the thankfulness of his heart. So often those who are especially blessed of God forget to return the gratitude due Him. Gideon might have reasoned that, with the urgency of the assignment and the need for immediate action, he could properly put off until after the victory his worship of praise. But such postponements often lead to the utter neglect of praise to God.

Gideon's worship was probably also a confession of a feeling of deep unworthiness. He had already given evidence of his humility when he spoke of himself as the "least in my father's house" (ch. 6:15). Here he reaffirmed his attitude. It was this characteristic of his life that, among other attributes, peculiarly qualified him for his assignment. It is such

men that God can use in His work. With them He can entrust a large degree of success, for He knows that they will not take the glory to themselves. Pride and self-sufficiency unfit a man for the work of God.

16. Three companies. This division was to give an illusion of a large attacking force, so that when the Midianites would see the torches and hear the trumpets at different points around the camp, they would suppose that they were surrounded. The plan of attack was suggested by divine direction (PP 550).

A trumpet. Heb. *shophar*. The curved horn of a ram.

Pitchers. Cheap earthenware pots that the people of that time used for cooking and as containers.

Lamps. The word is generally used for lighted torches. When inserted within the earthenware pots, they would but smolder or burn dimly; when the pots were broken and the torches were waved in the air, they would flare with a sudden blaze. Simple, unpromising methods under the direction and blessing of God can accomplish more than the most elaborate systems men have ever devised. God is not dependent upon numbers.

19. The middle watch. It is thought that at this time the night was divided into three watches. If so, the middle watch would have begun a little before midnight. Later the Jews adopted the Roman pattern of four watches in the night.

21. They stood. Instead of attacking so great a host, the 300 Hebrews held back on the outskirts of the camp, blowing their horns and waving their torches and shouting. Their plan was to induce a panic in the Midianite camp.

22. Against his fellow. As the multitude rushed down the Valley of Jezreel to escape across the Jordan in the darkness, those in front mistook the ones following for their Hebrew enemies, and turned their weapons upon them.

Beth-shittah. Not definitely identified. It was probably situated in the lower end of the Valley of Jezreel near the Jordan River.

Zererath. Probably the same as Zartanah (1 Kings 4:12). Believed to be in the Jordan valley, at the lower end of the Valley of Jezreel.

The border. Literally, "lip," "bluff," or "cliff."

Abel-meholah. Literally, "meadow of dancing." The birthplace of Elisha (1 Kings 19:16). Some identify it with *Tell el-Hamma*, about 9 mi. (14.4 km.) south of Bethshan; others with *Tell el-Maqlûb*, 7 1/4 mi. (11.6 km.) east of the Jordan on the *Wadi Yābis*, about 22 mi. (35.4 km.) from the Sea of Galilee. *Tell el-Maqlûb* was formerly considered to be Jabeshgilead, which is now identified with *Tell Abū Kharaz* on the same *Wadi Yābis*, 2 2/3 mi. (4.3 km.) east of the Jordan River.

Tabbath. Possibly, *Râs Abū Tābât*, east of the Jordan, near Abel-meholah.

23. Men of Israel. Many of those who a few hours earlier had been sent home now rallied to assist their brethren in pursuing the fleeing enemy.

24. Gideon sent messengers. To the south of the scene of battle dwelt the tribe of Manasseh and the populous tribe of Ephraim. The latter had not been called by Gideon when he mustered the Hebrews. When the Midianite hosts began their flight, Gideon sent speedy messengers to the territory of Ephraim, urging the people there to go quickly toward the Jordan River and to get command of the fords toward which the Midianites were headed. The Ephraimites responded promptly, blocking the escape over the

southern fords. The river at the time was probably high, forcing the enemy to use a certain ford.

Beth-barah. The site of this place is unknown, but it must have been some distance down the river near Ephraimite territory for Gideon to have asked the Ephraimites to cover that route of escape. Further evidence that the Midianites turned down-river before trying to cross is shown by the fact that Gideon's pursuit of the enemy across the river took him to Succoth, a town near the Jabbok (ch. 8:5).

25. Oreb and Zeeb. Literally, "the raven and the wolf," picturesque names for desert chieftains. The quick action of the Ephraimites enabled them to cut off the escape of a large number of Midianites who were trying to cross the Jordan at the lower fords. Pursued from behind by the reassembled forces of Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh, with the Jordan on one side and the Ephraimites before them, many Midianites were forced to surrender. Among the captives were two princes, Oreb and Zeeb, who were both promptly executed. To commemorate the victory, the sites where these men were slain were named "rock of Oreb," literally, "raven's rock," and "winepress of Zeeb," literally, "wolf's wine press," names which they, apparently, still bore when the book of Judges was written many years later. "Raven's rock" was still known in Isaiah's day (Isa. 10:26).

Other side Jordan. On the eastern side, the area now called Transjordan. According to ch. 8:4, Gideon had not yet crossed over the Jordan. Therefore, some have thought that the Ephraimites captured Oreb and Zeeb after they had crossed over to the eastern side of the river, and that they then brought the captives' heads back to Gideon, who was still pursuing the Midianites in their flight from Jezreel toward the Jordan. The better explanation is that the author of Judges, having introduced the Ephraimites and their part in this battle, wished to complete his narrative concerning them and their dispute with Gideon before giving the long account of Gideon's pursuit of the Midianites to the east of Jordan. For this reason he interrupted the chronological account of the battle to tell of the jealousy of the Ephraimites and how Gideon appeased them. Then in ch. 8:4 the author resumed the thread of the battle story. Gideon's meeting with the Ephraimites would actually, then, have taken place after he returned from the total defeat of the Midianites, or at least after he crossed the Jordan.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–25PP 548–554

2, 3 PP 548

4–7PP 549

9–18PP 550

19–25PP 553

CHAPTER 8

1 *Gideon pacifieth the Ephraimites.* 4 *Succoth and Penuel refuse to relieve Gideon's army.* 10 *Zebah and Zalmunna are taken.* 13 *Succoth and Penuel are destroyed.* 18 *Gideon avengeth his brethren's death on Zebah and Zalmunna.* 22 *He refuseth government.* 24 *His ephod cause of idolatry.* 28 *Midian subdued.* 29 *Gideon's children, and death.* 33 *The israelites' idolatry and ingratitude.*

1. They did chide. Ephraim was the most populous and most important tribe of northern Palestine and was jealous of its position of leadership. The Ephraimites had rallied immediately to Gideon's call, and had proved their power and fidelity to the national cause. Yet when they met Gideon their injured ambitions and pride led them to

reproach him for not calling them before the battle began, just as much as to say that no one had a right to make a move to repel the common enemy without asking them. Their arrogance was due partly to their strength and partly to an attitude formed when Joshua, who was an Ephraimite, was the acknowledged leader of Israel. Later the tribe again assumed a dictatorial tone (ch. 12:1–7), but this time the result was a humiliating defeat for Ephraim.

It is here that one of the most important lessons of this narrative may be found. In common with the other northern tribes, Ephraim had done nothing to oppose the depredations of the Midianites. In common with the others, they were brave enough to join in the fray only after the enemy was in flight. Similarly, there are many today who criticize the one who courageously launches a laudable project. They hold back any support until it is apparent that the venture will succeed. Then they attempt to take credit to themselves to edge in on the leadership of the enterprise. Such a spirit is reprehensible.

2. *Gleaning.* The leftovers.

Vintage of Abi-ezer. Gideon did not even mention himself, but modestly referred to the 300 men of the family of Abi-ezer who were with him. By his classic figure Gideon implied that Ephraim, by a subsequent and secondary effort, had achieved more than he and his group. However, there was no lack of truth in his remark, for Ephraim had wrought a significant victory (see Isa. 10:26), even though the account of their battle is extremely brief.

Gideon's qualities of leadership and self-control enabled him to deal effectively with the envious Ephraimites. His courtesy and diplomacy enabled him to appease their wrath and extricate himself from a difficult situation.

4. *Came to Jordan.* The account of Gideon's pursuit is resumed from ch. 7:24. As the Midianites fled, they split up into groups, one of which had been intercepted by the Ephraimites and destroyed; others succeeded in crossing the Jordan into the hills of Gilead.

Faint, yet pursuing. Even though Gideon and his men were tired and hungry from their exertions in fighting the rear guards of the Midianites, they did not pause at the Jordan but immediately crossed it and continued to follow the enemy. They had already done much, but they were willing to do more. Similarly, our spiritual warfare demands persistent effort. At no point in the struggle is it safe to relax our efforts through weariness. Many a victory has been won by Christians who were "faint, yet pursuing."

5. *Succoth.* Literally, "booths." This city of the tribe of Gad was situated along the Jabbok River, where the hills begin to rise not far from the place where the Jabbok flows into the Jordan. The city received its name from the booths Jacob erected there at the end of his long journey homeward from Padan-aram (Gen. 33:17).

Loaves. Literally, "rounds," or "circles," of bread. These were the round, flat cakes frequently mentioned in the Bible. Gideon's request was just and reasonable. He was performing a service for all Israel, and in an hour of need he could legitimately expect his brethren to supply food for his hungry men.

In like manner those who fight the spiritual battles of the church are deserving of the support of their brethren, and it is shameless unthankfulness to deny it. God's instruction to ancient Israel was, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn" (Deut. 25:4). Paul, in his spiritual application of this statement, applies the injunction to the obligation to support those who labor in the gospel ministry (1 Cor. 9:9).

Zebah and Zalmunna. There is probably an intended pun in these names. Zebah means “sacrifice” or “sacrificial victim.” Zalmunna may mean “[the god] Zelem rules,” or “protection is withheld.”

6. Princes of Succoth. For the office and function of these princes see on v. 14. In refusing to supply food for Gideon’s men, these leaders were guilty of both cowardice and of taunting brethren. They had seen the 15,000 Midianites pass by, and they probably reasoned, “How can so few men avail against so large a number? We will incur only disgrace and punishment at the hands of the Midianites for aiding their pursuers.” So instead of exhibiting compassion and patriotic sympathy, they displayed extreme selfishness in consulting only their own petty interests. They exemplified a materialism that serves a foreign tyrant rather than risk a loss. Besides, their miserly spirit may have begrudged the cost of feeding these 300 men.

7. Tear your flesh. Gideon answered the jeers of the princes with a threat. He had known how to appease the Ephraimites, but they had done something to help the cause. He regarded the leaders of Succoth as traitors, and threatened a fitting recompense.

8. Penuel. Literally, “face of God.” The place where Jacob wrestled with the angel (Gen 32:22, 30). It was near a ford of the Jabbok River, probably several miles upstream from Succoth.

9. In peace. That is, unharmed, having achieved success and victory.

This tower. Probably a tower used as a fortification and a place of refuge in times of danger. Within its walls, likely constructed of stone, the leaders of Penuel felt secure from the Midianites and Gideon alike, so they contemptuously refused to give aid to the Israelite band. Because of their refusal to aid his men, Gideon threatened to return and tear down the tower from which they now so confidently and so churlishly rejected his appeal.

10. Karkor. The location of this place is not known. It was probably in the somewhat inaccessible region of the volcanic rock on the edge of the Syrian Desert.

11. By the way of them. Instead of following the route the Midianites had gone, Gideon and his group approached their camp by a circuitous route through a region settled sparsely with nomadic Bedouins. By this wide circuit he was enabled to fall upon them unawares from a direction from which they did not expect attack.

Nobah. The exact location of this town is unknown. Some identify this Nobah with the town of the same name mentioned in Num. 32:42 as a city of Manasseh.

Jogbehah. A city of Gad (Num. 32:35) regarded as the ruin now called *Jubeihât*, 6 1/2 mi. (10.4 km.) northwest of Amman, and about 18 1/2 mi. (29.6 km.) southeast of Succoth.

12. Discomfited all the host. The Midianites probably thought that they had come far enough from the scene of their rout to be secure from further attack and may have been trying to regroup after their disastrous panic. They had probably posted sentries along the way they had come to sound warning of the approaching Hebrews. But Gideon and his men outwitted the device by making a wide circuit so as to fall upon the Midianites from the eastern side of the camp. Being surprised, the Midianites attempted to flee again, but the hardy Hebrews slew many of them and captured the two kings Zebah and Zalmunna. The rest of the Midianites probably escaped in small groups into the desert.

13. Before the sun was up. This passage may also be translated “by the ascent of Heres.” The latter rendering is probably correct inasmuch as the Hebrew word used here,

cheres, is not the ordinary word for “sun.” It is used in the Bible in place names. The significance seems to be that Gideon returned to Succoth purposely by a different way from the way he had left in order to surprise the princes lest they flee.

14. Described. Heb. *kathab*. Literally, “he wrote down.” A youth from the town of Succoth whom they had captured by chance wrote down for Gideon the names of the princes and elders of the city. Inasmuch as it was the rulers of Succoth that had haughtily refused him aid, Gideon doubtless desired to discriminate between them and the inhabitants of the city, lest he punish those who were not responsible.

The fact that a youth captured at random was able to write indicates that even at this early period the knowledge of writing was general.

Princes. Heb. *śarim*. The word is translated “rule,” “captain,” “chief,” almost as frequently as it is “prince.” In this passage it probably refers to the officials who stood at the head of the council of elders, the leaders in charge of military and civic duties.

Elders. Heads of the resident families of a city, forming a council or governing body.

16. Took the elders. Gideon now began to carry out the threat he made in v. 7. Precisely how he captured the elders the record does not state. They probably capitulated to save their city, for Gideon’s victory over the Midianites must have broken their will to resist.

Taught the men. It seems that this was done by beating them with thorny rods. The punishment administered to the elders was to serve as an effective lesson to these princes, lest they again show arrogant unconcern for their fellow Israelites.

17. Beat down the tower. It seems that the men of Penuel resisted, so that to tear down the tower as Gideon had threatened, he found it necessary to slay them. Gideon had threatened only to destroy the tower. It was thus probably their own folly that led these men to choose to defend the tower and thus to lose their lives.

These strong measures on the part of the new judge of Israel may have been necessary to warn other Israelite towns of the probable consequences of a lack of patriotism. The punishment meted out to Succoth and Penuel may have served as an effective barrier, at least in part, to independent action on the part of isolated Israelite towns, permitting the Israelites to present a more united front in the event of a future invasion.

18. Then said he. Gideon did not begin to settle accounts with the two captured kings until he had exhibited these men before the people of Succoth and Penuel who had mocked at Gideon’s ability to overcome the large Midianite forces. The scene here described probably did not take place immediately upon the fall of Penuel, but several days later after Gideon had returned to his home in Ophrah. This is suggested by the presence of Gideon’s young son, Jether (v. 20). Being but a timid boy, the lad could hardly have shared in the heroic expedition.

What manner? Heb. *’ephoh*. Probably better translated “where” as in Ruth 2:19 and Isa. 49:21. The LXX also has “where.” Gideon knew perfectly well that his brothers had been put to death by these kings. His question was an intimation to the kings that they must now pay for their evil deeds.

Whom ye slew. We are left completely in the dark as to the circumstances of this battle or massacre. It seems that several of Gideon’s brothers had been captured near Mt.

Tabor and slain by these two kings during one of their earlier forays into the land. This is the first intimation that Gideon was redressing a personal injury.

19. Sons of my mother. This was Gideon's way of saying that these men were his full brothers. In days when men frequently had several wives, it often became necessary to distinguish between brothers and half brothers. Naturally Gideon's full brothers would be dearer to him than the sons of his father by another wife.

If ye had saved them. The law of blood revenge demanded that Gideon put the two kings to death (Num. 35:17–19). A less severe fate might have been their lot for their other crimes.

20. Slay them. Anciently, to perish at the hand of a youth or a woman was considered to be a disgraceful humiliation (see ch. 9:54).

21. Rise thou. The pronoun is emphatic. If they must die, they would rather die at the hand of a hero than of a mere boy.

As the man is. That is, a man has a man's strength. A child cannot be expected to do that which requires the strength of a man. Naturally the kings would rather be dispatched at one stroke than to be hacked and mangled by a child, which would result in a more painful, lingering death.

Ornaments. Heb. *śaharonim*, "little moons," or "crescents." In Isa. 3:18 this word is translated "round tires like the moon." Crescent ornaments are still hung on the necks of camels by Bedouins. In the case of kings, like Zebah and Zalmunna, these ornaments were probably of gold.

22. Rule thou over us. Because of the magnitude of the victory won by Gideon's courage and untiring perseverance, the men from the various tribes that composed his army proposed to Gideon that he should become their king, with the succession passing from father to son. The move was an expression of the growing desire of the Israelitish tribes to unite under a monarchy, so that they could more easily and effectively give mutual support against the enemy. From their neighbors round about they could see the value of the united effort that an efficient kingship produces. This desire continued to grow stronger until the tribes succeeded in forming a monarchy in the time of Saul.

23. The Lord shall rule. Gideon refused the offer of hereditary kingship. He recognized that his accomplishments were due solely to the power of God working in his behalf. He had been called of God to perform a special service for the nation, and he had accomplished it. God had not called him to become a monarch. He knew that his children would not be able to lead the nation unless God individually called them. But God's call is not extended by virtue of family relationship. The weakness of hereditary rulership lies in this fact. Often the lineal descendant is a person wholly unsuited for the work.

The nobility of Gideon was shown in his rejection of the kingship. This offer must have presented a temptation to him. It often requires more strength to resist the allurements of proffered power than to defeat an enemy. But Gideon at that moment stood true to God, and his words worthily crowned his heroic deeds.

24. Ishmaelites. Ishmael and Midian were half brothers (Gen. 25:2). The names are frequently interchanged in Scripture because of their close kinship and because they both inhabited the same region, where they intermarried and coalesced (see Gen. 37:25, 27, 28).

25. Willingly give them. So great was the relief of being free from Midianite oppression after seven years of despoliation, and so strong was popular feeling in

Gideon's favor, that the Israelites gladly granted the request of their deliverer and surrendered to him the most valuable part of the booty they had taken.

26. The weight. The weight of the golden earrings came to about 42 lb. 10 oz. (19.3 kg.) Gen. 24:22 records that a single earring may weigh as much as half a shekel.

Ornaments. Heb. *śaharonim* (see on v. 21).

Collars. Heb. *neṭiphot*. That is, "drops." They were a type of pendant for the ears.

27. Ephod. The ephod was the sleeveless shoulder dress of the high priest to which were attached the 2 onyx stones bearing the names of the 12 tribes of Israel (Ex. 28:6–35; PP 351). The word was also used for a simple garment such as Samuel wore when he ministered as a temple servant (1 Sam. 2:18) and for David's clothing when he danced before the ark (2 Sam. 6:14). It was apparently a garment worn by many priests (1 Sam. 22:18). The one in the possession of Abiathar, David's priest, was used in consulting the Lord (1 Sam. 23:6, 9–12). Gideon's ephod and breastplate were constructed in imitation of those worn by the high priest (PP 556).

A whoring. The Israelites apparently came to regard this ephod as an object of worship.

A snare unto Gideon. The author seems to suggest that the misfortunes that befell Gideon's family after his death were attributable to the incidents connected with this ephod. One wonders at the motives that prompted Gideon to set up this rival worship at Ophrah. The religious center of the Israelites was at Shiloh, in the tribe of Ephraim, where the tabernacle was situated. It may have been the arrogant attitude of the Ephraimites (see ch. 8:1) that made Gideon resentful toward them to the extent that he did not care to go into their territory to worship. The miracle performed by the angel near his own home before his call to judgeship may have led him to conclude that God was intimating that a new seat of worship be established and that he should function there as a priest. He had asked for miraculous signs, and they had been granted. In his later functions as judge he may have felt the frequent need of inquiring of the Lord, and so, in view of these considerations, constructed an ephod in imitation of the one in the tabernacle. His sin consisted in taking over the prerogatives of the Aaronic priesthood without divine sanction. This deviation from the right prepared the way for wider apostasy both in his immediate family and among the tribesmen. The people were thus led astray by the very one who had formerly overthrown their idolatry. Gideon doubtless did not intend to turn from the worship of God, and his intentions may have been good. However, his subjective evaluation without divine guidance regarding the need for a new religious center opened the way for disaster. There was no excuse for Gideon to abandon the program that God had marked out regarding divine worship and service. If Gideon had continued to seek divine guidance as he had done formerly, he would have spared his family and his people much sorrow.

Gideon's history is a warning that more than good intentions are required to make an act commendable and right. Furthermore, the greater a man's position of prominence, the more far-reaching will be the influence of his evil example; hence the greater will be his need of regulating every act of his life by the divine pattern. The only right rule of life is the law of God. Despite his failure, Gideon is commended in the epistle to the Hebrews (ch. 11:32) for his earlier acts of faith.

30. Many wives. This harem is an evidence of Gideon's wealth and power. Polygamy on a large scale was adopted only by rulers or the extremely wealthy. The description of

Gideon's family as related here (vs. 30, 31) is given to provide the background for the series of events that follow (ch. 9).

31. Concubine. The sequel indicates that she may have been a Canaanite. The fact that this woman remained with her relatives in Shechem instead of coming to Gideon's home in Ophrah shows that the case was one which the early Arabs called a "*sadika* [female friend]" marriage. Under such a marriage arrangement the woman lived with her own people, and was visited by the husband from time to time. The children born to such a marriage were counted as members of the wife's clan, and always lived with the mother.

Whose name he called. Literally, "he put his name." The Hebrew construction here used is frequently employed when additional names, or surnames are given later in life (2 Kings 17:34; Neh. 9:7; Dan. 1:7; Dan. 5:12). Because of this some have thought that the name Abimelech, which means "father of a king," was given when Gideon observed the ambitious and boastful character of the child. The name may also mean "my father is king." Therefore it may have been given by the mother, out of vanity, so that all would remember that the lad's father was the powerful judge Gideon. Abimelech proved to be an unworthy son of Gideon, for he had the courage and energy of his father but not his virtues.

32. Died. Gideon died in peace and prosperity, but the evil seed he had sown bore bitter fruit in the next generation. Few realize how far-reaching is the influence of their words and acts.

Ophrah. See on ch. 6:11.

33. Baalim. See on ch. 2:13, 17. Unsanctioned ways of worship soon led to the worship of false deities.

Baal-berith. Literally, "lord of the covenant." The same deity is called "the god Berith," literally, "god of the covenant" (ch. 9:46). Shechem had a temple dedicated to this deity (ch. 9:4). It is not clear whether the name "lord of the covenant" refers to a deity that was thought to rule over a league of Canaanite cities, or to a covenant between the Baal and his worshipers, or to the league between the Canaanite inhabitants of Shechem and the Israelite newcomers. An alliance between the two peoples would frequently be cemented by a common worship. In later times politico-religious alliances like this often led the Israelites into idolatry. The Israelites had been forbidden (ch. 2:2) to form alliances with pagan peoples. One of the first symptoms of apostasy among them was the inclination to remove the barriers between themselves and their heathen neighbors. It seems that the concessions required to make the establishment of covenant relations possible were often one-sided; it was Israel that all too frequently surrendered her faith.

34. Remembered not. Forgetfulness has been a common fault with the followers of God. Safety lies in remembering the way God has led and worked in the past, and in continued dependence upon that leadership. Thankfulness springs from remembrance and reflection, and when men do not think on God's blessings to them, they forget Him and become unthankful. Thus ingratitude becomes the parent of unbelief (see on Rom. 1:20–28).

It takes positive effort to remember God. The human mind is so constituted that it does not retain in memory those things that are not frequently recalled. Hence the need of a constant refreshing in sacred history through the daily study of the Bible and attendance

at divine worship where these matters are rehearsed. Hence also the need of the review of current church history, and the frequent recalling of outstanding divine interventions in personal experience.

As is common with many Hebrew words, “remember” not only refers to the act of retaining in the conscious mind but also includes the doing of that which a knowledge of the facts would require. Thus to “remember” God means to give to Him the worship which He demands. To “remember” Gideon would mean to show honor to his posterity, as well as to give heed to his counsel and seek to follow out the pattern he had laid out for the future jurisdiction of the domain of Israel.

The error of Gideon in supposing that by setting up his ephod he could preserve the fidelity of the people to Jehovah now revealed itself in all its folly. After he was dead, the Israelites gave no more thought either to him or to the God who had delivered them.

35. *Neither shewed they kindness.* This clause is a brief summary of the events to be narrated in the next chapter. Those who once offered Gideon kingship over them failed to deal gratefully with his descendants. How fleeting is this world’s popularity. Today’s hero is forgotten tomorrow.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–35PP 553–556

1–3PP 555

4, 12 PP 553

18 PP 546

22, 23 PP 555

24–27, 31, 33PP 556

34, 35 PP 556

CHAPTER 9

1 *Abimelech by conspiracy with the Shechemites, and murder of his brethren, is made king. 7 Jotham by a parable rebuketh them, and foretelleth their ruin. 22 Gaal conspireth with the Shechemites against him. 30 Zebul revealeth it. 34 Abimelech overcometh them, and soweth the city with salt. 46 He burneth the hold of the god Berith. 50 At Thebez he is slain by a piece of a millstone. 56 Jotham’s curse is fulfilled.*

1. *Shechem.* Situated 30 mi. north of Jerusalem in a narrow fertile valley. It probably had been under the jurisdiction of Gideon. At least it was the residence of Gideon’s concubine and her kinsmen. As soon as Gideon was buried, Abimelech went to Shechem to try to induce his relatives, who seem to have been prominent citizens of the town, to help him obtain the same governing authority as his father had exercised.

2. *Men of Shechem.* The Hebrew word here translated “men” is the plural of *ba’al*, signifying “possessors,” or “citizens.” The inhabitants were of mixed nationality, some being Israelites, some Canaanites, and some, like Abimelech, perhaps shared the blood of both. They lived side by side, amalgamating to a certain extent, yet sharing a mutual dislike. Verse 28 indicates that the Canaanites were predominant in this particular city.

Whether is better? Abimelech thought this an overwhelming argument. We need not necessarily conclude that all the 70 sons of Gideon were seeking to gain for themselves the ruling authority of their father. Abimelech was stating the case in the worst possible light, playing on the fears and prejudices of the populace.

Your bone. Abimelech seems to be appealing to the Canaanite group of the populace. Even if this were not the case, the Israelites in Shechem were of the tribe of Ephraim, and

he well knew of their ambition to be the leading tribe. They had no doubt resented the fact that Gideon, a man of Manasseh, should be the chief man of the whole area. Therefore they would readily grasp at the opportunity to elevate Gideon's son from Shechem to the office of his father.

4. House of Baal-berith. Anciently the temples served as depositories for personal and civic funds, as the banks do today. In addition, each temple had its own treasury made up of accumulated funds from the payment of vows, penalties, and gifts. Abimelech's support for his undertaking came from a temple of Baal. What a disgrace that the son of one who had begun his career by showing the futility of Baal worship should launch his career with a gift from Baal's temple and with it murder all his brethren. Such is the end result of polygamy, ambition, and a lack of godliness. There is little affection and much jealousy in polygamous households.

Threescore and ten. This money amounted to a shekel for each brother slain, probably about 21 cents.

Vain and light persons. Literally, "empty [worthless] and reckless men." Many bloody revolutions have been conducted through hiring such disreputable and reckless followers.

5. Slew his brethren. This was the usual way of usurpers in securing their throne; the person who had no right destroyed all those who had right, so that he might have no competitors. Despots anticipated conspiracies, and so destroyed all their brothers and near kinsmen.

Upon one stone. Like sacrificial beasts (1 Sam. 14:33–35), Abimelech slew his brothers, perhaps on the rock on which Gideon had built his altar.

Jotham. Literally, "the Lord is perfect." That Gideon would give such a name to his 70th son indicates that he remained a loyal believer in the Lord despite the ephod he had made.

6. House of Millo. Millo was probably a place not far from Shechem. It is not clear whether the word "house" used here means the family or the inhabitants of Millo, or, a building. Here and in v. 20 the phrase seems to be parallel to "the men of Shechem." Hence it may refer to people of the clan, or family, of Millo. On the other hand, it could very well designate a building. In v. 46 reference is made to "the tower of Shechem" in such a way that it may be the equivalent of "house of Millo."

Plain. Heb. *'elon*. The word means an oak or terebinth tree (see Judges 6:11; Gen. 35:8). This tree in Shechem was probably the same as the one under which Jacob made his family bury the idolatrous earrings and amulets (Gen. 35:4) and under which Joshua raised his stone of witness (Joshua 24:26).

Pillar. This was one of the sacred stones customarily used by Hebrews and Canaanites in their places of worship (Gen. 28:18; Ex. 24:4; Deut. 12:3). Abimelech was proclaimed king at the same place where Joshua had held the last national assembly to renew the covenant of Israel with Jehovah (Joshua 24:1, 25, 26). It was the custom to choose a king at some sanctuary or sacred spot (1 Sam. 11:15).

7. Top of mount Gerizim. Probably not the "top" of the mountain, 900 ft. (274.3 m.) above the town, but more likely somewhere nearer, on the slopes of the mountain. Jotham, the only son of Gideon who had escaped being put to death by Abimelech, learned that the men of Shechem were proclaiming Abimelech king. Taking his life in his hands, he climbed to a projecting rock above the people who were assembled near the

oak tree. Having gained the attention of the throng that had just made Abimelech king, Jotham shouted a message to the group. His speech consisted of two parts. The parable contrasts the attitude of Gideon and his sons with the adventurous Abimelech, and predicts that the course of the Shechemites in electing Abimelech king will end in disaster. The speech is one of the masterpieces of literature.

8. *Trees went forth.* Allegories of this sort in which inanimate things speak and act were loved by the people of antiquity.

To anoint a king. Jotham was well acquainted with the desire of the people to have a king, not only to be like the other nations around them, but because they felt that their frequent sufferings at the hands of their enemies were due to a defect in their form of leadership, whereas their sufferings were due to their apostasy. This demand for a king first expressed itself in the people's offer to make Gideon king. It continued to grow stronger until this abortive attempt was made. In the days of Saul it became so strong that the prophet Samuel, under instruction from God, finally acquiesced and led out in choosing a king.

Olive tree. In Palestine the olive tree is the most valuable tree known. Extensive groves of such trees still abound in the fertile vale of Shechem. The olive tree, the fig tree, and the vine, which were offered the kingship in succession, represent men who, like Gideon, were interested in the welfare of the community more than in personal advancement.

9. *Should I leave?* Gideon had refused to leave the legitimate work of judge to assume a position that, although he may have had the capacity for it, God had not called him to fill. His answer was, "The Lord shall rule over you" (ch. 8:23). His assumption of kingship would have been as incongruous as that of a tree leaving its own useful function to become a king of trees.

Honour God. Olive oil was used in connection with sacrifices, offerings, and consecrations in the tabernacle service, as well as an article of diet. Perhaps the word '*elohim*' used here should be translated "gods," as it may properly be, for Jotham accommodated the parable to the idolatrous state of the Shechemites (see also v. 13).

10. *Fig tree.* The other sons of Gideon, or perhaps even some of the former judges. These may have had capabilities and qualities for rulership far in excess of Abimelech's. It may be that some offer had been made to one or several of them to become king, but they had rejected it.

13. *Wine.* Heb. *tirosh*, the juice of the grape, either newly made or fermented.

Cheereth God. Or, "cheereth gods" (see on v. 9), as an accommodation of the parable to the customs familiar to the idolatrous Shechemites. They would be well acquainted with the frequent offerings of wine to heathen deities who were actually supposed to partake of it.

On the other hand, wine was also used in libations in the temple service (Ex. 29:40; Num. 15:7, 10; etc.).

To be promoted. Literally, "to wave." The action represents a gesture of authority. All three of the trees that yielded most abundant blessings for man, the olive, fig, and vine, consecutively refused the honor of becoming the king of trees. Their reasons were all the same: why leave the function whereby they were rendering a most valuable service to assume a function that they felt was not necessary?

The figure “wave over the trees” is an apt image of popular will—uncertain and affected by every wind. A position gained as a result of popular favor could be maintained only by bending to every breeze, or else, by losing true nobility in the effort to maintain the position by force of arms. Jotham’s words indicate that Gideon also realized the fickle nature of the Israelites. No man of real worth would leave a position of usefulness to assume kingship over a people whose desires and aims shifted as quickly as the wind.

14. *Bramble.* The buckthorn, a straggling, thorny bush that is common in the hills of Palestine. It represented the antithesis of the valuable trees that had turned down the offer of kingship.

15. *In truth.* That is, with serious purpose. The bramble, recognizing its inferior worth as compared to the other trees, suspects that the offer is made only as a jest or in mockery.

Put your trust in my shadow. This may also be translated, “take refuge in my shadow.” The foolish bramble in all seriousness offers a preposterous invitation. The low branches afford no shadow, and they are full thorns. This is biting irony. It depicts the absurdity of the situation in which the Shechemites found themselves. Abimelech, Jotham tells the people, can no more provide protection for them than the scraggly bramble bush can provide shadow and protection for the olive and fig trees. It was all promise and no performance.

If not. Not only is the bramble eager to be king, but it utters spiteful and dangerous threats—the counterpart of those intimidations, doubtless, which had been used by Abimelech to discourage any withdrawal of the offers of support the people of Shechem had given him.

Let fire come out. Bramble bushes were evidently the cause of frequent fires inasmuch as they ignited easily and the fire spread rapidly (Ex. 22:6; cf. Ps. 58:9; Isa. 9:18). Although Abimelech, like the bramble, had no power or ability to help, he had great power to harm. Those who had made Abimelech king were in a dilemma. If they remained loyal to him, they would enjoy his mocking protection. If they deserted him, he would bring them to ruin.

The condensed moral of the whole parable is this: Weak, worthless, and wicked men will ever be foremost to thrust themselves into power, and, in the end, to bring ruin upon themselves and the unhappy people over whom they preside.

16. *If you have done truly.* Jotham begins the application of the parable. Their action in making Abimelech king—even they would have to admit—was performed thoughtlessly and in a cavalier fashion.

According to the deserving. Having shown the dangerous situation in which the people of Shechem had involved themselves, Jotham sternly rebuked them for the ingratitude they had shown toward Gideon by financing Abimelech’s raid on Gideon’s house during the course of which Abimelech had massacred 69 of his own half brothers. This was the reward the inhabitants of Shechem gave the family of one who had risked his life to deliver the inhabitants of Palestine from the Midianite hordes. Great favors often meet with ill returns, especially from posterity.

18. *Have slain his sons.* Because they financed Abimelech in his evil deed Jotham held the men of Shechem jointly responsible for the murder of his brothers.

Maidservant. That is, a slave concubine. The term is intentionally contemptuous. Chapter 9:1 indicates that Gideon's concubine was probably a freewoman, perhaps from an influential family.

19. Have dealt truly. The words are ironical. If your conduct is just and right, I wish you much joy in it. May your bramble-king bring you peace and prosperity, *if* you have acted in good faith.

20. But if not. Jotham's hearers knew they had not acted in good faith, and this imprecation must have been like a knell of doom.

Let fire come out. Jotham's curse was that Abimelech and the men of Shechem would perish by mutual destruction. Frequently the unity of bad men speedily changes into enmity and reciprocal extermination. This malediction was exactly fulfilled as recorded in the remainder of the chapter (see vs. 56, 57).

21. Beer. Signifying "well." There were many places in Palestine that bore this name. This renders exact identification of the place impossible. Jotham would likely have been safe anywhere in the territories of Judah or Benjamin, and he probably fled to one territory or the other.

22. Over Israel. That is, over all the Israelites, who would accept his authority. This comprised probably chiefly those in the area of Shechem.

23. God sent. That is, God did not interfere with the natural consequences of a course of evil. That which God allows is often presented as though He is the author. Those who do not choose to serve God thereby leave themselves open to the control of Satan.

Evil spirit. This may mean an evil temper or attitude. The word "spirit" is often used to describe attitude or disposition (see Num. 14:24).

Dealt treacherously. the men of Shechem now began to deal with Abimelech as they had helped him to deal with the sons of Gideon. It was only natural that those who were unfaithful to Gideon would be unfaithful to Abimelech. The record does not state the immediate cause of the break between Abimelech and the men of Shechem. Perhaps they found all too soon that he was an iron-handed despot who did not hesitate to take advantage of them after he had been made king.

24. Aided him. Literally, "strengthened his hands."

25. Set liers in wait. Abimelech probably took up his residence at Ophrah after he had destroyed his brothers there. The men of Shechem, in their disaffection, laid an ambush in the hope of capturing Abimelech at a time when he was escorted by only a few men. While waiting for their victim to appear, the ruthless men who formed the ambush began to rob all travelers and caravans that came along. The countryside was soon in a state of insecurity that was damaging to Abimelech's prestige and popularity.

Top of the mountains. Probably near Shechem. This town was on the two main arteries of travel through the mountains of Ephraim. All the roads could easily be commanded from the heights of the twin mountains, Ebal and Gerizim. This section of Palestine has always been a favorite haunt of highwaymen.

26. Gaal. His name means "scarab."

His brethren. Evidently brothers or relatives formed the nucleus of Gaal's coterie of followers.

Went over. This may suggest that Gaal had previously lived beyond the Jordan.

27. Merry. Heb. *hilulim*, from the root *halal*, "to praise." *Hilulim* is translated "praise" in Lev. 19:24. The wine-gathering festival in Palestine was the most joyous of

all the year. Among the Canaanites it was generally accompanied with orgiastic feasting, drinking, and hilarious merriment. This is the kind of gathering described here. On such an occasion the latent dissatisfaction with Abimelech's rule would certainly come to the surface. Under the influence of wine and merrymaking they became bold and rash enough to abuse Abimelech and to speak openly against him. In the very temple where they had plotted with Abimelech and had taken its treasures to finance his first nefarious foray, they now cursed him and contrived his ruin.

28. *Who is Abimelech?* Obviously contemptuous, like, "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse?" in 1 Sam. 25:10.

Who is Shechem? Probably a reflection on the city also for allowing such a one as Abimelech to rule over its inhabitants. Did Shechem naturally and traditionally belong to Abimelech?

Zebul his officer. "We are not even being ruled by Abimelech," he said in effect, "but merely by Zebul, his underling, who is of no account at all." Zebul had apparently been placed by Abimelech as governor or prefect of the city (see v. 30). Gaal was preparing the way to usurp Zebul's position and authority.

Men of Hamor. How much better to make as your leader a pure-blooded Canaanite, descendant of our old native prince Hamor, the hereditary owner of Shechem (see Gen. 33:19; Joshua 24:32).

29. *Would to God* Heb. *mi*, literally, "who," an idiomatic exclamation, meaning, "O that I might have" Actually the word "God" is not in the Hebrew. The KJV translates the clause into idiomatic English. A further example of idiomatic translation introducing the name of God is found in the NT expression "God forbid" (Rom. 3:31; etc.). The original simply has "may it not become."

As to Gaal's methods, compare the similar method Absalom used to undermine David's position (2 Sam. 15:4). The statement is directed against Zebul. Gaal infers that if he were the governor of the city in the place of Zebul, he would make short work of Abimelech.

He said. The LXX reads "I would say." According to the context, this is probably the correct reading. In the Hebrew the two forms are very similar, and it is possible that a copyist mistook one for the other. Verse 31 suggests that Zebul sent word secretly to Abimelech notifying him concerning what was taking place. If Gaal had openly challenged Abimelech face to face, there would have been no need for a secret mission. If the translation "and he said" is retained, it can be interpreted to mean that Gaal spoke to Abimelech in animated, imaginary, oratorical dialogue. If this be so, then the applause of the Shechemites emboldened the wine-heated orator to the extent that he turned, as if addressing Abimelech, and boastingly said, "Increase thine army, and come out."

30. *Ruler of the city.* See on v. 28.

Heard the words. Betrayers are often betrayed in turn by those of their own number. The cursing of a king is carried by a bird of the air (Eccl. 10:20). Gaal's drunken boast reached the ears of Zebul, who became angry over it, for his own overthrow, he learned, was to be connected with Abimelech's. This narrative, though simple, is superbly told, enabling us to trace clearly the advancing progress of the conspiracy, in which secret treachery and open dissipation, boasting and jealousy, conspire together to bring doom to the city.

31. Privily. Heb. *betormah*. This may be translated either “in secret” or “in Tormah.” If the latter is correct, Abimelech was dwelling in a town named Tormah. Verse 41 states he lived in Arumah. Unless the two names describe the same town, the first translation, “in secret,” is undoubtedly correct. Zebul acted secretly. He was not strong enough to deal with Gaal, so he did not openly oppose him. Had Gaal been wiser, he might have dealt more subtly with Zebul.

35. Entering of the gate. During the judges period the city gate was the regular place where officials met with the people. Zebul came to the gate this particular morning because he was expecting trouble. Gaal came also, for he was intently watching developments in the city, that he might further his own ends.

36. There come people. During the night Abimelech’s forces had come as near to the city as they could without causing alarm. In the early morning, after the gates were open and many of the people had gone out of the walls to their fields, Abimelech’s soldiers began to advance upon the city. Gaal, who was standing watch at the gate, immediately detected them, and excitedly shouted the information to Zebul. We may imagine the latter, in order to gain time for Abimelech, leisurely going out to look, and then replying with deceit and mockery, “You’re unnecessarily excited. It is only shadows cast by Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim.” Zebul seems to treat him as if he were still partially suffering from the intoxication of the night before.

37. Middle of the land. Literally, “land’s navel.” It was probably the name of a hill, so called because it was halfway between the Jordan and the sea.

Another company. From all points commanding the avenues of the city, troops of Abimelech’s soldiers advanced, to the consternation of Gaal and the surprise of the citizens.

The plain. The preferable translation is “oak tree” (see on v. 6).

Of Meonenim. Probably more correctly translated “of the diviners” than as a proper name. This sacred oak was probably the seat of a family or sect of sooth-sayers.

38. Where is now thy mouth? “Mouth” is here used metaphorically for “boastfulness.” It is an expostulation against Gaal’s past rashness and audacity. Although Zebul still seems to be in no position openly to oppose Gaal for fear of his own personal safety, yet he does, by his taunts before bystanders, goad Gaal to fulfill his boast (v. 28) by going out to fight with Abimelech’s forces. Insolent, boastful men are often made to change their rash attitude in a brief time, and to dread those whom they have previously insulted.

40. Overthrown and wounded. Better, “fell slain.” Abimelech won a complete victory without much trouble. Evidently Gaal’s followers suffered heavy losses. We are left in uncertainty as to why Zebul did not close the city gates to cut off Gaal’s retreat. Perhaps Gaal left a strong force of men to protect the gate in order that he and his men might find safety within the walls if they were defeated.

41. Dwelt at Arumah. That is, Arumah being Abimelech’s home, he now returned thither. He did not try to storm Shechem. Its walls were sufficiently formidable so that he decided to take it by stratagem. Therefore he returned to his home at Arumah as though, having disposed of Gaal, he would not press the quarrel with the Shechemites. By withdrawing his forces he succeeded in lulling the Shechemites into an unwise sense of security.

Thrust out Gaal. Gaal's inability to oppose Abimelech cost him his following in Shechem. No one had confidence in him any more, and, perhaps, hoping that Abimelech would be appeased if Gaal were sent away, the men of Shechem acquiesced to Zebul. Gaal and the few men he had left with him were asked to leave the city, which they did.

43. Smote them. After many of the townspeople had gone to work in the fields, Abimelech's men attacked and ruthlessly destroyed them. It is difficult to understand how the inhabitants of Shechem foolishly believed that Abimelech would be content with the banishment of Gaal and not follow up his initial victory by an attack upon the city.

44. Entering of the gate. Abimelech's strategy was better this time. As soon as the attack began, he led one group of his men to the city gate and captured it. By means of this perilous sally he was able to prevent the Shechemites outside the city from getting back inside, or those within to get out to rescue their comrades. There is no denying Abimelech's courage.

45. Took the city. The inhabitants of Shechem fought bitterly. It took all day for Abimelech to widen his beachhead at the gate and finally to devastate the city. He let no one escape. Presumably the entire population perished by sword or fire.

Sowed it with salt. Abimelech's anger was not assuaged until the entire city, edifices and walls, had been thrown down. Then Abimelech sprinkled salt over the ruins in a symbolic action, to express the wish that it might be barren and uninhabited forever (see Deut. 29:23; Ps. 107:34, margin). It would have been difficult to put enough salt there to spoil the land, at least over an appreciable area. That is hardly what the passage means. Similar actions have been reported of the Assyrians, Attila, and Charles IX of France. Shechem was a prosperous city again in Solomon's time (1 Kings 12:1). Its vicinity was too fertile and its location at a crossroad too advantageous to remain unoccupied for long.

46. Tower of Shechem. This may be the "house of Millo" (see on v. 6).

An hold. Heb. *ṣeriach*. An underground cellar or excavation (see 1 Sam. 13:6, ASV, where it is translated "covert"). In this instance the "hold" was connected with a temple.

God Berith. It is not clear whether this temple of the god Berith was the same as that of Baal-berith mentioned earlier in the chapter (v. 4). The supposition is that they were identical.

In antiquity temples were regarded as places of asylum. This was so among the Jews (1 Kings 2:28–34) and the heathen (1 Macc. 5:43). Classical Greek literature abounds with illustrations of men fleeing to the temples for political asylum. The residents in the vicinity could have fought it out in their fortified tower, but they chose to go to the temple and plead for mercy. Had Abimelech not been ruthless, he would probably have respected this ancient custom and spared the people. However, mercy seemed totally foreign to his nature.

48. Mount Zalmon. An unknown hill close by.

49. Set the hold on fire. It is evident that the hold was not intended for defense. It was a walled cellar of the temple precinct into which the refugees had fled expecting that Abimelech would honor their right of asylum there. The intense heat of the pitchy branches soon set the wooden paneling on fire, with the result that everyone in the cavernous rooms perished, perhaps as many as 1,000 men and women in all.

The prophecy of Jotham was literally fulfilled. Fire had gone forth from the bramble-king and destroyed the people of Shechem (v. 20). Many of the people were probably in no way concerned with the quarrel or with making Abimelech king. Perhaps they had not

meddled with either side. However, all through the centuries men of turbulent spirits cause others to perish with them. Millions of innocent people still perish in cruel wars brought on by a few evil men.

50. Thebez. There is at the present time a town named *Tûbâş* about 9 mi. (14.4 km.) northeast of Shechem. Many believe this is the place here mentioned, but the identity is questionable. Thebez had apparently followed Shechem in the rebellion against the rule of Abimelech.

51. Top of the tower. Towers like this have been found in Palestine with stone walls as much as 14 ft. thick. There were floors or stories within the tower with a platform on top from which to defend it. Into this last formidable citadel the citizens of Thebez fled after Abimelech had broken through their city walls. The frequent mention of towers reflects the unsettled state of the country.

52. Went hard unto the door. With his characteristic fury and bravery Abimelech attacked the tower. When the defenders resisted his furious attacks, Abimelech tried to set the wooden door on fire. If he had succeeded in burning the door down, his men could have successfully stormed the tower.

53. A certain woman. Even the women were helping with the defense. While the men would use bows and spears, women could roll down heavy stones on those who exposed themselves by venturing near the base of the tower.

Piece of a millstone. Literally, “millstone of riding”; that is, the upper half of the millstone that was turned while grinding in contrast to the lower stone that remained stationary. The fact that this woman had a millstone suggests that the tower may have been stocked with grain and instruments for grinding flour in anticipation of a siege.

All to brake his skull. An obsolete English phrase over the meaning of which there has been much controversy. The Hebrew says, “crushed his skull.” The word for “skull” here is *gulgoleth*, from which comes the name Golgotha, the place where Jesus was crucified. Even if Abimelech had been wearing a heavy helmet, such an object falling from a height of 30 or 40 ft. would crush his head.

54. His armourbearer. Military leaders usually had an aide-de-camp or squire as a token of importance as well as to carry the master’s heavy shield and spear when no battle was in progress (see Judges 7:10; 1 Sam. 14:6; 31:4).

That men say not. The horror of being slain by a woman was not confined to the Hebrews (see chs. 4:9; 5:24–27). The same feeling is expressed in Greek and Roman literature. Abimelech probably feared also lest, mortally wounded as he was, he should fall into the hands of his enemies, who would treat him with insult and torture. Despite all his pains to end his life by other means, Abimelech still did not escape the odium of being slain by a woman (see 2 Sam. 11:21).

Abimelech in his dying moments might well have given consideration to what men thought of his life, for that is the basis on which posterity finally judges a man. Even to this day the matters about which men are most sensitive are often not the basic things of life that really matter. Those who in life consult only their pride and ambition will usually die as they have lived, more solicitous that their reputation should be preserved on earth than that their souls be saved from destruction.

Thrust him through. The first man who sought to exercise kingship over Israel, and the first real king of Israel, Saul, sought to die similarly (see 1 Sam. 31:3, 4).

55. Every man unto his place. The death of a leader was generally sufficient to break up and scatter an ancient army (see 1 Sam. 17:51).

56. Thus God rendered. These words give the moral of the whole account. The writer of this book felt deeply that God controlled the events of history, punishing both individual and national crimes. The murderer of the sons of Gideon “upon one stone” is killed by a stone striking his head, whereas the wicked Shechemites who used temple money to hire assassins of good men were burned to death in that same temple by the one they aided in the deed. The curse of Jotham had been completely fulfilled.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–6PP 556, 557

CHAPTER 10

1 *Tola judgeth Israel in Shamir.* 3 *Jair, whose thirty sons had thirty cities.* 6 *The Philistines and Ammonites oppress Israel.* 10 *In their misery God sendeth them to their false gods.* 15 *Upon their repentance he pitieth them.*

1. After Abimelech. The verse provides no clue as to whether there was an interval between Abimelech’s death and Tola’s judgeship.

To defend. These words suggest that as evil as Abimelech’s reign was, he did something also to defend Israel against foreign enemies, or at least to keep them in check.

Tola. Tola and his father, Puah, were of the tribe of Issachar and were named after two of the sons of Issachar (Gen. 46:13; Num. 26:23). In the days of David the Tola clan was noted for producing men of valor (1 Chron. 7:1, 2). Tola seems to have been the only judge furnished by this tribe.

In mount Ephraim. Ordinarily the tribe of Issachar dwelt north of Mt. Ephraim, beyond the plain of Esdraelon. Evidently part of the tribe had settled in the territory usually regarded as belonging to Manasseh and Ephraim.

2. He judged Israel. Aside from the fact that he judged Israel for 23 years, nothing is related concerning Tola’s rule. Evidently there were no major battles with enemy invaders during the period of his power. To govern a nation well in times of peace is not less praiseworthy than to carry on wars and overcome enemies, but how well Tola judged Israel is not stated. That he feared the Lord is indicated by the statement, “After the death of Abimelech, the rule of judges who feared the Lord served for a time to put a check upon idolatry” (PP 557).

3. Jair. Mention is made in Num. 32:41 of a contemporary of Moses named Jair of the tribe of Manasseh who captured some towns in Gilead and settled there. We may conjecture that the Jair mentioned here in Judges was of the same tribe.

Gileadite. Gilead was the name given to the territory east of the Jordan that lay between the southern end of the Sea of Chinnereth and the northern end of the Dead Sea.

Judged Israel. These words were never applied to the cruel Abimelech. Of him it was merely stated that he “reigned” over Israel. Jair’s rule must have been enlightened and beneficial like that of the other judges.

4. Thirty sons. This proves almost certainly that he was a polygamist, like Gideon.

Thirty ass colts. In the days prior to the time of Solomon when the Israelites did not own horses, the possession of asses was a sign of wealth and therefore of honor and dignity. This fact is probably recorded to show the rich blessings of a man who had 30 sons, all of whom enjoyed the honor and distinction of riding as chiefs or governors.

Havoth-jair. Literally, “tent villages of Jair.” This name was given to the region in the time of Moses when the earlier Jair captured a number of villages from Og, king of Bashan (Num. 32:41; Deut. 3:14). In the meantime more cities had sprung up or others had been captured, so that when Jair judged Israel he was able to give one to each of his 30 sons, who served as their prefects.

Gilead. Literally, “hard,” or “rough.” It received the name from the characteristic rough mountain ridges. Gilead is divided in halves by the Jabbok River (Deut. 3:12; Joshua 12:2, 5). The southern half was conquered by Israel from the Amorite king Sihon (Joshua 12:2). The tribe of Gad settled on the southern half, and the northern half fell to Manasseh. Occasionally the term Gilead is used in the Bible with great elasticity, designating the entire land east of the Jordan as far north as Dan (Deut. 34:1).

6. *Did evil again.* Many years had passed since Gideon stemmed the widespread apostasy and broke the Midianite oppression. Now the people turned in large numbers toward idolatry again. Seven heathen deities are listed as constituting the new objects of worship. These were the deities of the peoples bordering Israel on all sides. The number and distribution reveal that there was a mass turning to idolatry.

Baalim, and Ashtaroth. See on ch. 2:11, 13.

The gods of Syria. Syria (or Aram) was the country extending from Phoenicia to the Euphrates. Damascus was the best-known city of the area. Chief gods of that region were Hadad, Baal, Mot, and Anath. The OT mentions a god called Rimmon (2 Kings 5:18).

Gods of Zidon. That is, of Phoenicia, the main city only being mentioned. The gods of the Phoenicians were those of Canaan and Syria.

Gods of Moab. The Moabite Stone and the book of Kings (1 Kings 11:33; etc.) show that this deity was the god Chemosh.

Gods of the children of Ammon. One of the Ammonite gods was Molech (1 Kings 11:7, 33; see on Lev. 18:21).

Gods of the Philistines. These were Canaanite deities taken over by the Philistines, the most prominent of whom were Dagon and Baal-zebub.

7. *Children of Ammon.* At this time probably the worst threat to Israel was from the east, where the Ammonites were subjugating the tribes on the other side of Jordan. The Ammonites were a pastoral people from the eastern desert. The Philistines also were becoming strong and were oppressing the Israelites in Judah and Dan. There Samson became the center of opposition to Philistines domination (ch. 13:1–5).

9. *Passed over Jordan.* Emboldened by their victories over the tribes in Gilead, the Ammonites crossed the Jordan River and began raiding all central Palestine where the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim dwelt.

10. *Cried unto the Lord.* At least this much is praiseworthy, but their admission of the fact that they had sinned and their cry for help were still not acceptable, for they were not accompanied by true repentance. Yet the Lord acknowledges the slightest inclination of the sinner toward God, and seeks to lead the sinner on to true reform.

11. *The Lord said.* How the Lord spoke to the Israelites is not here indicated, but it was by means of a prophet (PP 557). The burden of the prophet’s message was to remind the backsliding people of their ungratefulness. Despite the many wonderful deliverances God had wrought for them, they had not learned the folly of idolatry.

From the Amorites. See Joshua 10:5–27.

From the children of Ammon. See on Gen. 19:38.

From the Philistines. See on ch. 3:31.

12. Zidonians. See pp. 67–71.

Amalekites. They were allies of Moab (ch. 3:12, 13) and of Midian (ch. 6:3).

Maonites. There is no record of a deliverance from these people, just as the record is brief concerning an earlier deliverance from the Ammonites, Philistines, and Sidonians mentioned previously. Perhaps they were the same people as the Mehunims of 2 Chron. 26:7 and the Meunites of 2 Chron. 20:1, RSV, and 1 Chron. 4:41, RSV. If so, they lived in the area south of the Dead Sea. The brevity of information concerning some of these incidents shows that the book of Judges does not give an exhaustive history of the times, but that it relates episodes of the period as illustrative and typical of the behavior of the Israelites and of God's efforts to help them.

13. Deliver you no more. This threat is to be understood conditionally (Jer. 18:7, 8), as the subsequent events show.

14. Let them deliver you. The irony of this must have cut deep, because the idols to whose service Israel had turned were the deities of those nations by whom they were oppressed. God speaks here with a sorrow like that of a father reasoning with an inconsiderate child whom nothing but a sharp goad of rebuke and chiding will drive to serious thought. Though God for the present disowned Israel, He did not abandon them permanently. He sent judgments in ever-increasing severity and magnitude. Again it should be remembered that the rejection here threatened is only of the nation of Israel insofar as it failed in fulfilling its divine appointment. The door to personal salvation for individual Israelites continued open. During the dark years of apostasy there continued to be a remnant who refused to bow to Baal.

15. Whatsoever seemeth good. The Israelites in their affliction acknowledged their error and asked the Lord to punish them in any way He saw fit, but only to save them from their enemies. Like David in later times, they preferred to fall into the hands of the Lord, for His compassion was great; but of the cruelty of men, they had had enough.

16. Put away the strange gods. The Lord's pointed, solemn, yet kind rebuke delivered by the prophet had the desired effect. The people repented of their ways, and brought forth fruits indicative that their repentance was genuine.

Was grieved. Literally, "was shortened." Today we would say, "He became impatient." That is, God could bear Israel's distress no longer. His pity for Israel and His indignation against their oppressors, mingled together, caused Him to act. He would stand aloof no longer. Whenever, by prayer and sincere repentance, men call upon their merciful God, He, like a tender father, hears their plea.

Men do not always display this attribute of God in their dealings one with another even though they may profess to walk in the footsteps of Christ. They continue to cherish anger when others are seeking reconciliation. If God was moved with compassion toward rebellious Israel, how can they remain untouched by the pleas of those who are of like passions as they are. Grudge bearing is an altogether too frequent characteristic of many seemingly pious Christians. The sinless God, who has been infinitely more mistreated, forgives, and continues to forgive, whereas God's professed children so often cherish ill will and rancor for years. Men ought to ponder seriously the petition in the Lord's prayer, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matt. 6:12).

17. Gathered together. Literally, "were called together," "were summoned."

Encamped in Gilead. For the past 18 years the Ammonites had come every season to Israelite territory to carry off crops and to exact tribute. No doubt they were expecting servile submission again such as they had wrung from the people each year before.

Assembled themselves. By the same medium that the divine reproof had been brought to Israel (vs. 11–14), they had probably received word that God had accepted their repentance. At any rate they now had gathered sufficient courage to plan resistance.

Mizpeh. Literally, “outlook point.” Generally the word indicates a watchtower or point of observation on high walls. The place is probably identical with the “Mizpeh of Gilead” (ch. 11:29). It may have been the same Mizpah where Jacob and Laban parted (Gen. 31:25, 49). Some would identify Mizpeh of Gilead and Ramathmizpeh (Joshua 13:26) with Ramoth-gilead (Joshua 20:8; 1 Kings 4:13; 22:3, 6). It was situated in the territory of Gad and was a strong place of much importance.

18. What man? The princes of the tribes east of the Jordan had acted in concert to gather armed Israelites to oppose the Ammonites, but after assembling, they felt that they were in need of a leader who was wise in warfare, courageous in battle, and sufficiently diplomatic to weld the various contingents into a strong fighting force. In those days the outcome of wars generally depended on one pitched battle, and the princes recognized that they must choose carefully. In other crises God had chosen the leader, but this time He had probably not indicated a choice, so the people were forced to use their own best sanctified judgment and select one from their number. God honored their choice by putting His Spirit upon him (ch. 11:29). His character may not have been the best, but inasmuch as God chooses to work through human agencies, He is dependent for His choice upon the men who are available. Even today God carries on His work through imperfect human channels. If this fact were better understood, there would be less criticism of those whom God has called into service.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–16PP 557, 558

7–10PP 557

10–165T 640

11–14PP 557

16 Ed 263; PP 558

CHAPTER 11

1 *The covenant between Jephthah and the Gileadites, that he should be their head.* 12 *The treaty of peace between him and the Ammonites is in vain.* 29 *Jephthah's vow.* 32 *His conquest of the Ammonites.* 34 *He performeth his vow on his daughter.*

1. Jephthah. Literally, “he will open.” Some believe that the name may have been a shortened form of Jipthah-el (Joshua 19:14, 27), which means “the Lord will open.”

Harlot. His mother did not even have the status of an inferior wife or concubine. She was merely a prostitute, and because of this the father apparently took the child to his home and reared him there, thus signifying his desire to treat him as a legitimate son.

Gilead begat Jephthah. Here Gilead stands for a person. Everywhere else where the name occurs in this narrative, except in v. 2, it refers to the region of Gilead. Manasseh had a grandson named Gilead, who gave his name to this region (Num. 26:29, 30; Joshua 17:1; 1 Chron. 7:14–17). But it is highly improbable that he was the father of Jephthah. If he were, the events here recorded concerning Jephthah must be among the earliest in the book of Judges. It is difficult to extend four generations over the period from the descent

into Egypt to this point in the judges period. Jephthah's father was probably another man of the tribe of Manasseh who bore the famous tribal name. It should be noted also that the narrative goes back a number of years to explain the family background of Jephthah.

2. Gilead's wife. This was his lawful wife, by whom subsequently he had a number of sons.

Thrust out Jephthah. After the legitimate sons grew up, and perhaps after the death of the father, they drove Jephthah from the home, refusing to allow him any part of the inheritance even though the father, by bringing Jephthah to the home, apparently showed his intention of regarding the child as a son. The attitude of these brothers was probably in harmony with family laws and traditions of the time, which may have found support in a rigorous interpretation of the law of Moses (Deut. 23:2, 3).

A strange woman. Literally, "another woman." Either it may merely mean another woman who was not a legal wife, or it may bear also the added connotation that she was of an alien race.

3. Tob. A place by the name of Ish-tob ("Tob," RSV) was included with the list of the small Aramaean states to the east of Jordan from among whom the Ammonites hired mercenary troops in their wars with David (2 Sam. 10:6–8).

Vain men. Literally, "empty men," that is, poor persons without property, employment, or training wherewith to earn a living, except their ability to fight. It does not necessarily mean that they were men without moral qualities, but rather that they were unsuccessful, discontented, needy men.

Went out with him. That is, they went out on forays together. They were in a sense soldiers of fortune making their living by hiring out as mercenaries, scouts, or guards. Like David at a later time (1 Sam. 22:1, 2; 1 Sam 25:1–35), they received gifts for protecting wealthy people from robbers, or for driving back small incursions of desert invaders. From this type of activity Jephthah gained a wide reputation for bravery, sagacity, and initiative. The epistle to the Hebrews (11:32) mentions him as a man of faith.

4. In process of time. The years rolled on till the Ammonite incursions into the territory of Israel led up to the place where the author had left his narrative (ch. 10:18) to trace Jephthah's background.

5. Elders. These were the heads of families and clans.

Went to fetch. The elders had been seeking for someone to lead them against the Ammonites, but none of the inhabitants of Gilead had the skill or reputation to win the confidence of the elders of the tribes for the hazardous undertaking they all faced. They all had heard of the prowess of Jephthah and his group of warriors, and so their choice for a leader fell on him.

6. Captain. Heb. *qaṣin*, from the root *qaṣah*, "to decide," "to judge." He was probably primarily called to be a leader in war. They were willing to grant him dictatorial powers for the duration of the war. In that sense they were appealing to him as a mercenary.

7. Expel me. Jephthah had been driven not only from his home but evidently from his tribe and country also, for tribal and inheritance rights went together. Therefore, expulsion from the home made a man an outcast, a wanderer, with no clansmen to aid him in protecting himself or his belongings.

Evidently the elders of Israel had supported Jephthah's brothers when they had driven Jephthah from home, for he charged them with formerly being animated by hatred against him, and a party to his expulsion. He still felt that he had been dealt with unjustly, perhaps not so much that they violated the letter of the law, but that they violated his father's wishes. The pretense of legal right is often a mere cover for the foulest wrongs and deepest injuries.

8. *Therefore we turn.* It is not certain whether the answer of the elders refers to the first or to the last part of Jephthah's statement. Either will make good sense. In the first case they would have said, in effect, "Yes, we acknowledge that we did not treat you in the right way, and for that reason we are now wanting to make it right and repair the old wrong." In the second, "Exactly so, but because we are in very great distress we appeal to you for help to protect your native land."

Be our head. In addition to the former offer of military leadership (v. 6), they now offer Jephthah the headship of all the clans in Gilead in peace as well as in war.

9. *Shall I be your head?* Jephthah's patriotism was probably not entirely disinterested. But in the light of his former experience of expulsion from his tribe and deprivation of his share of his father's goods, he was seeking for some assurances that the promise would be carried out. He wished to be sure that there would be no misunderstanding. It was prudent for him to make his bargain for the future now since he was dealing with men whom he had reason to distrust.

Though there may have been an element of self-seeking in Jephthah's demands, his prudence in making the bargain clear before proceeding with the proposition should be emulated more often today. Christians show wisdom when they make their agreements clear and explicit, so that there may be no possibility for questioning or recrimination afterward. The Lord is a God of order and clarity, not of ambiguity.

10. *The Lord be witness.* Literally, "The Lord be the hearer between us," taking note of our agreement, and watching between us when we are out of one another's sight to the end that we live up to our word (see Gen. 31:49). The elders now call upon the Lord, to whom they have so recently renewed their allegiance, to witness to their agreement to Jephthah's terms.

11. *Made him head.* The promise of the elders was confirmed by the people, who inaugurated Jephthah as the civil and military leader of the tribes east of the Jordan.

Uttered all his words. This passage is not entirely clear. It may mean that Jephthah took an oath specifying the terms of his rule; or that he told the people, in a religious assembly, the course they must follow to defeat their enemies; or that he did not wish to launch out on a campaign against the Ammonites without asking counsel from the Lord.

In Mizpeh. The place where the tribes had assembled preparing to resist the Ammonite advance (ch. 10:17).

12. *Jephthah sent messengers.* Before engaging in actual warfare with the Ammonites, Jephthah announced himself as the new leader of the Gileadites by exchanging messages with the king of the enemy invaders. He spoke in the name of Israel, as an acknowledged prince. In his message he launched a formal protest against the Ammonite invasion.

What hast thou? That is, "What business have we with each other?" What reason do you have for invading our country? Although Jephthah was a mighty man of valor, he did not delight in war, but preferred to avoid it by peaceable negotiation. He wanted to settle

the dispute on the basis of justice. If the Ammonites could convince him that Israel had done them wrong, he was ready to restore their rights. If not, he was ready to maintain the cause of Israel even if it meant war.

13. *Because Israel.* The King of Ammon stated the cause of his quarrel very distinctly. He claimed that all the land of Gilead between the Arnon and the Jabbok really belonged to the Ammonites, and demanded its surrender as the only condition of peace. This was not in accordance with the facts. The Israelites had been forbidden to war against the Moabites and Ammonites (Deut. 2:9, 19), so they had passed around Moab; and also avoiding the territory of Ammon, which lay along the desert, they had crossed the Arnon into the territory of Sihon, king of the Amorites. Sihon, it is true, had wrested this territory earlier from Moab and Ammon (Num. 21:21–30; Joshua 13:25), but that was a question with which the Israelites had nothing to do. When they captured the land it belonged to someone else.

From Arnon even unto Jabbok. The deep, rocky ravine of the Arnon formed the southern boundary of Israel, separating the tribe of Reuben from Moab. It is about 50 mi. from the Arnon north to the Jabbok River. The hill country and moorland of this region had been given to the tribes of Reuben and Gad because it was suited for grazing. This strip of territory between the Jordan and the desert was about 20 mi. wide.

14. *Sent messengers again.* It is to Jephthah's credit, and witnesses to his peaceable disposition, that he was still trying to end this controversy by negotiation and thus avoid useless bloodshed.

15. *Israel took not away.* Jephthah refuted the king of Ammon's statements. He showed that the Ammonites, and the Moabites, who seemed to be united with them in their claims against Israel, had no legal claim to the territory between the Arnon and the Jabbok. To prove his point he described in detail what had taken place when the Israelites took over that country. They had captured the land from Sihon, king of the Amorites, and they were not willing to discuss who had been the previous owners.

Land of Moab. Throughout his denial, Jephthah grouped the Moabites and the Ammonites together, as if they were one people. In v. 24 Chemosh, who was the god of the Moabites, is called the god of the king of Ammon. From this it has been thought that at this time the king of Ammon had perhaps gained control over Moab, either by force of arms or intermarriage, so that the one king ruled over both countries. The national deity of Ammon was Milcom, or Molech (see on Lev. 18:21).

16. *Came to Kadesh.* It was in this area that the Israelites settled during the 40-year wilderness sojourn (see Num. 20:1; cf. Num. 33:37, 38; Deut. 1:46; 2:14). This place, sometimes called Kadesh-barnea, has not yet been definitely identified, but seems to have been somewhere near 'Ain Qedeis, in the Negeb about 50 mi. south of Beersheba.

17. *King of Edom.* See Num. 20:14–22; PP 422–432.

King of Moab. Moses does not record this incident, but does state that the Israelites did not enter the territory of Moab (Deut. 2:9). There is a suggestion in Deut. 2:29 that Moab may have refused passage just as Edom had done.

19. *King of the Amorites.* See Num. 21:21–24; Deut. 2:24–36. Sihon's territory was from the Arnon northward to the Jabbok and from the Jordan eastward to the Ammonite territory (see Judges 11:22). Heshbon, his capital, and the surrounding territory had formerly been held by the Moabites (Num. 21:26). Later Heshbon is referred to by Bible writers in connection with Moab and Ammon (Isa. 15:4; 16:8, 9; Jer. 48:2, 34, 45; 49:3).

Into my place. The original plan for Israel was that they should all settle west of the Jordan (see Deut. 2:29), but the hostility of Sihon forced the Israelites to defeat him in order that they might gain access to the Jordan so as to cross into Canaan. After Sihon's forces had been defeated and his territory was in Israelite hands, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh made a special request to Moses to be allowed to settle there (Num. 32:1–33).

20. Jahaz. This town was probably situated immediately north of the river Arnon, which the Israelites were preparing to cross to invade Sihon's land. Centuries later the Moabite Stone mentioned Jahaz as an Israelite town.

22. All the coasts. That is, all their boundaries, their entire territory. It was this territory that Ammon was now claiming.

23. Dispossessed the Amorites. The land that the Israelites took from the Amorites became theirs, irrespective of who had been its previous owners. They had not fought against the Ammonites, or captured their land (Num. 21:24; Deut. 2:37).

Shouldest thou possess it? By the primitive law of the nations this territory was clearly Israel's. Why do the Ammonites think they have title to it? Jephthah's question is one of indignant surprise.

24. Chemosh thy god. Milcom was the national god of the Ammonites (1 Kings 11:5, 33), not Chemosh. Chemosh was the god of the Moabites. The use of "Chemosh" here has been explained by the fact that at this time the king of Ammon may have ruled over both Moab and Ammon. The two nations were of kindred blood and institutions (see Gen. 19:37, 38; Judges 3:12, 13). The mention of Chemosh was particularly appropriate in that the territory in question had once belonged to the Moabites, but Chemosh had been unable to save it from the invading Amorites. In the Moabite Stone inscription, Mesha, king of Moab (2 Kings 3:4, 5), ascribes all Moabite victories to the good will of Chemosh, and all defeats to his anger.

Jephthah pointed out that if Ammon refused to recognize the rights of Israel to its territory, he at the same time undermined, in principle, his own right to the country he inhabited.

Jephthah was trying to arrange peace by diplomacy. He did not intend, under these circumstances, to claim universal dominion for the God of Israel. It is of course possible, on the other hand, that inasmuch as Jephthah had grown up in exile among heathen people, he did not understand fully that Jehovah was the God of the whole earth.

25. Balak. See Num. 22:1 to 24:25. Although Israel took over the territory of Sihon, which formerly had belonged to Moab, the king of Moab at the time had apparently not claimed Israel's newly won land as his. He had fought Israel out of hatred rather than because he claimed the land Israel had captured from the Amorites (Joshua 24:9). How, therefore, can a valid claim be made centuries later? Quite likely the Moabite king had clearly recognized the right of conquest. If the land had rightfully been his, why had he not claimed it long before? This was a telling argument to support the justice of Israel's cause.

26. Three hundred years. On the chronology of this period of the judges see p. 128.

27. Be judge this day. Jephthah ends his argument with an appeal to God to approve the justice of his cause. There was a difference between the conception of the Hebrews about their God and that of the heathen about theirs. The Hebrews believed theirs was a just and moral God. In the recognition of moral character, which they recognized in their

God, lay one of the points of superiority of their belief over that of their heathen neighbors. Jephthah asserts that if the Ammonites want to decide the issue by force of arms, he is willing to trust God to decide justly whose cause is right, and then give the victory to that side.

The verses give evidence of the straight-forward, honest, firm, yet conciliatory diplomacy of Jephthah. He had maintained the rights of Israel on three grounds: (1) the right of direct conquest, not from Ammon but from the Amorites (vs. 15–20); (2) the decision of God (vs. 21–24), which he supported by diplomatically suggesting that even their deity had not contested the conquest of Sihon; (3) undisputed possession of the land over a long period of time (vs. 25, 26). Then he ended by an appeal to God to approve the justice of his cause.

28. *Hearkened not.* Apparently the king of Ammon did not even trouble to answer Jephthah's arguments. He cared only for the argument of the sword.

29. *Spirit of the Lord.* It is the presence of the Holy Spirit that makes service for God effective for good. There may be much activity, much feverish anxiety, but unless the labor is sanctified by the presence and power of the Spirit, little lasting good will be accomplished.

He passed over. In succession Jephthah toured Gilead and all the territory of Manasseh recruiting additional troops. He swept through the land from end to end to kindle the torch of war and to embolden the population to resist the Ammonite invaders. Chapter 12:2 implies that even the Hebrew tribes across the Jordan in western Palestine were invited to participate in the war.

30. *Jephthah vowed.* The record of Jephthah's rash vow confronts us with one of those difficult passages of Scripture where the account is too brief to permit definite conclusions as to what occurred. According to one explanation Jephthah actually offered his daughter as a burnt offering, and by so doing placed himself in an evil light. In view of the fact that God gave him success pursuant to the vow, such an act on his part appears particularly heinous and most difficult to understand. The second, view, which assumes that Jephthah devoted his daughter to a life of celibacy, exonerates him from the charge of offering her as a sacrifice (see on v. 39).

Here, as elsewhere, it is our duty to ascertain what the Bible says, and to avoid attempting to make its statements harmonize with our concept of the story. We must take the Bible as it reads and be content to let the matter rest there. Wherever possible we should, of course, give a man the benefit of the doubt, and not pass judgment on him without due cause.

A vow. The literature of early nations shows that the ancients frequently made vows to their deities. The practice was common among the Hebrews (see Gen. 28:20; 1 Sam. 1:11; 2 Sam. 15:8).

Jephthah's vow was made under the stress of circumstances, as he stood at the threshold of a most perilous venture. Unfortunately it was generally in times of danger or crisis that vows like these were made, when the emotional stress contributed to the danger of making rash promises.

31. *Whatsoever cometh forth.* Whom should Jephthah expect to come from the doors of his house to greet him returning in victory, except his wife, or his daughter, or possibly a slave? Some have attempted to show that an animal, such as may often have been found in the homes of the ancients, could be here implied. But the Hebrew term he used for

“meet” seems to rule against this. This term is most generally used of men (see Gen. 18:2; Ex. 18:7; 2 Kings 1:6; etc.). It has been observed that it would not have been an extraordinary vow to have promised to offer a lamb or an ox for a marvelous victory. Such sacrifices would have been offered by numerous Israelites.

One must remember that although Jephthah worshiped the God of Israel, and in the undertaking relied on Him, he had grown up in an alien land among heathen people. Among these heathen nations human sacrifices were offered in times of great crisis. Compare the act of the king of Moab who sacrificed his eldest son to his god Chemosh as a final act of desperation to save his city from the attacking Israelites (2 Kings 3:26, 27). The law of Moses prohibited the offering of human sacrifices (Lev. 18:21; Deut. 12:31; etc.), yet this prohibition was flouted from time to time down to the days of Ahaz and Manasseh (2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6).

The Spirit of God came upon Jephthah in order that Israel might be saved from destruction. But the presence of the Spirit does not guarantee infallibility or omniscience. The one who receives the Spirit remains a free moral agent, and is expected to make appropriate progress in spiritual growth and knowledge. Jephthah, in his ignorance of what was right, rashly vowed an evil thing. In the same way, although the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon and wrought great deliverance through him, the Spirit did not prevent him from setting up an illegal worship. This narrative of Jephthah’s rash vow is related, as so many in the Scriptures are, without note or comment, indeed neither is needed. The only judgment possible in the case of Jephthah is that of condemnation.

Be the Lord’s. Apparently in the same sense that Jericho and its inhabitants had been devoted to Him (see on Joshua 6:15).

And I will offer. Some have endeavored to translate as “or” the Hebrew word for “and,” at the beginning of the phrase. They believe Jephthah to have said, in effect, “Whatever comes from the doors of my home to meet me as I return shall be devoted exclusively for the Lord’s service, if it is a human, *or*, if it is a clean animal, I will offer it as a burnt offering.” Since it was Jephthah’s daughter who came out to meet him, such interpreters say the first phrase applies, that is, “shall surely be the Lord’s.” Commentators who take this point of view explain Jephthah’s statement to mean that the girl never married but devoted herself to religious service for the rest of her life (see on v. 39).

It. Some commentators prefer rendering the pronoun, thus translated, as “Him,” thereby making the statement read, “I will offer [to] *Him* [God] a burnt offering.” It is true that the Hebrew pronoun, standing alone, may mean either “him” or “it.” But attached to the verb, as here, the pronoun must always be understood as the direct object of the verb. This invariable rule requires the translation, “I will offer *it* for a burnt offering.” Furthermore, Jephthah’s grief (v. 35), his daughter’s mourning (v. 37), and the impression made upon contemporaries (vs. 37, 40), require something entirely out of the ordinary, something more than a common burnt offering.

33. *Aroer.* There were two cities by this name in Transjordan, one (see v. 26) on the northern bank of the Arnon, and another near Rabbath-ammon, in Ammonite territory (Joshua 13:25). It is difficult to tell which city the writer intended here.

Minnith. Mentioned in (Eze. 27:17) as an exporter of wheat. Thought to have been near Heshbon.

Plain of the vineyards. “Meadow of the vineyards” or a proper name. *Abel-keramim* (RSV). Eusebius puts it 7 Roman mi. from Philadelphia (Amman). An identification with *Khirbet es-Şūk*, south of Amman, remains uncertain.

34. To Mizpeh. After having been invited back from exile to be the ruler in Gilead, Jephthah seems to have moved his family to Mizpeh and established his residence there.

With timbrels. It was the custom for women to greet their menfolk thus upon their victorious return from war (1 Sam. 18:6; cf. Ex. 15:20). Evidently other women accompanied Jephthah’s daughter, playing small tambourines.

Only child. The Hebrew is emphatic: “She only was an only child.” Jephthah’s family would become extinct in Israel, a thing that all Hebrews deplored.

35. He rent his clothes. A usual custom among Hebrews for expressing extreme grief (Gen. 37:29; 2 Sam. 13:19, 31; etc.).

Very low. When Jephthah saw his daughter the full significance of his rash vow rendered him weak, crushed.

Trouble me. This translation is far too weak. The word used here for “trouble,” *‘akar*, designates unusual grief, anxiety, or distress. All of Jephthah’s life had been a continuous succession of strife and trouble. Now his own precious daughter becomes the one who brings him the most poignant grief of all.

Opened my mouth. An expression used of making a vow (see Ps. 66:13, 14). To be binding, a vow had to be uttered (Num. 30:2, 3, 7; Deut. 23:23).

I cannot go back. It was considered a terrible wrong to go back on such a serious vow. There were two kinds of vows among the Hebrews—the simple vow, *neder* (Lev. 27:2–27), and the “devotion” or “ban,” *cherem*. Anything devoted to God by the *cherem* was not redeemable, became “most holy” to Him, and was to be put to death (Lev. 27:28, 29; see on Lev. 27:2, 28). Jephthah’s vow was a *neder*. Despite its sacredness, the one who vows it is not under obligation to keep it if it binds him to perform a wrong act (see PP 506). Jephthah’s vow was contrary to the express command of the law and therefore was not binding. However he felt that it was binding, and though he had sworn to his own hurt, he would not change.

36. She said unto him. Her father’s anguish and the intent of his words enabled the daughter, with a woman’s quick presentiment, to discern immediately what the nature of the vow was. He needed not to tell her.

Lord hath taken vengeance. Only dimly understanding the nature of God, she sincerely believed that the victory had been given because of her father’s vow, and that her sacrifice was an appropriate price to pay for such a victory.

37. Let me alone. The fulfillment of vows could be postponed for a definite purpose.

Bewail my virginity. The prospect of forfeiting the joy of wedding festivities or the pleasure of rearing children would be an especially bitter experience to a Hebrew maiden, particularly to one who was an only child. To Jephthah’s daughter it would mean that she and her father’s house would lose the hope of a share in the future glories of Israel.

38. With her companions. Her youthful friends, with whom she had often talked and dreamed of future marriage, now joined her in lamenting the sad fate that had befallen her.

39. According to his vow. This seems to imply that he offered her as a burnt offering, according to his vow (see on v. 31). It has been suggested that the author of the book of Judges, with fine reserve, drew a veil over the tragic act of sacrifice.

On the other view that Jephthah did not offer up his daughter (see on v. 31) might be mentioned the following:

About 1200 A.D. Rabbi Kimchi, followed by many writers since, promulgated the view that Jephthah did not sacrifice his daughter. He said that the words “offer it up for a burnt offering” (v. 31) would apply only if whatever met Jephthah should be a sacrificial animal. He interpreted verse 39 to mean that Jephthah built his daughter a house where she was secluded from men the rest of her life, in sacred celibacy, in order that all her moments might be dedicated to the Lord, and that there the virgins of Israel went annually to visit her and bewail her fate.

Against this interpretation of Kimchi’s is the fact that the customs of that day knew nothing about treating women as nuns. Perpetual virginity and childlessness were looked upon as the greatest of misfortunes. There is no law, usage, or custom in all the OT that in the least intimates that a single woman was looked upon as the more holy, more the Lord’s, or more fully devoted to Him than a married woman. It was no part of the law of the priests or Nazirites. Deborah and Huldah, both prophetesses, are particularly mentioned as married women. Moreover, if the daughter were to remain unmarried in harmony with such an unknown custom, the case would not have been so tragic as it is portrayed here; neither would she have needed two months to bewail her virginity, for she would have had the rest of her life to do that. All Jewish and Christian interpreters up to the time of Kimchi held to the natural intent of the passage, namely, that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter as an offering to the Lord, a thing that Abraham almost did to his son Isaac under different circumstances.

She knew no man. Or, “she had not known man.” See Gen. 24:16 for identical words in Hebrew.

It was a custom. These words really belong with the following verse.

40. To lament. The marginal reading of the KJV gives “to talk with.” This marginal reading may reflect the thinking of those who believed that the daughter was not sacrificed, but kept apart in a seclusion which was broken only once a year when virgins in Israel could talk with her. The Hebrew verb, *tanah*, does not mean “to talk with.” Basically it means “to recount,” with the idea of talking about some event, hence “to commemorate,” “to celebrate.” The same verb is translated “rehearse” in Judges 5:11. The Hebrew verb occurs only in these two passages in the Bible. The LXX translates *tanah* “to lament.”

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

29, 32 PP 558

CHAPTER 12

¹ *The Ephraimites, quarrelling with Jephthah, and discerned by Shibboleth, are slain by the Gileadites. 7 Jephthah dieth. 8 Ibzan, who had thirty sons and thirty daughters, 11 and Elon, 13 and Abdon, who had forty sons and thirty nephews, judged Israel.*

1. Northward. Hebrew, *ṣaphonah*. Gilead was to the east and northeast of Ephraim. Because of this, most Bible translations give the word as a proper name. There was a

town by the name of Zaphon in the Jordan valley, on the Gilead side, not far from Succoth (Joshua 13:27).

Passedst thou over. They do not mean that he crossed the Jordan, but that he marched against the Ammonites.

Didst not call us. Both here and in Judges 8:1–3 the tribe of Ephraim is presented in an unfavorable light. They were passive in time of oppression, and arrogant when others had taken the initiative and won the victory. Gideon had been conciliatory toward them and overlooked their boorishness, but Jephthah was in no mood to become subservient to them. Their alleged grievance stemmed from their desire to be regarded as the leading Israelite tribe. Their pride led them to resent having had no part in the glory of the victory. Moreover, they denied to Gilead the right of separate action, let alone that of choosing a ruler.

2. When I called you. The previous account did not mention an appeal to the tribes in western Canaan to help drive back the oppressors. The narrator mentioned only the salient facts.

3. Wherefore then? The men of Ephraim were more guilty, if possible, than were the Ammonites. It is difficult to tell whether Jephthah's answer was given in a conciliatory spirit. At any rate the Ephraimites did not seem to be satisfied with his reasoning, for civil war ensued.

4. All the men of Gilead. Probably including all the Israelites east of the Jordan. Signal fires and trumpets could pass the mustering call to the villages of the eastern tribes within a very short time.

Because they said. In spite of Jephthah's reasonable answer, the men of Ephraim seem to have precipitated the conflict by intolerable taunts.

Fugitives of Ephraim. The full force of the taunt is lost to us inasmuch as we do not know all the details. It seems that fierce jealousy had sprung up between the Manassites living east of the Jordan, and the rest of Manasseh and their close kinsmen, the Ephraimites, in western Palestine. The Manassites in the east had allowed their close clan and family connections to languish and were throwing in their lot more and more with the pastoral tribes of Reuben and Gad among whom they lived. For this schism in clanship the Ephraimites were taunting them, calling them fugitives, that is, the dregs and lower class of the tribal relatives in the west.

5. Passages of Jordan. Only through these fords could the men of Ephraim quickly cross the Jordan to their own territory.

Ephraimites which were escaped. In Hebrew these are exactly the same words with which the Ephraimites had so shortly before taunted the men of Gilead—"fugitives of Ephraim." Now the Ephraimites are the fugitives.

Art thou an Ephraimite? There was considerable traffic across the Jordan fords. The object of the questioning was to distinguish between the fugitives and the harmless travelers and merchants. The men who had boasted of their tribe shortly before were now willing to deny any connection with it in order to save their lives.

6. Say now Shibboleth. The word was probably selected at random as an example of a word beginning with the letter *shin*. Any other word beginning with that letter might have served as well. The Hebrews east of the Jordan pronounced the initial letter *sh*, as in *shibboleth*. The Hebrews in Canaan gave it a soft sound, *s*, as in *sibboleth*. It was one of those differences in dialect that had grown up through the years.

7. Six years. Jephthah's rule was the shortest of all the judges. It may be that he fell in battle while fighting other Israelite enemies.

8. Ibzan. The meaning of this name is unknown. It occurs in the Bible only in this place.

Of Beth-lehem. Though this may have been the Bethlehem of Judah, it was probably the Bethlehem in the tribe of Zebulun, the present *Beit Lahm*, 7 mi. (11.2 km.) northwest of Nazareth (see Joshua 19:15, 16).

Ibzan, along with the other two judges mentioned here, Elon and Abdon, and the two whose names are given in ch. 10:1–5, Tola and Jair, form a group of judges of whose exploits nothing is related. The briefest details about them are given: their names, where they lived, how long they ruled, the place of their burial. In the case of three of them (Jair, Ibzan, and Abdon) the number of their children and evidence of their wealth are added.

9. He sent abroad. Ibzan had a definite policy of strengthening his position by intermarriage. He gave his 30 daughters in marriage to men of other tribes, and also took daughters for his 30 sons from other tribes than these. This information is recorded to show that Ibzan was a great man with wide influence. Moreover, that he lived to see his 60 children married indicates that he had a long and prosperous life, although he ruled Israel only 7 years. These were probably the last 7 years of his life. Perhaps he attained his position of judge through his policy of building up friendships in other tribes by intermarriages. Evidently there was peace during the period of his rule.

11. Elon. The name means "a terebinth." Orientals were often named after trees. In Gen. 46:14 and Num. 26:26 the name occurs as one of the families of Zebulun.

13. Abdon. Literally, "servant."

Of Hillel. Signifying, "praising." This is the first occurrence of a name that later became famous among the Jews. It occurs only here in the Bible. The later Hillel was the leader of one of the Jewish schools of thought shortly before the time of Christ, and is regarded as the greatest of all the Jewish rabbis.

A Pirathonite. Pirathon, according to v. 15, was in the land of Ephraim, so we may conclude that Abdon belonged to the tribe of Ephraim. In 1 Chron. 8:23 a man named Abdon is included in the tribe of Benjamin, but since the name was common, the Abdon who became judge could well have been an Ephraimite (see 1 Chron. 27:14). The town of Pirathon is generally thought to be the modern *Far'athā*, 7 mi. (11.2 km.) west by south of Shechem.

14. Forty sons. Only the male members of the family are mentioned. He doubtless had many daughters as well. Again, the large size of his family is cited as an evidence of his wealth and high rank. It also testifies to the widespread polygamy among those who could afford numerous wives.

Nephews. This should be "grandsons." The Hebrew says literally, "sons of sons." The KJV used the word "nephew" in the old English sense of grandson, which use is now obsolete. Therefore in that version wherever the word "nephew" occurs, we should read "grandson."

15. Mount of the Amalekites. The Amalekites made their home in the Negeb, in the south of Judah. However, this place name indicates that at one time they had advanced as far north as this region in Ephraim on an incursion that caused their name to be attached

to that particular area. It may have been that they were defeated there, or that a small number of them may have been allowed to settle in that area in earlier times.

CHAPTER 13

1 *Israel is in the hand of the Philistines.* 2 *An angel appeareth to Manoah's wife.* 8 *The angel appeareth to Manoah.* 15 *Manoah's sacrifice, whereby the angel is discovered.* 24 *Samson is born.*

1. Did evil again. For the chronology of this apostasy and of the Philistine oppression, see pp. 35, 36.

Philistines. They have been briefly mentioned by the author of Judges several times previously (chs. 3:31; 10:7–11). They were, like the Hebrews, invaders and settlers in Palestine. Philistines, in limited numbers, were in the land as early as the time of Abraham (Gen. 21:32). But their major wave of migration into Palestine probably occurred at the beginning of the 12th century B.C. along with that of other non-Semitic tribes from Asia Minor and the Aegean Islands (see p. 27). According to archeological accounts these Peoples of the Sea, as they were called by the Egyptians, were turned back at the gates of Egypt by Ramses III about 1194 B.C. In honor of his success in repelling the invaders, Ramses III built a large temple at Thebes (now called *Medīnet-Habu*) and covered its walls with pictures of the battle, among them being realistic representations of Philistine warriors. After the defeat of the Peoples of the Sea by the Egyptians part of this migration settled in the maritime plain of Canaan, where they largely adopted the religion, customs, and language of the Canaanites.

The Hebrews called the Philistines *Pelishtim*, and their territory, *Pelesheth*, which word, by the evolution of language, became “Palestine.” The Philistines settled chiefly in the five ancient cities of the plain, Ekron, Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Eglon, which became the centers of the Philistine confederacy. From there the Philistines spread out into the Shephelah, and eventually, during the time of Saul, controlled all western Palestine as far north as the plain of Esdraelon and the Sea of Galilee. From the time of Samson they were the main challengers of the Israelites until they were subjugated by David.

For further information on the Philistines, their origin, and history, see on Gen. 10:14; 21:32; and Vol. II, pp. 27, 33, 34, 47.

Forty years. There has been a question as to whether this period was prior to, or included, the days of Samson and perhaps extended beyond to the battle of Ebenezer in the days of Samuel (1 Sam. 7:13). Samson was born in the early years of the Philistine oppression (PP 560). According to some authorities, this oppression was contemporaneous with the Ammonite oppression and judgeship of Jephthah (see p. 128).

2. Zorah. The name means “disease.” It is the modern *Ṣar‘a*, situated in the Shephelah 14.7 mi. (23.5 km.) west of Jerusalem. In Joshua 19:41, as here, it is called a city of the territory of Dan, but in Joshua 15:33 it is called a city of Judah. The city was probably first given to Judah and later assigned to Dan (see on Joshua 19:41). The city is generally mentioned in connection with Eshtaol (Judges 13:25; 18:2, 8, 11; etc.); the inference is that the tribe of Dan was largely confined to the environs of these two cities. Zorah was an ancient Canaanite town, being mentioned in the Amarna Letters. Its proximity to Philistia exposed the inhabitants to Philistine influence.

Manoah. The name, which means “rest,” may express the yearning of the Israelites in those troubled days. It does not occur elsewhere in the Bible.

Barren. Barrenness, to a Hebrew woman, was the greatest of calamities. Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel were likewise barren. So was Hannah, the mother of Samuel, and Elisabeth, the mother of John the Baptist.

3. Angel of the Lord. This was the Angel that had appeared to Moses, Joshua, and others, and was none other than Christ (see EGW, Supplementary Material, on vs. 2–23).

Thou shalt conceive. Some of the greatest men of the Hebrew nation were born of erstwhile barren women. Children like these were in a special sense the gift of God, and were given because the parents were fully devoted to the Lord and would rear them in such a way as to enable these children to be special instruments of the Lord in behalf of His people.

4. Drink not wine. The mother was to take special care not to use any wine or intoxicating drink made from grapes. The health and character of this child, given by a direct providence of God, were to be safeguarded by the temperate habits of the mother from the time of its conception.

Strong drink. See on Gen. 9:21; Num. 6:3; 28:7; Deut. 14:26.

Unclean thing. It is likely that many Israelites were careless in observing the Levitical laws of clean and unclean foods; otherwise no special mention of this would have been necessary.

5. No razor. A person under the Nazirite vow was not to cut his hair during the time of the vow. When the vow expired, he was to cut off all his hair and present it at the tabernacle (Num. 6:18). The unshorn hair of the Nazirite was the visible token of his consecration, reminding both himself and the people of the sacred vows he had assumed. The long hair was thus the mark of the Nazirite as the linen garment was of the Levite.

A Nazirite. The word means “separated,” or, “devoted.” It is probably a shortened form of the full title, “devoted to God.” The Nazirite vow was a voluntary and temporary vow, carried out only for a specified period of time (see on Num. 6:2). Its significance consisted in a consecration of the life to God. The outward manifestation of the vow consisted of three things: (1) abstaining from all products of the grape, including the wine or the fruit, fresh or dried (Num. 6:3, 4); (2) allowing the hair of the head to grow, untouched by a razor or cutting instrument (Num. 6:5); (3) refraining from approaching a dead body under any circumstances lest defilement be incurred (Num. 6:6).

The Nazirite vow was highly regarded among the Hebrews (Amos 2:11; Lam. 4:7). Samuel was a Nazirite (1 Sam. 1:11), as was also John the Baptist (Luke 1:15; DA 102). Some have thought that perhaps Joseph (see Gen. 49:26, where the word translated “separate” is the same word used of Samson here in this verse and of all the Nazirites) was a Nazirite.

Begin to deliver. Although the Nazirite vow was ordinarily voluntary and temporary, in the case of Samson the dedication was externally imposed upon him by divine command and began from his birth. God had a plan for Samson’s life, a plan whereby, through the leadership of Samson, Israel should be delivered from Philistine bondage. Both the vow and the parents’ faithful training were to influence the child to recognize this plan of God for his life and lead him to consecrate himself to fulfill it. In Samson, one devoted to God, the Lord designed to set before the people an object lesson of the

strength they might attain to overcome their foes through submission and service to their God.

Unfortunately, as Samson grew to manhood, he refused to bring his life into harmony with the plan God had for him. He became self-willed and careless morally. The weakness of Samson's own character rendered him unfit to achieve complete deliverance from the Philistines. That task had to be left to others at a later time. However, through his feats of strength the eventual downfall of the Philistines was begun.

God has a plan for every life. Yet such a plan does not preclude free choice. Men must still choose as to whether they will follow the divine blueprint or not. Samson's experience is an illustration of how a man may completely thwart the high destiny planned for him.

6. *Man of God.* This was a term generally used of prophets (Deut. 33:1; 1 Sam. 2:27; 9:6–8; 1 Kings 12:22; etc.). Manoah's wife probably did not imagine that her Visitor was anyone else than a prophet, although she was awe-struck by the majesty of His appearance to the extent that she did not venture to talk to Him, even to ask Him His name or whence He came. Compare v. 10 where she again speaks of Him as "the man," and v. 16, which states that Manoah did not know He was a heavenly visitant. An Eastern custom is that, when meeting a stranger, the first question usually asked is concerning the name.

7. *Day of his death.* In telling her husband of the message concerning the child, she added these words which were implied, in the Angel's statement to her (see v. 5).

8. *Intreated the Lord.* Manoah feared that he and his wife might make some mistake in carrying out the instruction, so he sought for further guidance and information. He took his problem to God in prayer, asking the Lord to direct the Man of God to come back and teach them further regarding the training of this promised child. One cannot but admire the faith of Manoah, who fully accepted and believed the Angel's word. He took for granted that in due time this promised child would be given to them. His faith is in sharp contrast to that of the priest Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, who asked for a sign when the angel of the Lord appeared to him and promised him a child (Luke 1:18). Blessed are those that have not seen, and yet, like Manoah, have believed.

9. *God hearkened.* God honored the prayer of this loyal Danite, even as He ever honors the prayers of believing hearts.

12. *Let thy words.* Manoah desired to show his confidence in the message of the Stranger by expressing in this way not only his desire but also his belief that the promise would be fulfilled.

How shall we order? Literally, "What shall be the rule [ordinance, rule of life] for the child?" This prayer should be upon the hearts of all parents. Their children are, in a special sense, gifts from the Lord. Upon fathers and mothers rests the responsibility of training these little ones, so that they may fulfill the destiny divinely planned for them. Rearing children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4) is one of the most important and difficult tasks of life. The work cannot be successfully accomplished without divine assistance. Parents should seek the Lord for guidance, that they may know how to order their children.

In asking how to order the child, Manoah used the term "we." The Messenger had given the original instructions to his wife, but Manoah rightfully looked upon himself as

essentially connected with the wise management of the promised child. The joint endeavor of parents is essential to the proper training of children.

How shall we do unto him? Literally, “What shall be his work?” Manoah’s questions were directed toward a confirmation of what the Angel had told his wife on the first meeting, namely, that the child was to be a Nazirite, fully devoted to God’s service, and that his work would be to deliver Israel.

14. All that I commanded. The Messenger did not answer Manoah’s question further than to repeat the instructions He had given to the woman at the first visit. The Lord sent the Angel back, not to give additional instructions, but to strengthen the faith of Manoah and to help prevent seeds of doubt from growing in his heart. The parents were urged to obey carefully the directions they had received, that the promised child might be fully consecrated to God for the work he was to do.

15. Made ready a kid. A kid was generally regarded as a special delicacy. Manoah was offering the very best entertainment for the unknown Messenger in an effort to induce his Visitor to remain for a time as their guest, so that they might learn more about Him, and perhaps obtain more information from Him.

16. If thou wilt offer a burnt offering. The Angel refused the offer of food, but suggested that Manoah might offer the kid as a burnt offering to the Lord. It is unlikely that Manoah was contemplating offering a sacrifice to the Messenger, for the record states clearly that he did not know that it was an Angel of the Lord. Yet the angels who visited Abraham and Lot partook of earthly food (Gen. 18:8; 19:3).

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⁶Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Jdg 12:15). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



17. What is thy name? Manoah was becoming increasingly uncertain about the nature or identity of the mysterious Messenger who had made the remarkable promise to them. His refusal to eat food and the suggestion that they offer a sacrifice puzzled Manoah to the extent that he put a direct question to Him, hoping to learn His identity.

Do thee honour. If the word of the Messenger should come true, Manoah and his wife would want to honor Him in a special way—perhaps by naming the child after Him, or by publishing abroad His prophetic power, or by a gift. As it was, they did not even know who He was, and so could not hope to honor Him later.

18. Why askest thou? Jacob, after recognizing that the one with whom he had been wrestling was a heavenly visitant, had asked the Angel His name and received no reply (Gen. 32:29). Again this Angel (see on v. 3) refused to identify Himself, this time to Manoah. In contrast, Gabriel identified himself by name to Zacharias (Luke 1:19).

Secret. The Heb. *pel'i* is an adjective meaning “wonderful.” The noun form of the same word is translated “Wonderful” in Isa. 9:6 (see also Ex. 15:11; Isa. 25:1; 29:14; etc.). The word denotes something extraordinary, ineffable, beyond human understanding. The best illustration of the meaning of this word is the way it is used in Ps. 139:6: “Such knowledge is too *wonderful* for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.” The verb is used in the sense of “surpassing understanding” (see Job 42:3; Ps. 131:1; Prov. 30:18). It is probably because of this meaning of the word that the translators of the KJV rendered it here as “secret.” What is evidently meant is not that the name of the Angel was “Secret” or “Wonderful,” but that His name was beyond Manoah’s power to understand.

19. The angel. This word is supplied, as indicated by the italics, which means that it has no corresponding form in the Hebrew. A different sentence structure is possible (see below).

Did wonderously. This is the same root word in Hebrew as that used to describe the name of the Angel. Inasmuch as the word is in the participial form, it may be better to apply it to “Lord,” making the passage read “offered upon the rock to Jehovah, the one working wonders” (see Ex. 15:11). The reference seems to be both to the wonder God was going to work in the birth of the promised child, as well as to the miraculous disappearance of the Angel in the fire (v. 20).

20. Flame went up. Perhaps not a miraculous fire like that in ch. 6:21. The Angel declined the food, but suggested a burnt offering. Manoah probably supplied the fire when he “offered” it.

Ascended in the flame. This wonder was calculated to increase the faith of the couple in the promised birth of the child. They were to recognize that God was still working wonders in their days.

21. Manoah knew. He had suspected before that their Visitor was a messenger from God; now he had indisputable proof.

22. Surely die. See on ch. 6:22.

23. Pleased to kill us. Her reasoning was logical. Manoah was so filled with dread that he thought death would be their lot for having looked on the Angel. His wife, with quicker, keener insight, quickly realized that the Lord would not make them the promise of a child to deliver Israel, and then destroy them for having looked upon the Messenger through whom He had sent the message. Her deduction was correct. God does not act in a capricious way with His people. The thoughts He thinks toward us are thoughts of peace and not of evil (Jer. 29:11).

24. Samson. Heb. *shimshon*. The meaning of the word is disputed. Some think it is derived from *shemesh*, “sun.” Near Bethshemesh was a seat of the worship of the sun.

However, it hardly seems likely that Manoah's wife would name her promised son after a heathen deity. The root word also has the meaning "to serve" in the closely related Aramaic dialect. On the other hand *shimshon* may simply be descriptive of the parents' joy at his birth, or of Samson's "sunny" disposition as a child.

The Lord blessed him. God's blessings are of many kinds. Those here alluded to included gifts of health, strength, and courage.

25. Spirit of the Lord. See on ch. 11:29. Samson knew that he was consecrated to God for a special function. His long hair and habits of abstinence that set him apart from the rest of the people were constant reminders of that. But human efforts and advantages are not sufficient of themselves to accomplish the work of God (see AA 53).

Began to move him. The Hebrew verb means "to disturb," "to disquiet," "to agitate." Promptings from the Lord began to stir him up, to agitate his mind to plan action against the oppression of the Philistines. Samson felt impelled to exercise his unusual strength in deeds of valor.

At times. Some have thought that Samson used his unusual strength at times in this period to perform deeds of valor that the author does not describe, and that his beginning exploits are thus briefly referred to.

Camp of Dan. This is a proper name. Sometimes it is not translated, but given as Mahaneh-dan, as in ch. 18:12. The name originated in the migration of the hard-pressed tribe, which is described in chs. 18 and 19. Dan's camp, or Mahaneh-dan, was near Kirjath-jearim (ch. 18:12), 8 mi. north of Zorah (see ch. 18:2).

Eshtaol. The exact location of this town is not known. It is always mentioned in connection with Zorah, which has led to the supposition that they were twin towns (see on v. 2). It has been thought to be the modern *Eshwa'* 2 mi. (3.2 km.) northeast of Zorah (see on v. 2).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–25PP 560–562

2–8PP 560

3, 4 Te 90, 292

4 CD 218; DA 149; MH 333

5 PP 567

7 MH 372; Te 233

12 Ed 276; MH 379; PP 573

12–14PP 560

13, 14 AH 255; CD 218; MH 372

14 Te 90, 269

21, 22 1T 410

24 PP 562

CHAPTER 14

1 *Samson desireth a wife of the Philistines.* 5 *In his journey he killeth a lion.* 8 *In a second journey he findeth honey in the carcase.* 10 *Samson's marriage feast.* 12 *His riddle by his wife is made known.* 19 *He spoileth thirty Philistines.* 20 *His wife is married to another.*

1. Went down. The elevation of Zorah is 1,170 ft. (356.7 m.), whereas that of Timnath is only 800 ft. (243.9 m.) (see vs. 5, 7, 10). Conversely, "went up" is used for the return journey (see vs. 2 and 19).

Timnath. Probably *Tell el-Batâshi*, about 4 1/2 mi. (7.2 km.) southwest of Zorah. The city was assigned to the tribe of Dan (Joshua 19:43 cf. Joshua 15:10). It was then under the control of the godless Philistines.

A woman. The word we might expect here is “maiden” or “damsel” (see Gen. 24:14, 16) instead of “woman.” The latter term may indicate that Samson’s new acquaintance may have been a widow or divorcee, although young (PP 562), or else the expression is used to show contempt for her (see Judges 16:4). Many of the incidents in the life of Samson centered about his relations with women. Though strong physically, he was weak in moral power and self-control. Early contact with idolaters had broken down the citadel of his soul.

Of the Philistines. The Hebrews had been forbidden to intermarry with the native inhabitants of the land (Ex. 34:16; Deut. 7:3, 4).

2. Told his father. As was proper, Samson consulted his parents about his desire for marriage. However, this may have been prompted more by the fact that it was the custom for parents to arrange the details of marriage than by his respect for their wishes.

3. Is there never? Or simply, “is there not?” Samson’s parents objected to his proposal and urged that he take a wife from among the Hebrews rather than from the pagan Philistines. Such a marriage must have been especially repugnant to Manoah and his wife because they knew Samson had been called to do a special work for God. It is the duty of God-fearing parents to seek to deter their children from entering into marriage with those of a different faith. It is their responsibility to lay down religious principles while their children are yet young that will lead them to make the proper choice later.

Get her for me. In the Hebrew the word “her” is emphatic. Samson brushes aside the objections of his parents. He will brook no interference with his inclinations. He refused both parental and divine counsel.

It is unfortunate that so many youth do not feel obligated to weigh carefully the counsels of their parents when planning marriage. On the other hand, parents may be in danger of being too peremptory in their denials. God pleads with men to follow the way of right, but He does not prevent a contrary choice. In the same way a limit is placed upon the rights of parents to control the wills of their children after their children have reached the age of accountability.

She pleaseth me well. Literally, “she is right in my eyes.” His infatuation blinded him to her unsuitability for becoming a life companion and partner for one who was to be a leader in Israel. A wise, God-fearing person will recognize that there are other important criteria to be considered, such as basic attitudes, religious convictions, ideals.

4. Of the Lord. Even in this unfortunate marriage God was overruling the course of events for the furtherance of His own designs. He makes even the weakness and poor judgment of men to redound to His praise.

He sought. The subject of the sentence is probably “God,” although some believe the “he” refers to Samson.

An occasion. Literally, “a meeting,” that is, perhaps an opportunity to provoke hostilities. It may be that Samson had neglected to take up his life assignment when the proper time came, and some event was needed to stir him to activity. God used the incidents connected with the marriage as the “occasion.”

Had dominion. See chs. 10:7; 13:1.

5. His father. Evidently Samson's parents had submitted to the insistent will of their son, and though painfully aware of the fateful consequences of such a marriage, accompanied him to Timnath to make the proper marriage arrangements.

A young lion. The Heb. *kephir* indicates a young lion in full prime. There is a word, *gur*, which designates a lion whelp, not yet full grown. Lions were once common in the deserts south of Judah and in the Jordan valley, but have disappeared since the time of the Crusades.

6. Spirit of the Lord. The Spirit dispenses various gifts and skills (Ex. 31:2–5; 1 Cor. 12). Samson's special gift revealed itself in his superhuman strength.

Rent him. By his supernatural strength Samson destroyed the animal barehanded, perhaps by dashing it against the ground or tearing its hind legs apart as ancient Babylonian pictures depict their mythical hero Enkidu as doing. David (1 Sam. 17:34–37) and Benaiah (2 Sam. 23:20) later performed similar feats of prowess.

Rent a kid. That is, as easily as an ordinary man might rend a kid. The point is on the ease with which Samson accomplished the feat, not on the manner.

Nothing in his hand. Samson was not on a hunt, and hence unarmed. Besides, the Philistines followed a policy of forcing the Hebrews to go about unarmed by prohibiting any Hebrew from operating as a smith (1 Sam. 13:19–22).

Told not his father. This reticence may show that at this time, at least, he was free from all boastfulness.

7. He went down. No mention is made of the participation of his parents in the arrangements. Some have thought that although they had started with Samson, they probably refused to go through with their part of the affair.

8. After a time. Nothing in the record indicates how long a time elapsed between the visit of the previous verse and this trip to consummate the marriage. A betrothal might last a year.

In the carcase. By nature bees avoid all decomposition and putrefaction. Evidently jackals and vultures had stripped the flesh from the bones and the heat had dried them out. Only the mere skeleton remained. In the cavity formed by the ribs a swarm of bees had built a nest. Herodotus tells how the skull of an enemy, which the people of Amathus had fastened over their city gate, served as a hive for bees.

9. In his hands. It was the honeycombs that Samson carried in his hands, eating as he went (see 1 Sam. 14:29). No doubt this was a violation of Samson's Nazirite vow, for the fact that the honey was taken from a skeleton would render it unclean, and unclean food was forbidden (ch. 13:7).

To his father. The parents evidently had consented to go to the wedding, although their presence is not mentioned there. Samson had turned aside momentarily to see the lion.

10. A feast. Literally, "a drinking," or "occasion for drinking." The term was used for feasts because drinking was one of the main attractions. This drinking feast was to last for seven days (v. 12). As a Nazirite, Samson was forbidden to use strong drink. However, he had taken one step in uniting with the world, and, as is usual, it was easier for him to take another. It seems that in all matters except his unshorn hair he treated lightly his Nazirite vows.

11. When they saw him. The reason why this clause is added is somewhat obscure. It probably means "when they saw what a powerful person he was." Some of the Greek

translations read “because they feared him.” The two readings would be very similar in the Hebrew.

Thirty companions. Ostensibly, these companions were to serve as wedding attendants, but probably they were really there for defense, for the Philistines knew of Hebrew hostility toward the oppression. Usually the groom provided himself with attendants, but in this case Samson was in a strange city, marrying under the disapprobation of his own people; so the Philistines provided him with wedding attendants. There were sufficient attendants, they believed, so that if the powerful Hebrew groom should try to make trouble, they could subdue him. On the other hand, the 30 companions may have been provided as a bodyguard for the marriage festival.

12. A riddle. The use of riddles at feasts is an ancient and favorite amusement. Often large sums were offered for their solution. It always added to the gaiety and interest of the occasion.

Thirty. Obviously, because there were 30 attendants (v. 11).

Sheets. Better, “linen garments.” Believed to be large rectangular pieces of fine linen, which might be worn as an outer garment during the day or as a sleeping wrap for the night. Reference is made to these garments in Prov. 31:24 and Isa. 3:23. Others take them to be undergarments.

Change of garments. These were festal garments, or clothes for dress (see Gen. 45:22).

13. Give me. Samson’s offer was fair enough. Should he lose, he would have to provide 30 sets of garments. Should they lose, they would have to provide only one each.

14. Meat. Heb. *ma’akal*, “food.” “Meat,” in Old English, means simply “food.” The riddle was put in Hebrew poetic form. So was the retort Samson gave (v. 18).

15. On the seventh day. The LXX says “on the fourth day.” This corresponds to the latter part of v. 14, which states that they tried to solve the riddle for three days.

Declare unto us. They meant that Samson would declare it through his wife, who was to secure the information and then tell them.

Lest we burn thee. The Philistines were brutal and treacherous even to their own people. Rather than lose a wager, they forced the woman with threats to aid them. It was no idle threat, for later they actually burned her and her father (see ch. 15:6).

16. Wept before him. Samson’s riddle had the effect of making the wedding feast not a season of rejoicing, but of distress. The weeping, fretting bride and sullen guests should have served as a warning to Samson that Philistine marriages brought distress and sadness in their train.

Tell it thee. Samson replies that he had not even told his parents and that his unwillingness to disclose the riddle to her, whom he had known but a short time, was no proof of lack of love.

17. The seven days. Perhaps we should accept here the marginal reading, “the rest of the seven days,” because according to v. 14 pressure was not put on her by her countrymen until after three days. This marginal reading is based on the fact that in Hebrew part of a period may stand for the whole. On the other hand, the manuscripts and versions agree on the reading “seven,” and the statement may be designed to be general, showing the emotional state of his wife during the entire feast. She herself had probably been pleading from the first to be let in on the secret. In fact, the wedding attendants may

have immediately resorted to the strategy of obtaining the information through her, and when it was not forthcoming in a few days resorted to the threat recorded in v. 15.

Lay sore upon him. Literally, “she urged him insistently.” He had conquered the lion, but this Philistine woman was too much for him.

18. Before. To heighten their triumph, the Philistines waited until the last moment before they revealed the secret that they had forced from him through his wife. Their answer, like the riddle, is in poetic form.

Plowed. Samson quickly perceived his wife’s treachery, and showed that he did so by quoting the poetic proverb of plowing with another person’s heifer. They had not used their own wit to find the answer to his riddle, but had learned the secret from one close to and belonging to him. The statement is an assertion that if they had acted fairly he would have won the wager.

19. The Spirit of the Lord. The Lord sought to stir up Samson, so that he would lay hold of the work to which, from his birth, he had been called.

Ashkelon. This city was about 23 mi. (36.8 km.) away, a journey of 7 or 8 hours.

Slew thirty men. Perhaps he surprised them at a festival of some sort during the night hours, and thus was able to procure from their corpses the festal garments necessary to pay his wager.

His anger was kindled. He was angry, both at the Philistines and at his wife, who had proved her treachery to him during their marriage feast. For this reason he would not stay with her, but returned to his father’s house.

20. To his companion. He was probably the main one of the 30 attendants, the one who stood next to him, the one called “the friend of the bridegroom” in John 3:29. To her treason the woman added infidelity. She may not have had any love for Samson in the first place.

Such were the results of a course in direct violation of the express commands of God. If Samson had profited by his experience and had permitted the emptiness and disappointment of sin to drive him to seek a higher way, God might yet have accepted him and permitted him to lead Israel in full triumph against the Philistines. However, God continued to work through Samson to the extent that Samson permitted himself to be used.

The experience of Samson indicates that God does not immediately forsake His servants when they fall into sin. He may continue to bless their efforts, even though they are living in conscious disregard of some specific requirement of God. Inasmuch as no one is without fault, God would be unable to use human instrumentalities in His work, if He could bless only the efforts of the sinless. Since this is true, no one should interpret the blessings of heaven as proof that God approves of all his deeds.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–20PP 562–564

1–3PP 562

5, 6, 19 PP 564

10–20PP 563

CHAPTER 15

1 *Samson is denied his wife.* 3 *He burneth the Philistines’ corn with foxes and firebrands.* 6 *His wife and her father are burnt by the Philistines.* 7 *Samson smiteth them hip and thigh.*

9 He is bound by the men of Judah, and delivered to the Philistines. 14 He killeth them with a jawbone. 18 God maketh the fountain En-hakkore for him in Lehi.

1. Wheat harvest. In that region the wheat harvest was from mid-May to mid-June. The season is mentioned because of the incident related in vs. 4 and 5 regarding the burning of the ripe grain.

A kid. A kid may have been a customary present on such an occasion (see Gen. 38:17).

Chamber. That is, women's quarters. Although this woman was now the wife of another man, she was still in her father's house.

2. Hated her. The father insisted that he thought Samson would have nothing to do with the woman after she had betrayed him, so he had given her to another man. The father might reasonably have concluded that inasmuch as Samson had left in anger and had not returned, he had deserted her.

Younger sister. Because the father had taken the dowry, he now offered to give Samson a younger daughter. He understood well the strength of Samson, and with anxiety and fear he sought to free himself from a difficult situation. He was afraid of what Samson would do in return for the injustice done him.

3. Concerning them. Literally, "to them." Although Samson had been talking with the father, others may have been in the room. Possibly the women themselves could hear his voice in their apartments, and might have been excitedly discussing the situation.

More blameless. This sentence may be translated, "This time I shall be innocent as regards the Philistines." It was an important moment in Samson's life. Ordinarily he might have retaliated against the fearful father or against the treacherous wife. But Samson may have believed that they had acted toward him as they had because of pressure from the Philistines, who in turn hated him because he was an Israelite. In that event he might determine to get at the root of the trouble by striking against the Philistine tyranny in general. The Philistines had invited trouble. In this light Samson felt blameless for now engaging in hostilities in earnest.

4. Foxes. Heb. *shu'alim*. Also used of jackals. Since foxes do not feed on dead bodies, jackals are believed to be intended in Ps. 63:10. It was probably jackals that Samson caught, for they live in packs and are much easier caught than foxes.

At that season of the year, expressly declared to be the time of wheat harvest (v. 1), which comes at the end of a long dry season, the fields would be as dry as tinder. Samson probably carried out his scheme at night when his actions would be unobserved and no one would be on hand to quench the flames.

5. With the vineyards. The low vines of the grapes and the dry trunks of the olive trees would burn easily. Samson was probably not fully aware of the extent to which the conflagration he was starting would grow. When the fires were over, miles of blackened fields were all that remained where the day before were rich harvests.

6. They answered. Probably the Timnites or, from what follows, it may have been the Hebrews themselves—offered the information that it was Samson who had started the fires. Not only did he have to contend with the Philistines singlehanded, but he also had to cope with the lethargy and the open opposition of his own people who were willing to cooperate with the Philistines rather than join him in warfare to throw off the foreign yoke.

Burnt her. Although the Philistines vented their anger upon the woman and her family whose conduct had led to all these troubles, they also intended by that act to insult Samson himself. They destroyed in savage retaliation the woman of whom he had once thought so much, and to whom he had hoped to return.

7. Done this. Samson said in effect, “If you are going to act like this [in taking cowardly vengeance upon a defenseless woman], I will take further vengeance upon you.”

8. Hip and thigh. The origin of this figure of speech is obscure. It was a proverbial expression for “completely,” or “entirely.” We are not told what company of Philistines Samson smote, but in all likelihood it was those who burned his wife and her father.

Top. Literally, “cleft,” or “fissure” (see Isa. 2:21; 57:5). The place was probably an inaccessible cave in a large rock cliff. Such a location explains the expression “went down” in this verse and the “brought him up” in v. 13.

Etam. The site of this cave is unknown. Two towns by this name are mentioned in the Bible: (1) *Khirbet el-Khôkh*, southwest of Bethlehem and not far from Tekoa (2 Chron. 11:6), also near *‘Ain ‘Atan*, where “Solomon’s pools,” which now supply Bethlehem, are situated; and (2) an unidentified place in the southern part of Judah, in the tribal allotment of Simeon (1 Chron. 4:32). The cave here mentioned, however, has not been identified with either of these places.

9. Pitched in Judah. Samson was of the tribe of Dan, but this tribe had received its inheritance within the tribe of Judah. The Philistines, in battle array, went up against the Hebrews to take vengeance for the terrible damage Samson had inflicted.

Lehi. Literally, “jaw.” This locality likely did not carry that name until after the events which the author is about to relate (see on v. 19). The site of Lehi is not known. Those who locate Etam near Bethlehem prefer a location near there, but those who place Etam near Zorah favor a location in the *Wadi eş-Şarâr* in the vicinity of Zorah and Timnath.

10. Why are ye come? The tribe of Judah were evidently living in contented servitude. For that reason they seem to express surprise at being overrun by the Philistines. After all, Samson was not of their tribe, and they had not shown any resentment against the Philistines.

To bind Samson. The Philistines were apparently not planning war against all the Hebrews. They sought Samson only. But evidently they had brought enough men with them so as to protect themselves against any surprise attack.

11. Three thousand. The men of Judah knew of Samson’s prowess and probably for that reason came in such force to surround him and prevent his escape. Even at that they would not have dared approach him if they had not felt assured he would not harm his own countrymen.

Knowest thou not? The men of Judah reproached Samson for rebelling against the Philistine rule and for exposing them to danger by hiding within their borders. This reproach, and their readiness to give him over to the Philistines, bear evidence of the low ebb Judah had reached. Once so powerful in war, they now lay powerless in moral decay. The loss of their religion was accompanied by a loss of their patriotism. What might not these 3,000 have achieved on the side of Samson if they had been like Gideon’s 300?

12. Swear. Samson was unafraid of the Philistines. He believed God would help him against them when the time came. He was, however, distrustful of his own kinsmen, and demanded an oath that they would not harm him lest he be compelled to destroy them also.

13. Two new cords. See ch. 16:11. They wanted the strongest ropes possible, for they knew of his tremendous strength.

14. Shouted against him. Literally, “shouted [as they ran out] to meet him.” When the word reached the Philistine camp that their enemy was in bonds and was even now being dragged into their camp by his cowardly countrymen, they went wild with joy and ran to meet him, so anxious were they for revenge.

15. New jawbone of an ass. Rather it was a “moist” or “fresh” jawbone, one from an animal that had recently died. Hence it was not yet brittle enough to break easily. As Samson broke the cords binding him, he probably glanced hurriedly from side to side for some weapon. Before his enemies could still their shouts of exultation, he was among them dealing deadly blows. In a panic the Philistines fled, but ere they could gain the safety of the open plain, 1,000 of their number had fallen before the irresistible strength of Samson.

16. And Samson said. So extraordinary was the slaughter that Samson celebrated it with a poem of victory. In verse form the poem would appear as follows:

“With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps,
With the jawbone of an ass, have I slain a thousand men.”

The poem also displays an interesting play on words, which is apparent in the Hebrew but untranslatable into English. The sounds for “ass” and “heap” are identical. The couplet is transliterated so that the effect may be illustrated:

Bilchi hachchamor chamor chamoratayim

Bilchi hachchamor hikkiti 'eleph 'ish.

17. Ramath-lehi. Signifying “the hill of the jawbone.”

18. Sore athirst. In that region the heat becomes intense, especially in harvesttime, and water is scarce. Evidently Samson’s exertions had almost completely exhausted him. He probably feared that the Philistines would regroup or get reinforcements and attack him in a short time. If they should find him in his present condition, he would not be able to resist them. By these circumstances God was trying to teach Samson that apart from divine aid he could not deliver Israel. This great victory was due to God’s help. Samson could not even get off the battlefield in his own strength, and would perish unless God came to his aid.

Called on the Lord. When he was in great difficulty Samson resorted to prayer. Only here in this time of crisis, and in a similar situation at the time of his death (ch. 16:28), is there a record that Samson prayed to God. Each time the Lord answered his prayer. What a tragedy that his prayer life was so deficient! He might have been a mighty spiritual leader had he been more spiritually-minded. But only when he feared death was nigh, as far as the record goes, did he call upon God, and as a result he was a spiritual pygmy. It is a good thing to call upon God in the day of trouble, but the pity is that so many ignore Him the rest of their days.

19. An hollow place. Heb. *maktesh*, “mortar.” It was a circular depression perhaps in the ground that resembled a mortar in shape. In the Hebrew the word has the definite article; therefore we must translate it, “the hollow place.”

In the jaw. Heb. *ballechi*. Literally, either “in the jawbone,” or “in Lehi.” At first reading of the passage in the KJV one might think that the hollow place that God made was in the jawbone that Samson had used as a weapon. Many have so interpreted this passage. Evidently the translators of the KJV interpreted it that way. However, at the close of the verse the statement is made that the “hollow place” is “in Lehi [*ballechi*].” Since this Hebrew expression is identical with that which earlier in the verse is translated “in the jaw,” the choice of translation must be determined by the context. It seems more reasonable to adopt the reading that employs the proper name. The sentence would then be translated: “God clave the hollow place [or mortar] that was in Lehi.”

For similar instances of miraculous provisions of water in time of destitute need see Gen. 21:18, 19; Ex. 17:6; Isa. 41:17, 18.

There came water thereout. God performed a miracle by causing a rift in the bottom of the hollow place that was there, so that a spring issued out of it. The water from this spring refreshed Samson so that he was able to return home at once.

En-hakkore. Literally, “the spring of the caller.” Samson gave this name to the spring because it sprang up when in his great need he called on the Lord for water.

20. Judged Israel. Samson did not rule over all 12 of the tribes, but seemingly only over the Hebrews in his area. The people probably accorded him the sort of vague prerogatives they were willing to give to a military hero.

In the days. This seems to mean in the 40-year period of Philistine oppression (see p. 128).

Twenty years. Evidently this 20-year period of Samson’s leadership of the southern Hebrews was near the end of the 40 years of Philistine oppression, for Samson was born in the early years of the oppression (PP 560). The fact that the Hebrews did not join Samson in the revolt against the Philistines but remained subservient to them suggests that his rule may have been confined strictly to his own small locality. (see ch. 16:31).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–20PP 563–565

8–15, 20PP 564

CHAPTER 16

1 *Samson at Gaza escapeth, and carrieth away the gates of the city.* 4 *Delilah, corrupted by the Philistines, enticeth Samson.* 6 *Thrice she is deceived.* 15 *At last she overcometh him.* 21 *The Philistines take him, and put out his eyes.* 22 *His strength renewing, he pulleth down the house upon the Philistines, and dieth.*

1. Gaza. This was the southernmost of the Philistine cities and the largest of them. It was an important center because the caravan routes from the desert joined the highway from Egypt there. It was around 30 mi. (48 km.) from the region of Samson’s other adventures. Samson trusted in his great strength, which had inspired the Philistines with so much fear, and ventured into the very heart of enemy territory.

An harlot. It seems that Samson had become almost completely devoid of moral principles. At least he continually allowed his impulsive desires to triumph over them. One wrong step led to the next. Samson had made his first mistake in the choice of wrong

associations in his youth. His tragic marriage with the Philistine woman was the result. Now he sank still lower in the moral scale.

2. And it was told. These words are supplied by the translators but evidently correctly so. All the ancient versions have them.

Samson is come hither. Samson's boldness may have led him to make little attempt to conceal his identity or his presence. The Philistines were eager for revenge and lost no time launching plans to apprehend the one who was leading the opposition to them among the Hebrews.

Compassed him in. Perhaps they did not know what house he was in. At any rate, the gates of that strongly fortified city were closed, and the Philistines felt sure of their prey.

3. Arose at midnight. Conscience-stricken (PP 565) Samson arose at midnight. Perhaps he suspected that he had been recognized, and desired to leave while the streets were deserted. He found the gates closed. The walls of the city were too high to scale. Would God, despite the great sin that he had committed, intervene to deliver him?

Took the doors. God had not yet forsaken Samson. Whether the guards were asleep or had wandered off for the moment or even offered some resistance, is not stated. Samson seized the bar that was locked through gateposts and, exerting his magnificent strength, uprooted the posts.

Went away with them. The Hebrew actually says "pulled them up."

Carried them. Samson carried away the whole mass in one piece, the doors and the entire framework.

Before Hebron. Hebron is about 38 mi. from Gaza. However, it is not stated that Samson walked with the gates and bars on his shoulders all the way to Hebron. He simply deposited them on a hill on the way to Hebron.

4. Valley of Sorek. The valley in which Zorah, Samson's home, was situated. The valley is believed to be the modern *Wadi eṣ-Ṣarâr*, in which are found ruins called *Sūrîk*, which are thought to be the ancient Sorek. The town of Sorek was about 2 mi. from Zorah.

Delilah. Generally thought to be a Philistine woman, but it is not so stated. Judging by the bribe offered her, some have thought that she was not a Philistine, for had she been of that nationality, they would probably have used threats against her instead of bribery, as in the case of Samson's wife (ch. 14:15).

5. Lords of the Philistines. Probably all five of the main Philistine rulers (see on ch. 3:3) joined in this effort to accomplish by bribery what they had failed to do by force of arms.

Wherein his great strength. Even though Samson must have been large in physique, the Philistines recognized that his strength was far beyond what one would expect from mere physical greatness. They imagined that he probably possessed some magic charm that was the secret of his power. Perhaps Samson at some time had boasted that there was a secret source of his strength.

Bind him. The Philistines hated Samson too much to kill him. His misery and their joy would be too short-lived. They wanted to keep him in chains to mock and deride him.

Eleven hundred pieces. After the manner of the time, these would be unminted silver bullion pieces, each one weighing a shekel. There were five lords of the Philistines. According to this verse, each of them was promising to pay Delilah that amount for tricking Samson into betraying the secret of his extraordinary strength. By money values

of that age, this was an enormous bribe; it shows how eager the Philistines were to capture Samson. The 5,500 shekels thus paid to Delilah would be equivalent to the price of 275 slaves, at the rate paid for Joseph (Gen. 37:28).

6. Mightest be bound. Samson must have had some suspicions of Delilah's motives; hence he resorted to deceiving her by falsely declaring the secret of his strength.

7. Seven. This number was thought by some to possess particular power. It may be noted that Samson's hair, the last evidence of his consecration to God, was divided into seven locks (v. 13). Perhaps he was already unconsciously betraying a part of his secret.

Green. Heb. *lach*, "moist," "fresh," "green," the meaning depending on the object to which it is applied.

Withs. The exact meaning of this Hebrew word is uncertain. It is used for bowstrings and tent cords. It probably refers to strings of gut made from the intestines or sinews of animals.

As another man. That is, having no more strength than an average man of the same size.

8. She bound him. No doubt Delilah kept up her banter the meanwhile, acting as if it had no sinister import.

9. Men lying in wait. The Hebrew has the singular here, but likely in the collective sense as in Judges 20:37; Joshua 8:14. Some have doubted that Delilah would have been able to conceal more than one spy without Samson's becoming aware of it, but this is questionable.

Philistines be upon thee. It is not stated that the men came out of hiding when this cry was uttered, but at least the circumstances were such that Samson had the clearest evidence that the Philistines were leagued with Delilah (see PP 566).

Tow. The weak, broken part of flax which is usually discarded because of its weakness.

10. Delilah said. We need not necessarily infer that Delilah made her second attempt immediately. She probably waited a few days until Samson's suspicions would be allayed. However, at what she thought was the next opportune moment she complained of his want of kindness in refusing to tell her his secret.

11. New ropes. This had already been tried by others but had failed (ch. 15:13, 14). Again, by specifying ropes that had never been used or consecrated for another purpose, Samson may again have distantly touched on his secret, his consecration to God as a Nazirite.

Delilah hoped that in this new disclosure Samson had not deceived her. She cunningly bound him again, but Samson broke the ropes as though they were but threads. By these deceptions Samson perhaps hoped to deter Delilah from further questioning. But with the tremendous bribe ever in her mind, she was not to be put off so easily. And Samson, whose tremendous strength made him overconfident, was playing more and more into the charmer's hands.

13. With the web. With almost incredible levity and folly, Samson here goes to the very verge of the true secret, and suffers his hair to be woven in Delilah's loom. No doubt she flattered him by praising his manly strength, and professing a lover's curiosity, insidiously asked again for the secret of his strength. Samson lightly turned her aside by suggesting that if she wove his hair into the loom, perhaps using it as the woof, he would not have the power to free himself.

14. Fastened it with the pin. Literally, “she struck with the pin.” This seems to have been a technical expression for the operation in weaving which beats the woof tightly into the warp. That this pin was evidently the weaver’s shuttle is inferred from the expression “pin of the beam” which follows.

Went away. The Hebrew verb used here basically means “to pull up” as in v. 3. The word was commonly used for pulling up tent stakes, from which usage it also took on the meaning “to depart.” Either meaning fits the context here. At any rate, in Samson’s efforts to free himself from the loom in which his hair was securely fastened, he tore the loom to pieces, and probably went off angrily with the web or unfinished cloth still in his hair and with the shuttle and parts of the loom clinging to it.

15. Said unto him. Again, some interval may have elapsed. If the former scene had caused temporary estrangement, Samson was now willing to return to Delilah. She doubtless still continued her jest that she had no ulterior motive in seeking his secret, but used her failure in discovering that secret as a means of reproaching him for his lack of love for her. “Instead of loving me as you profess to do,” she insisted, “you are mocking me.” And thus she continued to wear away his reluctance to reveal the truth about his great power.

17. Told her. The narrative creates an impression of almost incredible stupidity on the part of Samson. At any time he could have put an end to Delilah’s questioning by leaving her and returning to his home. But Samson’s chief fault was not so much stupidity as sensual infatuation. In the ruin and shame that this sensual weakness brought upon him, and the way in which, step by step, it led him to forfeit God’s miraculous gift of supernatural strength, lies the chief moral of the story. Three times he had proved his vast strength. Now for the fourth time he proves his immense folly. God had planned a noble destiny for him, but weakness in placing sexual gratification foremost in his thinking marred God’s blueprint for his life and eventually brought him to an inglorious end.

18. When Delilah saw. Samson was not so far gone as to be able to reveal the great secret without some sense of awe and shame. Delilah quickly divined that at last she had secured his secret, so she sent immediately for the rulers of the Philistines, knowing that now she would be able to deliver Samson to them and collect their bounteous reward.

19. Afflict him. That is, by annoying him and causing him pain.

20. Shake myself. The phrase seems to suggest “shake myself free.” Because of this expression, many have believed that Delilah had bound Samson in addition to shearing off his hair. The context, however, does not make this clear. The Philistines would want some evidence that his strength was really gone before venturing to face him, but his reaction to Delilah’s afflictions (v. 19) would have provided the proof.

The Lord was departed. Samson had many times violated his Nazirite vow by partaking of wine (PP 565) and by defiling himself in other ways, but in it all, by keeping his long hair, he indicated at least some interest in maintaining his consecration for God’s service. There was no virtue in the hair itself, but since it was a token of his loyalty to God, its sacrifice to the whim of a lawless woman caused God to withdraw the gift of supernatural strength. God had borne long with Samson’s folly, but now that he had broken the vow in every way, the Lord withdrew His blessing and protection.

21. Put out his eyes. An appropriate punishment. Samson’s unsanctified desire to gaze upon the beauties of unholy women had lured him on from one unhallowed

experience to another, and finally became the immediate cause of his capture by the Philistines.

The Philistines chose to spare Samson's life, evidently to sustain their vanity at their great achievement. Yet they feared that at any time Samson's tremendous strength might return. To be safe in such event, they put out his eyes, probably by burning them with a hot iron or by puncturing them with a sharp instrument. Both methods were used in antiquity.

Grind. They made him turn a heavy mill, probably such as usually was turned by an ox or an ass.

22. To grow again. Samson recognized his folly in revealing his secret and allowing his hair to be cut. He renewed his consecration to God. Because of this resolve, God began to restore his strength.

23. A great sacrifice. This usually was accompanied by a great feast or celebration.

Unto Dagon. Not much is known about this deity. Various explanations have been given for the meaning of the name. Some have derived it from the Hebrew and Canaanite word *dagan*, meaning "grain." If so, Dagon would be one of the many agricultural deities of Palestine. But the name may also be a derivative of the word *dag*, "fish." Both explanations are ancient. The fact that coins have been unearthed in the Philistine city of Ashkelon with the image of a deity represented as half man and half fish leads us to accept the latter explanation (see PP 567). Reference is made to Dagon's head and hands in 1 Sam. 5:4.

Our god hath delivered. Most ancient nations attributed their victories to the might of their national deity.

24. When the people saw him. It is possible that Samson was on exhibition at the mill where he was grinding grain and that tours were conducted through the prison, that all might see their hated enemy close at hand.

They said. The words that follow are in the form of a jingle of four lines, each ending in rhyme in the Hebrew.

25. Call for Samson. That is, bring him from his prison into the assembly room forming part of the temple where the whole assembly could see him at once.

May make us sport. This does not necessarily mean that he would act like a buffoon, but that the appearance of their mighty enemy, now blind and in chains, would induce laughter and jeering.

26. The pillars. The house to which he refers was probably a flat-roofed porch or hall supported by columns that composed part of the temple.

27. Lords of the Philistines. These were the rulers of the five Philistine districts who had bribed Delilah to betray Samson (see on v. 5).

Upon the roof. These 3,000 people had probably sought a vantage point on the roof, so they could better watch the display as Samson was goaded and tormented before the crowd. This great weight would render certain the collapse of the roof if several columns were pushed over.

In the Hebrew the words for "men and women" are different in the first clause from those in the second. The distinction may be in classes, those on the main floor representing the nobility who sat with the "lords," and those on the roof, the common people.

28. O Lord God, ... O God. Samson used in succession three different names for God, namely 'Adonai, Yahweh, and 'Elohim (see Vol. I, pp. 35, 170). This is the second time the author mentions Samson's praying. We need not conclude that these were the only occasions on which he prayed, but if prayer had been more of a habit in his life, he might have been spared this shame and humiliation, and his life might have fulfilled the great destiny planned for him by God.

At once avenged. Some translate this passage so as to give the thought, "that I may be avenged for one of my two eyes." They then reach the conclusion that Samson died with an expression of grim humor upon his lips, so in keeping with his former bantering moods. According to this translation, even though he anticipated a great catastrophe by causing the roof to collapse, it would not atone for the loss of his sight, but it *would* suffice for one eye.

Though this translation is possible, the one given in the text, or the more literal one given in the LXX, the Vulgate, and the Syriac, "I will requite one recompense," is equally allowable and seems to fit the context better. Inasmuch as the bitter experiences of his humiliation had led Samson to repentance, it seems far more probable that he died in a serious mood—seeking to redeem, in the last moments of his life, his lost opportunities. The taunts attributing the victory of the Philistines to the heathen deity Dagon may have aroused his soul to vindicate the name of the God of Israel upon whom he himself had brought such dishonor.

30. Let me die. The Hebrew reads, "Let my soul die" (see margin). "Soul" is often used in the sense of "self" (Gen. 12:13; 27:25; 1 Sam. 18:1; Ps. 25:20; etc.). Samson was saying, "Let me [myself] die." It is the individual himself who dies, not merely his body. The designation "soul" calls attention to man as a unique "self" or "individual."

Bowed himself. It seems that Samson put his arms around the two middle pillars and pulled them together, throwing his entire weight upon them in addition to the pull of his arms. In this manner he might have either pulled them from their top or bottom supports or else broken them in the middle. Deprived of the two central pillars, the roof would begin to sag, likely causing the other columns, forced out of the perpendicular, to give way, crushing the assembled crowds below and hurtling those on the roof to their death.

The dead which he slew. This was the climax of Samson's struggle against the Philistines. In his death he had slain more Philistines, and greater ones (for among them were the rulers), than he had in his life.

31. His brethren. This is the only intimation that Samson had brothers. It may here refer to his nearest kindred, although like Hannah, Manoah and his wife may have had other children after the birth of Samson. They, and perhaps the rest of Samson's kinsmen on his father's side, came to Gaza when they heard of his death, and took the body back to his home town, where they buried it in the burying place of his father. Manoah and his wife may already have been dead, for in all, Samson's career of opposition to the Philistines lasted 20 years (see ch. 15:20). It seems that inasmuch as his kinsmen had not joined him in his conflicts with the Philistines, they were allowed to take the body for burial. Contrast the Philistine attitude in connection with the body of Saul (1 Sam. 31:10–13).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–31PP 565–568

1–6, 15PP 565

CHAPTER 17

1 *Of the money that Micah first stole, then restored, his mother maketh images, 5 and he ornaments for them. 7 He hireth a Levite to be his priest.*

1. Mount Ephraim. See on ch. 2:9 and 3:27. The exact place of Micah's home is left indefinite. The implication is that it was somewhere along the road that ran through the central mountains of Palestine in the territory of Ephraim.

Micah. Heb. *mikayehu*. This Hebrew form occurs only here and in v. 4. Elsewhere in this narrative the shortened form, *mikah*, is used. The full form of the name means "who is like God [Yahweh]," whereas the shortened form means merely "who is like."

Beginning with ch. 17, the remainder of the book of Judges is composed of two appendixes to the history of the preceding chapters. Up to this point in the narrative of the book of Judges the incidents have centered around apostasy, oppression, and deliverance. The remaining five chapters contain the record of two events that happened earlier in the judges period. They are related to show the lawless state of affairs during this era.

Chapters 17 and 18 give incidents in the life of Micah and show the migration of a part of the tribe of Dan from its allotted territory between the sea and the southern boundary of Ephraim to the northern section of Palestine adjacent to the territory of Naphtali. The narrative falls into three parts: (1) the origin of Micah's idolatry (ch. 17:1–6), (2) how a renegade Levite became the priest of this idolatrous worship (ch. 17:7–13), (3) how the image happened to be transferred to Dan along with the migration of a portion of that tribe. The events here described probably took place during the time of the elders that followed Joshua (ch. 2:6–10; see on ch. 18:29).

2. Eleven hundred. For an evaluation see on ch. 16:5.

Were taken. That is, stolen.

Cursedst. When the mother, who apparently was a wealthy widow living with her son, discovered that the silver had been stolen, she placed a fearful curse upon the money and the one who had taken it, perhaps never dreaming that her own son Micah was the thief. In placing the curse upon the money, she may have mentioned, as in v. 3, that she had set it aside for making an idol, thus prohibiting its use for other functions. The thief could not use it then, according to superstition, without suffering retaliation from the deity thus invoked.

In mine ears. Micah heard the terrible imprecation against the thief and perhaps immediately became troubled. In those times the power of a curse was believed to be very great and real.

I took it. Micah's confession may have been made in the hope of allaying his conscience and avoiding the anticipated effect of the curse.

Blessed be thou. People of ancient times believed that a curse could not be withdrawn. Micah's mother may have sought to avoid its effects by neutralizing it with a blessing.

3. Had wholly dedicated. The vehemence of her curse was due to the fact that the stolen money had been promised to "the Lord." Yet it is not entirely clear whether she said, "I have *now* consecrated it" as a thanksgiving for its restoration, or, "I had done so before it was stolen." Either meaning is possible.

Unto the Lord. Literally, “to Jehovah [*Yahweh*].” Thus this mother and her son were worshipers of the God of the Hebrews. But their worship had become degraded, as had that of other Israelites, to the point where they were making graven images to the Lord in direct violation of the second commandment.

A graven image. It is not clear whether the *pesel* (“graven image”) and the *massekah* (“molten image”) represent two distinct images, or one silver image adorned with sculptured ornament. Often an image was carved or graven from some base metal and then covered over by a more precious metal. One such image of a deity has been recovered from the city of Megiddo in Palestine and is now on display in the museum of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. That two images, however, were intended seems clear from ch. 18:17, where the two words are separated in a manner that the second can hardly be taken as an explanation of the first. Yet again in ch. 18:20, 30, only one is mentioned.

5. House of gods. The Hebrew may be translated “a house of God” (see ch. 18:31). It means that Micah built a private shrine or sanctuary.

Ephod. For a description of the ephod see on Judges 8:27; Ex. 28:6. The ephod was worn by the priest when inquiring of God.

Teraphim. These were household idols (Gen. 31:19, 34 [Heb. *teraphim*]; etc.; see on Gen. 31:19). They were also used as oracular instruments (Eze. 21:21; Zech. 10:2). Some of them seemed to be in human form (1 Sam. 19:13–17).

Consecrated. The Hebrew phrase thus translated literally means “filled the hand.” The expression may have originated from the custom of filling the hands of the newly consecrated priests with portions of the sacrifice.

One of his sons. Micah had apostatized so fully that he not only made an image and a private sanctuary but actually installed one of his sons as the priest of the sanctuary. Every one of these acts was in direct violation of the requirements of the law of Moses.

6. No king. Nor any recognized form of national government. Faithfulness to their unseen King would have provided Israel with national unity and with security against invasion and servitude to their heathen neighbors.

In his own eyes. Anarchy prevailed. Might was right, and the whims of men guided them rather than the instruction of the laws of God. The Israelites had been warned that they should not be ruled by such a philosophy of life (Deut. 12:8). The author placed these words in his narrative to explain how such violations of the Mosaic law could go on unrestrained or unpunished. This phrase seems to give evidence that the author wrote the book of Judges during the reign of a strong king who kept down lawlessness in various parts of his kingdom.

7. A young man. Strange as it may seem, this renegade Levite was probably the grandson of Moses (see on ch. 18:30).

Beth-lehem-judah. It was called thus to distinguish it from the Bethlehem in Zebulun (Joshua 19:15; see on Judges 12:8).

A Levite. How he could be a Levite and of the family of Judah as well, the record does not state. His mother may have been from one tribe and his father from the other. Bethlehem-judah may have been a center for Levites at that time (see v. 8; ch. 19:1, 18), although the place is not mentioned as a Levitical city in the list given in Joshua 21:4–41.

Sojourned. The Hebrew word indicates a temporary settlement.

8. Where he could find. Because of the prevailing apostasy the Israelites were not supporting the Levites with their tithes as they should. Inasmuch as the Levites were not given territory as were the other tribes, they could not, like the others, support themselves by their lands. This Levite was wandering about evidently looking for employment and some place to live.

10. A father. This was a title of respect given to prophets and other officers of distinction (Gen. 45:8; 2 Kings 2:12; 5:13; 6:21; etc.).

Ten shekels. The actual cash payment each year was small, but Micah also offered him, in addition, his food and apparel, as well as his lodging.

12. Consecrated. In installing this Levite in the office of the priesthood, Micah probably removed his son from the position of priest (see v. 5).

13. Seeing I have. Micah regarded it as a piece of good fortune that he had been able to obtain a Levite, one probably trained for the work of the sanctuary, to officiate at his private shrine. He had installed his son only out of need, but now he was pleased to have a professional, at least one originally called to the service of the sanctuary, filling the office. It gave him assurance that as a result of the Levite's ministry, Jehovah would prosper him in whatever he did. One can but pity Micah in his desire for God's blessing. Evidently unknowingly, he was violating the commandments of God in the method of his worship.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

6 1T 316

CHAPTER 18

1 *The Danites send five men to seek out an inheritance. 3 At the house of Micah they consult with Jonathan, and are encouraged in their way. 7 They search Laish, and bring back news of good hope. 11 Six hundred men are sent to surprise it. 14 In the way they rob Micah of his priest and his consecrate things. 27 They win Laish, and call it Dan. 30 They set up idolatry, wherein Jonathan inherited the priesthood.*

1. No king in Israel. The author probably wishes to explain that the following lawless action of the Danites could take place only because there was no sovereign king to keep law and order.

Unto that day. The allotted territory of Dan was on the lowland between the sea and the hills, but the Danites were unable to take it from the native inhabitants. They had been forced by the Canaanites to move back into the mountainous country (ch. 1:34).

2. Of their family. That is, of their clan, or tribe.

From their coasts. Better, "from their borders," that is, from all parts of their territory or settlements. It seems to have been a delegation that represented all parts of the tribe.

From Zorah. See on ch. 13:2, 25.

To spy out. They saw no prospect of being able to conquer the territory allotted to them; therefore they sent some of their tribe out looking for a place where they might be able to establish themselves with less difficulty. In doing so they went contrary to the original plan of God who had given them their inheritance within the inheritance of Judah. Trust in God would have enabled them to drive out the inhabitants of the land. The migration northward was an open admission of their unwillingness to follow the plan of God.

Lodged there. Obtained a night's lodging there.

3. Knew the voice. This may mean either that they had been acquainted with the Levite before he came to Micah and recognized his voice, or that they recognized he was a Levite by the way he spoke as he conducted a service in the private chapel. If he was the grandson of Moses (see on v. 30), the Levite may have been well known.

5. Ask counsel. Upon learning that the Levite had objects for consulting deity, an ephod and teraphim, the Danite spies requested that he inquire of the Lord whether their exploratory tour would turn out successfully.

6. Before the Lord. That is, your trip is under God's observation and favor. The word for "Lord" used here is *Yahweh* (Jehovah). The Levite was practicing the worship of the true God under forms of worship forbidden in the Mosaic law.

7. Laish. Called Leshem in Joshua 19:47. After the Danites captured it, its name was changed to Dan (Judges 18:29). Under this name it was often mentioned in the OT in the expression "from Dan even to Beer-sheba." It was Israel's northernmost settlement (Judges 20:1; 1 Sam. 3:20; 2 Sam. 3:10; etc.). It was near the foot of Mt. Hermon in the vicinity of the headwaters of the Jordan River. It was 26.7 mi. (42.7 km.) east by south from Tyre and 42 mi. (67.2 km.) southwest of Damascus.

Careless. Heb. *betach*, "securely," or "safely." The inhabitants of Laish were so isolated from troublesome people that they had evidently not built large walls for protection, nor had they defended their city by setting guards.

Manner of the Zidonians. The Sidonians were not a warlike people, but devoted themselves to commerce.

Far from. In actual miles it was not so far, but a mountain range lay between them.

No business. They were content to live an aloof, isolated, independent life.

9. Very good. Compare Num. 14:7; Joshua 2:23, 24. The scouts bore a unanimous report concerning the feasibility of migrating to Laish, and urged immediate action.

11. Six hundred men. The whole clan did not migrate, but perhaps only the more enterprising members and those who did not have suitable land. Inasmuch as the 600 men took their families with them (v. 21), the whole group probably numbered from 1,500 to 2,000 people.

12. Kirjath-jearim. Signifying "city of forests." From the days of Eusebius (4th century A.D.) it has been identified with *Tell el-Azhar*, near the modern *Karyat el-'Inab*, and about 8 mi. (12.8 km.) from Jerusalem on the road to Jaffa. Kirjath-jearim was originally one of the cities of the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:17). In the time of Samuel it was inhabited mainly by tribesmen from Judah.

Mahaneh-dan. That is, "camp of Dan" (see on ch. 13:25).

13. House of Micah. Probably as a proper name Beth-micah. Perhaps a settlement had grown up around Micah's home and sanctuary, and the village came to be known as Beth-micah. The migrating Danites camped in the vicinity on their way northward.

14. These houses. The term could be equivalent to "this village."

Consider. That is, consider what to do in order to get the ephod, teraphim, and graven image into the possession of the Danites. From what follows, it was evidently decided that one group would engage the Levite in conversation, and meanwhile others would slip into the shrine and appropriate to their own use its religious objects.

15. Saluted. Literally, "asked him of his welfare." A similar construction occurs in 2 Sam. 11:7 where David inquired as to how the war prospered.

16. Entering of the gate. Evidently there was a protecting wall around the small village, at least around Micah's house and shrine. The main body of the Danites engaged the Levite in conversation at the gate (see v. 17).

17. The five men. Meanwhile, the five scouts who had been in the houses before and knew their way around slipped away unobserved and stole the religious objects from Micah's shrine.

18. What do ye? When the five men returned to the gate with the cult objects, the startled priest cried out, "What are you doing?"

19. Upon thy mouth. The laying of the finger on the lips is one of the most universal of gestures (see Job 21:5; 29:9; Prov. 30:32).

20. Was glad. The perfidy of this Levite is noteworthy. He had first of all betrayed the pure worship specified by the law of Moses to minister before Micah's idol for the sake of the money offered him. Now he abandoned his benefactor who had treated him as a son (ch. 17:11) and gladly accompanied those who were taking that which did not belong to them. We must notice that none of the characters of the narrative were at all exemplary. Micah himself was a thief. The Levite was mercenary. The Danites were lawless freebooters.

In the midst. Apparently for concealment and protection.

21. Little ones. That this was a regular migration involving women and children is brought out only in this incidental way.

Carriage. That is, baggage, household effects, etc.

Before them. The women, as well as the children, were evidently placed in front of the armed men, since the Danites were apparently expecting pursuit. The women are not mentioned, though most certainly present (see Gen. 34:29; 2 Chron. 20:13).

22. In the houses. The theft of the images was regarded as the loss of the entire village and not of Micah alone.

Gathered together. Literally, "called out," that is, were called to arms.

23. Turned their faces. Probably without even stopping their march.

24. My gods. Micah does not scruple to call the images and teraphim his gods. Though a professed worshiper of Jehovah (see on ch. 17:2, 3), he held much of the pagan concept of deities.

Which I made. The expression is startling coming from the lips of an Israelite.

This that ye say. Micah was angry at their pretense of innocence and their attempt to throw the matter off as if it were a jest. Evidently the Danite force was far larger than Micah's, or the Danites would not have acted with such impudence (see v. 26).

25. Angry fellows. Literally, "men bitter of soul," that is, men of fierce dispositions and hot tempers. The Danites said in effect, "Do not bother us with your complaints lest you provoke hot-tempered men among us to attack you." See 2 Sam. 17:8, where the temper of David and his companions was compared to a she-bear robbed of her cubs.

27. Quiet and secure. The report given by the spies was accurate. The heartless Danites surprised the people of Laish, who were unprepared for resistance. The city was captured and burned to the ground.

28. Far from Zidon. The unfortunate colony was too far from Sidon, which was probably the mother city, to obtain any help, and, inasmuch as the inhabitants of Laish apparently had not made a league with any of the neighboring Aramaic tribes or towns, there were no friendly forces to come to their rescue.

Valley. Probably the depression through which the headwaters of the Jordan flow at the foot of the lowest range of Lebanon, north of the now drained Lake Huleh.

Beth-rehob. Signifying “house of the street.” A small state of Aramaic-speaking people, according to 2 Sam. 10:6, 8.

Built a city. Upon the blackened ruins of Laish the Danites built a new city. This was the manner in ancient times. Cities were built near sources of water and on the highest point feasible for purposes of protection. Accordingly, the same sites were chosen for successive cities.

29. Dan. They named their new headquarters city after the name of their tribe, which in turn was named after Dan, whom Bilhah, Rachel’s handmaid, bore to Jacob.

Dan’s location in the north is mentioned in the song of Deborah (ch. 5:17). This clearly shows that the migration described in chs. 17 and 18 took place in the earliest part of the judges period. It probably occurred during the days of the elders who followed Joshua, prior to the judgeship of Othniel. This migration and the idolatry described in connection with it were depicted by the author of Judges as illustrative of the apostasy and lawlessness of the period which resulted in the successive invasions and oppressions.

30. Jonathan. This is the first time the name is given of the Levite who served first Micah and then the tribe of Dan.

Manasseh. Some of the LXX manuscripts and the Vulgate give “Moses” instead of “Manasseh.” It is true that Gershom, unless another is referred to, was the son of Moses, not of Manasseh (Ex. 2:22; 18:3). In the Hebrew (not taking into account the vowel points) the only difference between the words for Moses and Manasseh is that the word for Moses does not have the letter *n*. It is an interesting observation that in the Hebrew manuscripts and Bibles, edited by the Masoretic scholars, the letter *n* is inserted in the name in a very odd way, being “suspended” above the line, strongly indicating that it was probably added later. The Hebrew Bible shows other instances of the “suspended” letters (Ps. 80:14; Job 38:13, 15). Ancient Hebrew rabbis and scholars, as well as modern scholars, both Jewish and non-Jewish, assert that this letter was inserted into the name Moses by rabbis or scribes to change it to Manasseh and thus spare the reputation of Moses by covering up the fact that his grandson was a renegade priest of the famed idol in the sanctuary at Dan. The Talmud says that Jonathan was the grandson of Moses, but because he did the deeds of Manasseh, the later king of Judah, the Scripture assigns him to the family of Manasseh.

Incidentally, if, as seems obvious, Jonathan was the grandson of Moses, the great antiquity of the event of ch. 18 is borne out by the fact that the Levite who served Micah was separated from Moses by only one generation.

Captivity. This probably refers to an unrecorded carrying away of the northern tribes by some foreign power, such as the Aramaean states of adjoining Syria. It could hardly refer to the captivity of the northern tribes by Assyria in the days of Tiglath-pileser, for the following verse in describing the same period says that the period was “all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh” (see 1 Sam. 1:24).

CHAPTER 19

1 *A Levite goeth to Beth-lehem to fetch home his wife. 16 An old man entertaineth him at Gibeah. 22 The Gibeonites abuse his concubine to death. 29 He divideth her into twelve pieces, to send them to the twelve tribes.*

1. In those days. The narrative recorded in chs. 19 to 21 depicts events in the early history of the tribe of Benjamin (see on ch. 20:28).

No king in Israel. Again the author prefaces his story of the lawless times and the intertribal strife with the explanation that such things were possible because there was no king in Israel to keep law and order. The tranquillity that exists in a country where law is respected and enforced is not always appreciated as it ought to be.

A concubine. She would be an inferior wife, lacking the regular status of even a second wife, and yet it was not a passing affair but seemingly a regular, lasting relationship, as shown by the fact that though her unfaithfulness to him was regarded as reprehensible, the husband sought later to effect a reconciliation.

Beth-lehem-judah. The Levite of the former story also had connections in Bethlehem (see on ch. 17:7).

2. Played the whore. Some of the LXX and Latin manuscripts read “was angry with him.” The Jewish Targums also support this reading. This idea is thought to fit the context better, for when the Levite went after her, he did not scold, but spoke kindly in order to placate her. However, these considerations do not seem to supply a sufficient ground for departing from the reading of the Hebrew.

3. Speak friendly unto her. Literally, “speak to her heart.”

She brought him. His approach was evidently successful, for she brought her husband into the house.

Rejoiced to meet him. The anxious hospitality of the concubine’s father indicates that the separation was probably regarded as a disgrace to the family. The father was outwardly apologetic and showed clearly his pleasure at the reconciliation by insisting that the Levite spend several days visiting with the family.

4. Retained him. The girl’s father strongly urged the Levite to stay longer than the Levite wished. The exaggerated hospitality of the father-in-law was designed, no doubt, to make a good impression on the Levite. Clearly he did not want the couple to quarrel again. He was doing his best to cement their relationship.

5. Comfort thine heart. The marginal reading “strengthen thine heart” is probably the more correct. The word here translated “comfort” means “to prop,” “to uphold,” “to support,” and in connection with “heart” may mean “to refresh [the body] with food.”

Morsel. This of course would be a polite way of saying it. It is likely that a feast was prepared.

8. Tarried. Again the father-in-law persuaded them to delay their departure until he could prepare another meal. Evidently it too was a large feast which the father-in-law did not hurry to prepare and during which there was much leisurely talk.

10. Would not tarry. The Levite, probably recognizing that it would be as difficult to break away the next day as it had been the previous two days, declined the invitation and started his journey homeward at this inappropriate hour. The results were disastrous, as the sequel shows.

The urgency with which, after three days, the father-in-law pressed the Levite to remain even though the latter was anxious to be on his way, was a form of politeness common to Eastern lands, but really contrary to the best form of hospitality. Equally objectionable is the host who hastens the guest who would stay. The author of Judges contrasts the exaggerated hospitality of the father-in-law with the utter lack of it which

the Levite soon experienced in Gibeah. As for the Levite, his experience was that of many weak and vacillating souls, first, unnecessary delay, and then overstrained hurry.

Jebus. This was the ancient name of Jerusalem, at this time a city of the Jebusites (see 1 Chron. 11:4, 5; see on Judges 1:21). The city is called Jebusi in Joshua 18:16, 28. The name Jerusalem itself is also ancient, occurring in Egyptian texts of the 19th and 18th centuries B.C. and in the letters of Canaanite rulers (Amarna tablets) written about 1400 B.C., as Urusalim.

11. Far spent. The journey from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, a distance of about 5 mi., would require about two hours.

12. Of a stranger. According to this statement, Jerusalem was still controlled by the Jebusites. The Levite feared lest in Jerusalem the rights of hospitality might be violated, and he be plundered. Therefore he hastened on, even though nightfall was right upon them, with the desire of reaching an Israelite settlement in which to spend the night. To be caught at nightfall in open country in those days was extremely dangerous. The incident illustrates that a smoldering hostility existed between the Israelites and the Jebusites of Jerusalem.

Gibeah. This city, the destination which the Levite had in mind, lay beyond Jerusalem, about 3 1/2 mi. (5.6 km.) on the road leading to the north. It was this Gibeah that later became the birthplace of Saul and the place where he established the political capital of his kingdom. The site is known today as *Tell el-Fūl*.

13. Ramah. This city lay 1.9 mi. (3 km.) beyond Gibeah. The two cities are on other occasions mentioned together (Isa. 10:29; Hosea 5:8). Perhaps the Levite knew that Gibeah did not have a good reputation, and that it would be better to proceed to Ramah if possible.

14. Belongeth to Benjamin. This is mentioned to make clear that it was not the Gibeah of Judah (Joshua 15:57) or the Gibeah in the hill country of Ephraim (Joshua 24:33, where the Hebrew for "hill" is *gib'ah*).

15. Turned aside. The village was off the main road.

In a street. Literally, "the broad place." This was the customary open space of each city, usually near the gate, that was used as the market place, where farmers and merchants displayed their wares. In small towns like Gibeah there probably were no inns and travelers were dependent upon the hospitality of the inhabitants. The Levite and his company sat down in the market place, hoping for someone to offer them shelter for the night.

No man. Although many of the inhabitants must have observed them sitting there as the darkness fell, no one was willing to fulfill the responsibility of hospitality which, according to ancient custom, was the first duty of the East (see Job 31:32; Matt. 25:35). Even though some may have been inclined to furnish the protection of their homes to the three travelers, they probably feared that such action might invite trouble for themselves from their debauched neighbors. The same neglect might have befallen the angels at Sodom but for the hospitality of Lot (Gen. 19:1-3).

16. Of mount Ephraim. The only person who took any interest in the travelers was not a native of the place. He was an old man who came from the same area as did the Levite, yet he manifested his hospitable interest before he had learned of that fact. He was merely a sojourner, a temporary resident of Gibeah. This point is mentioned by the

author to contrast the lack of hospitality on the part of the Benjamite inhabitants with the presence of it on the part of the Ephraimite sojourner.

17. *Whither goest thou?* Friendly natives still put the same questions to strangers in Palestine.

18. *House of the Lord.* Evidently the Levite referred to Shiloh, where the ark and the tabernacle were located. Shiloh was in Ephraim, perhaps quite near the home of the Levite, and thither he wished to go perhaps to present a thank offering to the Lord for restoring his wife to him, or to present a sin offering for her or for both of them, or even to perform his regular Levitical offices.

The LXX gives the phrase “to the house of the Lord” as “to my house.” In support of this reading is the clear implication of the context which indicates that the Levite was on his way home. On the other hand, both objectives might easily have been in the Levite’s mind.

19. *No want.* The Levite had plenty of food for himself, for the people with him, and for his pack animals. All he asked was shelter and the protection that would go with it.

20. *All thy wants.* The old man courteously insisted on providing food as well as lodging for the strangers.

21. *Gave provender.* By caring for the animals first they gave evidence of their humane attitudes.

22. *Sons of Belial.* Literally, “sons of worthlessness.” The expression was used to describe worthless, evil, low-minded, lawless fellows, vile scoundrels. In later times the word Belial came to be used as a proper name, a synonym for Satan (2 Cor. 6:15), but it is doubtful whether it had that signification here. Hence the word should perhaps be translated and not written as a proper name.

Beset the house. The resemblance between this and the equally repulsive narrative of Gen. 19:8 is close. These men were worse than brutes. Their unnatural lust and infamy were recalled with horror for centuries (see Hosea 9:9; 10:9).

23. *Do not so wickedly.* To violate the right of hospitality and protection of their neighbor was in itself a heinous crime. In Eastern lands it was a rigid rule that after hospitality had been extended to a wayfarer, he was to be safe from harm.

Folly. This word was frequently used for an outrage against the laws of nature, particularly of a sexual nature (Gen. 34:7; Deut. 22:21; 2 Sam. 13:12).

24. *My daughter.* The similarity between this verse and Gen. 19:8 is marked. Like Lot, with whose experience he was no doubt familiar, the old man offered to sacrifice his maiden daughter to the lust of these vile brutes rather than to have his guest treated in this shameful way. Although we can appreciate his desire to maintain the code of hospitality, yet the nature of his offer fills us with horror. It reflects the ancient low estimate of womanhood. The man must be judged, in part at least, by the conceptions of the times in which he lived (see on Gen. 19:8).

25. *Took his concubine.* The Hebrew verb translated “took” is *chazaq*. It signifies “to seize,” or “to take by force.” The husband seized the defenseless woman and forced her to go out. Naturally the concubine would resist so shameful an act. Such cowardice on the part of the Levite was reprehensible in the extreme.

Day began to spring. As daylight approached, the evil men slunk away lest their identity become known.

26. At the door. With her last breath she had turned to the house where he was who should have been her protector, but who had deserted her in the hour of need. She had strength to crawl just to the door, but probably not enough strength to knock for admittance. Outside the door she fell down dead.

27. Upon the threshold. Her hands were upon the threshold as though they had been stretched out toward her husband in one last agony of appeal.

28. Let us be going. After such an experience, the Levite spoke with such apparent nonchalance that we are shocked, and we are prepared to expect almost anything from him. It is, perhaps, no wonder that the poor woman had run away from him in the first place.

29. Divided her. There certainly would have been a less gruesome way to call the tribes together to execute judgment upon the evil men of Gibeah; but by this time the character of the Levite has become sufficiently apparent for us not to be too surprised by his grisly method of notifying the tribes.

Together with her bones. The word “together” has been supplied by the translators. It is better to omit it, and to translate simply “according to her bones.” The idea is that some of the pieces were larger, some smaller, according as the joints would permit the body to be divided.

Coasts. That is, “borders.”

30. No such deed. The Levite calculated correctly. The story of the deed aroused the moral indignation of all the Hebrews in Palestine. They recognized that here was such a foul deed that not even the unsettled times and a lack of a central ruling authority could serve as an excuse to let it go unpunished.

CHAPTER 20

1 The Levite in a general assembly declareth his wrong. 8 The decree of the assembly. 12 The Benjamites, being cited, make head against the Israelites. 18 The Israelites in two battles lose forty thousand. 26 They destroy by a stratagem all the Benjamites, except six hundred.

1. Went out. That is, went out prepared for battle (see ch. 2:15; etc.).

As one man. It was a spontaneous assembling, the result of their serious discussion of the problem with one another.

Dan even to Beer-sheba. That is, from the northernmost settlement of Hebrews, the city of Dan (see ch. 18), to Beer-sheba, the most southern Israelite settlement on the fringe of the Negeb in southern Judah. The expression occurs seven times in the Bible (Judges 20:1; 1 Sam. 3:20; 2 Sam. 3:10; 17:11; 24:2, 15; 1 Kings 4:25), and once as Beersheba even to Dan (1 Chron. 21:2).

Land of Gilead. This expression seems to include all the Hebrews east of the Jordan (see chs. 5:17; 11:5, 6; etc.). All the Hebrew settlements sent delegations, with the exception of the city of Jabesh-gilead (ch. 21:8, 10).

Unto the Lord. This does not necessarily mean that they brought the ark or tabernacle hither, nor yet that Mizpeh was Shiloh, where the ark was situated. David was made king in Hebron “before the Lord” (2 Sam. 5:3), and yet there was no ark there. The phrase may mean that they assembled to discuss together what course of action to take, and that they asked God to guide them in their deliberation (see on Joshua 24:1; see also on Judges 20:27).

Mizpeh. This settlement is often identified with the hill *Nebi Šamwīl*, 5 mi. (8 km.) northwest of Jerusalem and 3 mi. (4.8 km.) from Gibeah, the scene of the crime. The hill is about 3,000 ft. (914 m.) high. More likely is the identification with *Tell en-Naşbeh*, 7 1/2 mi. (12 km.) north of Jerusalem. Mizpeh in Benjamin served at other times as a gathering place of the tribes (1 Sam. 7:5–17; 10:17). This was the first great gathering of all the Hebrews since the days of Joshua.

2. Chief. Literally, “corners,” or “corner-stones.” The men who were the pillars, the mainstays, of the tribes all came to Mizpeh.

3. Benjamin heard. The word that the Israelites were assembling to punish the crime may have reached the Benjamites of Gibeah as soon as the first groups began to arrive at Mizpeh, or even before they got there. It may also be that the Benjamites received the same summons as the other tribes (see ch. 19:29).

Tell us. The words were addressed to the Levite. When the number of Israelites swelled to a throng, they asked the Levite to give them a firsthand description of the crime of which the men of Gibeah were guilty.

5. To have slain me. Although the previous chapter did not indicate this threat, it would probably have followed the carrying out of the intent recorded in ch. 19:22.

8. All the people arose. After the Levite had recounted the narrative of his outrage, the whole assembly united in protest and agreed that none of them should return to their homes until it was avenged.

9. Go up. Their decision was to go up in battle array against the town of Gibeah and demand the surrender of the guilty.

10. Ten men of an hundred. With so large a number of people encamped in one place, it was difficult to procure enough food for all. One tenth of the entire force, chosen perhaps by lot, were assigned the task of going out to gather food for the assembled forces. Thus one man was to provide food for nine men at the front.

11. Knit together as one man. Literally, “united together as a club [society].” It was remarkable that so great unanimity could be achieved in view of the divergent interests of the various Hebrew tribes.

12. Through all the tribe. Before resorting to force, the assembly expostulated with the tribe of Benjamin, urging them to recognize the enormity of the sin committed, and to deliver up the guilty men that they might be put to death. It was a fair proposition. Those that were guilty ought to pay the penalty for their misdeeds.

13. Put away evil. The sin committed was so grave that it called for the death penalty. Only in that way could the tribes be free from guilt (see Deut. 13:5; 17:7; 19:19–21).

Would not hearken. The tribe of Benjamin preferred civil war to giving up their criminals. Tribal pride and solidarity in this instance served to uphold and defend men of the worst sort.

14. Gathered themselves. The tribe of Benjamin displayed tremendous courage, but it was in an evil cause.

15. Twenty and six thousand men. This number was less than at the census taken at the end of the 40 years of sojourn in the wilderness (Num. 26:41), by more than one third. The same decrease is shown also in the other tribes (see on Judges 20:17).

16. Seven hundred. These expert marksmen with the sling were probably the same as the 700 men in their prime who, according to the previous verse, represented Gibeah in the army of Benjamin. It would not be likely that 2 different groups of 700 men would be

mentioned together, and yet the possibility of such a coincidence is by no means excluded.

At an hair. This expression merely implies extreme accuracy. The Benjamites were also noted in later centuries as being skilled in the use of slings (1 Chron. 12:2). In secular history men are reported to have become so expert in the art that the stones they flung came with as much force as if hurled from a catapult, and pierced shields and helmets.

Miss. Heb. *chata'*. This is the same word that in nearly all of its more than 200 occurrences is translated "to sin." Its basic meaning is to miss the mark, and when it is used for the idea of "sin" it describes the act as one of missing the divine mark that God has for His people—the mark of perfection defined in the law of God.

17. Four hundred thousand. The Israelite population was declining. In the first year after the Exodus from Egypt the fighting men are said to have numbered 603,550 including 35,400 from Benjamin (Num. 1:46, 37). In the 40th year after the Exodus they are said to have numbered 601,730, including 45,600 Benjamites (Num. 26:51, 41).

18. Arose. Most likely only the leaders of the host would have journeyed to Shiloh to inquire before the ark regarding their plan of procedure. It is hardly to be considered that all the army of 400,000 men would march to the tabernacle to inquire of the Lord. However, the place may have been close at hand.

House of God. Heb. *beth-'el*. If this word is left untranslated, the phrase reads "went up to Bethel," and that is the way it is given in modern versions. Some think it better to translate the word than to use it as a proper name indicating the nearby city of Bethel, for the tabernacle was at this time in Shiloh, 9 1/2 mi. (15.2 km.) north of Bethel and 12 1/2 mi. (20 km.) north of Mizpeh, where the army had encamped. It was usually to Shiloh, to the tabernacle, that they went to ask counsel of God (see ch. 21:2, 4, 12). However, there is the possibility that the ark may have been temporarily removed from Shiloh, as later in the time of Eli (1 Sam. 4:3, 4).

Which of us? Such a large army could not easily deploy around the small hill on which Gibeah was situated. They had decided that only one tribe would attack at a time.

Judah. This tribe had a reputation for being aggressive. They have held a position of pre-eminence from the beginning of the book (ch. 1:1, 2).

19. Rose up. Evidently from Mizpeh, where the bulk of the army was encamped.

21. Came forth. The whole army of Benjamin, 26,700 strong, had assembled within and around Gibeah. Courageously they came out of the walls and swept down the hill upon the army of Judah.

Down to the ground. That is, they fell slain upon the ground.

Twenty and two thousand. This means that the Benjamites slew almost a man apiece. No statement is made of Benjamite losses. There must certainly have been some.

22. Encouraged themselves. Some have suggested that v. 22 should follow v. 23 to make good sense and that some ancient copyist inadvertently reversed the order of these two verses. However, the narrative also is understandable with the events occurring in the sequence given.

23. Went up. It seems that the allied tribes sent another delegation to ask directions from the Lord.

Wept. Israel's defeat led the people to humble themselves before the Lord and to recognize more fully their dependence upon Him. Perhaps they needed to learn the lesson

that “he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone” (John 8:7). Many of those who were so highly incensed at the crime of the men of Gibeah were probably guilty of similar offenses. For example, at Sinai and Baal-peor, all Israel had fallen into abominable forms of idolatry.

My brother. The Israelites felt uneasy, realizing that they were engaged in a fratricidal war. Their angry feeling began to soften toward the men of Benjamin. However, the Lord instructed them to continue the attack. The people of Benjamin also needed to be humbled and brought to a recognition of their guilt.

26. Fasted. For the second time the army of Israel had suffered disastrous losses at the hand of the defiant Benjamites. They were perplexed, nonplused, distressed. The Lord had instructed them to attack, yet they had suffered heavy casualties. To try to find the answer for their failure, they fasted and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. This is the first place in the Bible where the word “fast” occurs, although the practice, no doubt, began much earlier.

27. Ark of the covenant. This is the only mention made of the ark in the book of Judges.

There. Some have believed this to refer to Shiloh, and others to Bethel. The tabernacle apparently remained in Shiloh from the time Joshua pitched it there (Joshua 18:1) until the ark was captured by the Philistines (1 Sam. 4:10, 11) at the end of the judgeship of Eli. On the tabernacle being in Shiloh see Joshua 22:12; 1 Sam. 1:3; 2:14; 3:21; 4:3. For a possible removal of the ark to some temporary location see on Judges 20:18.

28. Phinehas. According to Joshua 22:12, 13, Phinehas was priest of the tabernacle in Shiloh during the days of Joshua. The mention of his name in this passage, therefore, places this incident concerning the Levite and his concubine in the lifetime of the first generation of the Israelites in Palestine. It supports the view, stated earlier (see on Judges 18:29, 30; 19:1), that the two incidents described in the last five chapters of Judges took place many years before the other events described in the book. It is interesting to note that in the narrative of the migration of the Danites, the probable grandson of Moses plays a prominent part, whereas in the story of the Levite, the grandson of Aaron is mentioned (see on Judges 18:30).

To morrow I will deliver. The Israelites were not allowed to win a victory until after a preparatory period. The setbacks effectively drove them to fasting and prayer and to an earnest inquiry as to the cause of their failure. The delay was God’s opportunity to point them to their own defects of character that needed correction as much as to the faults of others, of which they were so forcefully aware. The Israelites were far too ready to set out upon the work of correcting their brethren without being conscious of their own shortcomings. It was to correct this same type of shortcoming that Jesus made His statement about the beam and the mote (see Matt. 7:5).

29. Liers in wait. In the two previous battles the Israelite forces had been overconfident because they felt that their cause was just and because the weight of numbers was on their side. But such advantages do not preclude the need for careful preparation, much prayer, and cautious strategy.

31. Were drawn away. The Israelite army feigned retreat, thus causing the Benjamites to pursue them. In so doing, the rear and flanks of the army of Benjamin were exposed to the Israelite troops lying in ambush.

Highways. The route the Israelite army took in its feigned flight was along two highways, one running northward to Bethel and Shiloh, the other leading to a town named Gibeah. The latter, to distinguish it from the Gibeah where the Benjamites had their base, was called “Gibeah in the field.” Gibeah was a common name meaning “hill.” The latter village seems to have been situated not on a hill, as its name would suggest, but on a level field.

33. At Baal-tamar. Literally, “Baal of the palm tree.” The exact location is not known, but it must have been somewhere in the vicinity of Gibeah. Besides the men in ambush near Gibeah, another part of the Israelite army was stationed at this unknown site nearby. As the Benjamites were following the retreating army of Israel, they were unexpectedly opposed by this new and fresh group of forces; and at the same time those secreted in ambush near Gibeah attacked the army of Benjamin from the rear. It seems that the army of Israel had been divided into three parts.

34. Ten thousand chosen men. This was evidently the group who formed the ambush and who seem to have attacked Gibeah itself.

Knew not. Although the Benjamites recognized that they were having a hard battle, yet each one, busily engaged on his own front, did not perceive that their forces were completely surrounded and thus doomed to destruction.

With this and the following verse, the author interrupts the detailed description of the battle to state its final outcome, as if to relieve the reader’s concern.

36. So. Having described the main course of the battle, the author now goes back and adds other details. Verse 36 to the end of the chapter could very well be added to v. 33 so as to give a connected account of the battle, but the author inserted vs. 34 and 35 as a parenthetical explanation, apparently to inform the reader of the outcome of the engagement. Then with v. 36 he resumed the detailed account.

37. Smote all the city. The 10,000 men who had formed the ambush (v. 34) succeeded in capturing Gibeah and then set it on fire. This they did as a signal to their comrades that the ambush had succeeded, and that it was now time for them to turn from their feigned flight and engage the main force of the pursuing Benjamites.

39. When the men of Israel. It seems to make better sense to include the first part of v. 39 with the last part of v. 38 as a description of the plan that the Israelites agreed upon. The two clauses may then be understood as stating, “They should make a great flame with smoke rise up out of the city and then the men of Israel should turn in battle.” Having stated the plan, the author of the book takes up the account of the sequence of events with the words “Benjamin began to smite.” He then describes how the scheme worked out, exactly as planned (vs. 40, 41). The Benjamites saw the smoke of their city ascending behind them, and about the same time the heretofore fleeing Israelite forces suddenly turned in their flight and began to offer stiff resistance. Then the men of Benjamin recognized that they had been tricked and that they were caught between the Israelite forces with little chance of escape.

42. Wilderness. Evidently “the wilderness of Beth-aven” (Joshua 18:12), east of Gibeah, which descends from the highlands to the Jordan valley. The region is described in Joshua 16:1 as “the wilderness that goeth up from Jericho throughout mount Beth-el.”

Them which came out. Some of the ancient versions read here, “They which came out of the city [that is, the men who had captured Gibeah] destroyed them in their midst.” This would mean that the 10,000 Israelites, after burning Gibeah, intercepted the

Benjamites who tried to flee into the wilderness. The meaning of the English version would probably be that the Benjamites fled to their own cities and were pursued thither in their flight and slain in their cities.

43. *With ease.* Heb. *menuchah*, meaning “rest.” The LXX translates this word by *apo Noua*, “from Nua,” as though it were a proper name. The meaning of the Hebrew may be that wherever some of the Benjamites sought refuge, the men of Israel sought them out and killed them.

44. *Eighteen thousand.* This number probably represents those slain in the initial engagement. The remainder of the 25,100 (v. 35) were overtaken and slain as they fled to the wilderness (v. 45).

45. *Rock of Rimmon.* Believed to be the steep, chalky hill visible from all directions about 3 1/2 mi. (5.6 km.) east of Bethel and 8 1/2 mi. (13.6 km.) northeast of Gibeah. A village on the site is today known as *Rammūn*.

Gidom. A place unknown.

47. *In the rock Rimmon.* The only soldiers of the entire Benjamite army to escape were 600 men who hid in the limestone caves on the hill of Rimmon.

48. *All that came to hand.* This indiscriminate slaughter of noncombatants, not to mention that of the broken and fleeing army, was entirely uncalled for. The sin of the men of Gibeah needed to be punished, for it was great. However, when the effective resistance of the army of Benjamin was destroyed, the duty of the Israelite army was finished. The individual perpetrators of the deed could then be caught and punished. Their city, Gibeah, was already in ruins. It should have been enough. There was no excuse for the relentless extermination of the whole tribe, nor for the burning of its cities. However, the heat of battle seems to work men into an unreasoning passion which carries them on to actions they would not perpetrate in their saner moments. In such times men are often not their own masters; reason does not guide and the voice of conscience is not heard. This would be especially true when they were without an outstanding leader to whom the army could look for directions and who could exercise control. The wounded pride of the Israelite army, stinging under the two defeats by their much smaller adversary, led them to commit a greater wrong, measured by extent, than the sin they were trying to punish.

CHAPTER 21

1 *The people bewail the desolation of Benjamin. 8 By the destruction of Jabesh-gilead they provide them four hundred wives. 16 They advise them to surprise the virgins that danced at Shiloh.*

1. *Had sworn.* No mention of this oath has been made in the preceding record. Evidently the tribes entered into it soon after they first assembled at Mizpeh, before any open hostilities began. The ancients regarded an oath as inviolable (see on chs. 11:30; 17:1, 2).

Although such oaths could not be broken or withdrawn, the Israelites, especially in later times, found many ways to keep the letter of an oath but break the spirit by trickery or some other evasion. However, no one is under obligation to keep his pledged word if it requires him to commit a wrong act.

Give his daughter. The oath was probably sworn under a curse as in Acts 23:14. The action of the Benjamites in supporting the evil men of Gibeah aroused the anger of the

Israelites to the extent that they vowed not to intermarry with the Benjamites, in the same manner as they had been commanded by the Lord not to intermarry with the seven heathen nations of Canaan (Deut. 7:1–4).

2. House of God. Perhaps Shiloh. Some believe that the words should again be translated as the proper name “Bethel” (see on ch. 20:18, 27).

Wept sore. After their fierce anger was gone, the people recognized that they had gone too far in their revenge upon one of their own tribes. How much better it would have been if their weeping had come earlier, before the deed had been done.

3. Why is this? This question implies that the Israelites accused God of having brought the tribe of Benjamin to virtual extinction (see v. 15). The assembled tribes should have known that it was their anger and their desire for revenge engendered by the two defeats administered upon them by the army of Benjamin that was the real cause of the near extinction of the tribe.

4. Built there an altar. This statement has been offered as proof that the Israelites were assembling at Bethel instead of at Shiloh, since an altar must have already existed in connection with the tabernacle at Shiloh. On the other hand, those who believe that the reference is to Shiloh take the passage to mean that the people built a new altar at Shiloh, either because the old one was in disrepair, or because another one was needed to handle the large number of sacrifices being made (see on ch. 20:18, 27; 21:2).

5. Came not up. After the battle was all over, the Israelites began an investigation to ascertain whether the entire nation had responded to the summons to take part in the war against Benjamin. When the army first assembled, the tribes had sworn an oath against any segment of the Israelites that refused to support the undertaking. The extreme measures were perhaps necessary to enforce cooperation.

8. Jabesh-gilead. Identified with *Tell el-Meqbereh* and *Tell Abū Kharaz*, about 9 1/2 mi. (15 km.) southeast of Bethshan in the *Wadi el-Yābis* to the east of the Jordan. A bond of affinity seems to have existed between the tribe of Benjamin and the city of Jabesh-gilead. The affinity seems to have continued even after the city was destroyed and rebuilt. Saul, who belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, performed his first exploit by saving Jabesh-gilead from the Ammonites (1 Sam. 11:3–15). At the time of Saul’s death the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead paid back their debt by rescuing Saul’s body from public exposure on the walls of Beth-shan (1 Sam. 31:8–13).

10. Twelve thousand. This method of levying an army representative of the whole group had been used before (Num. 31:1–6).

Go and smite. The adoption of this expedient for obtaining wives for the 600 survivors of the tribe of Benjamin who were hiding in caves in the hill of Rimmon helps us to realize the limited spiritual enlightenment of those times. Such ruthless measures in the name of religion are revolting and must be understood in the light of the times in which they occurred.

11. Every woman. Every inhabitant was to be destroyed except single girls of marriageable age. The other members of the families were in actuality no more guilty than these girls. The whole ruthless procedure, though carried out under the guise of fulfilling a sacred oath to the Lord, was but a brutal expedient to prevent the extinction of the tribe of Benjamin.

12. Four hundred. They lacked 200 of having enough for the 600 Benjamites who were still alive in the caves.

Shiloh. See on vs. 2, 4; ch. 20:18. The camp may have removed to Shiloh shortly after the conclusion of hostilities with Benjamin.

15. The Lord had made a breach. The breach, or gap, in the circle or chain of the 12 tribes really had been made by the Israelites themselves in their own unreasoning excesses in punishing the foul deed of certain Benjamites. Had they acted at all times in the spirit of true brotherly love, they could have accomplished the desired end without the purposeless slaughter and atrocities which they committed.

16. How shall we do? The elders knew that these men would, of necessity, marry wives of the Canaanites. To avoid this calamity, they employed devious means to get around the letter of their oath even though they violated its spirit. Instead of courageously repudiating their vow in the first place and allowing the Benjamites to marry from the other tribes, they were led by their mistaken belief that an oath is always inviolable, to perpetrate the butchery of innocent men, women, and children.

17. An inheritance. This likely does not refer to property or real estate, though some have suggested that the elders were advising the victorious army not to divide the territory of Benjamin among themselves. They meant that there must be a family succession for the remaining Benjamites.

19. A feast. There were three feasts during the year which all male Israelites were required to attend (Ex. 23:17). Inasmuch as the tabernacle at this time was situated at Shiloh, these gatherings would be held there. It is questionable whether in those unsettled times, there was any large-scale attempt to follow the prescribed ritual. From 1 Sam. 1:3 it is evident that even pious families did not always attend all three of these feasts.

Which is on the north side. The author of Judges gives an elaborate description of the location of Shiloh. The fact that the author felt it necessary to explain to his readers the location of Shiloh has led many to fix the date for the writing of Judges many years after the Philistines destroyed Shiloh at the end of the judgeship of Eli. It does seem that the author regarded the people of his day as unacquainted with the location of the city. Yet, on the other hand, it is a fact that Shiloh has been mentioned many times previously by the author of Judges without any attempt to explain its location.

Lebonah. Now called *Lubban*. It was 3 mi. (5 km.) west-northwest of Shiloh.

21. Daughters of Shiloh. Only the males were commanded to come to these feasts (Ex. 23:17; Deut. 16:16). Sometimes the men were accompanied by their wives and daughters, but the majority of the women present would be those who lived in or near Shiloh.

Dance. At the harvest festivals social occasions were provided as well as religious services (see PP 540).

22. Brethren. Anciently the brothers of a girl who was abducted were prominent in demanding satisfaction for her mistreatment (see Gen. 34:7–31; 2 Sam. 13:20–38).

That ye should be guilty. The elders of Israel promised to placate the fathers and brothers of the abducted girls on two counts: first, the council of elders had agreed that the men of Benjamin must have wives from some source; and second, the vow was not being violated by the parents, for their daughters had not been given in marriage but had been taken by force.

24. Departed. After the feast was over and the surviving Benjamites had secured wives, the army was disbanded. The troops must have been away from their homes for at

least 5 or 6 months, for the 600 men of Benjamin were hiding in Rimmon for 4 months (ch. 20:47).

25. *No king in Israel.* The statement makes a suitable transition to the book of Samuel, which describes the beginning of the monarchy.

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⁷Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Jdg 13:17). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.