

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

The conquest of Canaan completed

1¹AFTER THE DEATH OF JOSHUA the Israelites inquired of the LORD which tribe should attack the Canaanites first. ²The LORD answered, 'Judah shall attack. I hereby deliver the country into his power.' ³Judah said to his brother Simeon, 'Go forward with me into my allotted territory, and let us do battle with the Canaanites; then I in turn will go with you into your territory.' So Simeon went with him; ⁴then Judah advanced to the attack, and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and Perizzites into their hands. They slaughtered ten thousand of them at Bezek. ⁵There they came upon Adoni-bezek, engaged him in battle and defeated the Canaanites and Perizzites. ⁶Adoni-bezek fled, but they pursued him, took him prisoner and cut off his thumbs and his great toes. ⁷Adoni-bezek said, 'I once had seventy kings whose thumbs and great toes were cut off picking up the scraps from under my table. What I have done God has done to me.' He was brought to Jerusalem and died there.

⁸The men of Judah made an assault on Jerusalem and captured it, put its people to the sword and set fire to the city. ⁹Then they turned south to fight the Canaanites of the hill-country, the Negeb, and the Shephelah. ¹⁰Judah attacked the Canaanites in Hebron, formerly called Kiriath-arba, and defeated Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmi. ¹¹From there they marched against the inhabitants of Debir, formerly called Kiriath-sepher. ¹²Caleb said, 'Whoever attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, to him I will give my daughter Achsah in marriage.' ¹³Othniel, son of Caleb's younger brother Kenaz, captured it, and Caleb gave him his daughter Achsah. ¹⁴When she came to him, he incited her to ask her father for a piece of land. As she sat on the ass, she broke, wind, and Caleb said, 'What did you mean by that?' ¹⁵She replied, 'I want to ask a favour of you. You have put me in this dry Negeb; you must give me pools of water as well.' So Caleb gave her the upper pool and the lower pool.

¹⁶The descendants of Moses' father-in-law, the Kenite, went up with the men of Judah from the Vale of Palm Trees to the wilderness of Judah which is in the Negeb of Arad and settled among the Amalekites. ¹⁷Judah then accompanied his brother Simeon, attacked the Canaanites in Zephath and destroyed it; hence the city was called Hormah [*That is Destruction*]. ¹⁸Judah took Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron, and the territory of each. ¹⁹The LORD was with Judah and they occupied the hill-country, but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the Vale because they had chariots of iron. ²⁰Hebron was given to Caleb as Moses had directed, and he drove out the three sons of Anak. ²¹But the Benjamites did not drive out the Jebusites of Jerusalem; and the Jebusites have lived on in Jerusalem with the Benjamites till the present day.

²²The tribes of Joseph attacked Bethel, and the LORD was with them. ²³They sent spies to Bethel, formerly called Luz. ²⁴These spies saw a man coming out of the city and said to him, 'Show us how to enter the city, and we will see that you come to no harm.' ²⁵So

he showed them how to enter, and they put the city to the sword, but let the man and his family go free. ²⁶He went into Hittite country, built a city and named it Luz, which is still its name today.

²⁷Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean with its villages, nor of Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, and Megiddo, with the villages of each of them; the Canaanites held their ground in that region. ²⁸Later, when Israel became strong, they put them to forced labour, but they never completely drove them out.

²⁹Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, but the Canaanites lived among them there.

³⁰Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron and Nahalol, but the Canaanites lived among them and were put to forced labour.

³¹Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco and Sidon, of Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik and Rehob. ³²Thus the Asherites lived among the Canaanite inhabitants and did not drive them out.

³³Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath, but lived among the Canaanite inhabitants and put the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath to forced labour.

³⁴The Amorites pressed the Danites back into the hill-country and did not allow them to come down into the Vale. ³⁵The Amorites held their ground in Mount Heres and in Aijalon and Shaalbim, but the tribes of Joseph increased their pressure on them until they reduced them to forced labour.

³⁶The boundary of the Edomites ran from the ascent of Akrabbim, upwards from Sela.

2¹The angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bokim, and said, 'I brought [*prob. rdg, Heb I will bring*] you up out of Egypt and into the country which I vowed I would give to your forefathers. I said, I will never break my covenant with you, ²and you in turn must make no covenant with the inhabitants of the country; you must pull down their altars. But you did not obey me, and look what you have done! ³So I said, I will not drive them out before you; they will decoy you, and their gods will shut you fast in the trap.' ⁴When the angel of the LORD said this to the Israelites, they all wept and wailed, ⁵and so the place was called Bokim [*That is Weepers*]; and they offered sacrifices there to the LORD.

Israel under the judges

⁶JOSHUA DISMISSED THE PEOPLE, and the Israelites went off to occupy the country, each man to his allotted portion. ⁷As long as Joshua was alive and the elders who survived him – everyone, that is, who had witnessed the whole great work which the LORD had done for Israel – the people worshipped the LORD. ⁸At the age of a hundred and ten Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, ⁹and they buried him within

the border of his own property in Timnath-heres north of Mount Gaash in the hill-country of Ephraim. ¹⁰Of that whole generation, all were gathered to their forefathers, and another generation followed who did not acknowledge the LORD and did not know what he had done for Israel. ¹¹Then the Israelites did what was wrong in the eyes of the LORD, and worshipped the Baalim [*The Baalim were Canaanite deities*]. ¹²They forsook the LORD, their fathers' God who had brought them out of Egypt, and went after other gods, gods of the races among whom they lived; they bowed down before them and provoked the LORD to anger; ¹³they forsook the LORD and worshipped the Baal and the Ashtaroth [*The Ashtaroth were Canaanite deities*]. ¹⁴The LORD in his anger made them the prey of bands of raiders and plunderers; he sold them to their enemies all around them, and they could no longer make a stand. ¹⁵Every time they went out to battle the LORD brought disaster upon them, as he had said when he gave them his solemn warning, and they were in dire straits.

¹⁶The LORD set judges over them, who rescued them from the marauding bands. ¹⁷Yet they did not listen even to these judges, but turned wantonly to worship other gods and bowed down before them; all too soon they abandoned the path of obedience to the LORD's commands which their forefathers had followed. They did not obey the LORD. ¹⁸Whenever the LORD set up a judge over them, he was with that judge, and kept them safe from their enemies so long as he lived. The LORD would relent as often as he heard them groaning under oppression and ill-treatment. ¹⁹But as soon as the judge was dead, they would relapse into deeper corruption than their forefathers and give their allegiance to other gods, worshipping them and bowing down before them. They gave up none of their evil practices and their wilful ways. ²⁰And the LORD was angry with Israel and said, 'This nation has broken the covenant which I laid upon their forefathers and has not obeyed me, ²¹and now, of all the nations which Joshua left at his death, I will not drive out to make room for them one single man. ²²By their means I will test Israel, to see whether or not they will keep strictly to the way of the LORD as their forefathers did.' ²³So the LORD left those nations alone and made no haste to drive them out or give them into Joshua's hands.

3¹These are the nations which the LORD left as a means of testing all the Israelites who had not taken part in the battles for Canaan, ²his purpose being to teach succeeding generations of Israel, or those at least who had not learnt in former times, how to make war. ³These were: the five lords of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites who lived in Mount Lebanon from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath. ⁴His purpose also was to test whether the Israelites would obey the commands which the LORD had given to their forefathers through Moses. ⁵Thus the Israelites lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁶They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons; and they worshipped their gods.

⁷The Israelites did what was wrong in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot the LORD their God and worshipped the Baalim and the Asheroth [*Plural of Asherah, the name of a Canaanite goddess*]. ⁸The LORD was angry with Israel and he sold them to Cushan-rishathaim, king of Aram-naharaim [*That is Aram of Two Rivers*], who kept them in subjection for eight years. ⁹Then the Israelites cried to the LORD for help and he raised

up a man to deliver them, Othniel son of Caleb's younger brother Kenaz, and he set them free. ¹⁰The spirit of the LORD came upon him and he became judge over Israel. He took the field, and the LORD delivered Cushan-rishathaim king of Aram into his hands; Othniel was too strong for him. ¹¹Thus the land was at peace for forty years until Othniel son of Kenaz died.

¹²Once again the Israelites did what was wrong in the eyes of the LORD, and because of this he roused Eglon king of Moab against Israel. ¹³Eglon mustered the Ammonites and the Amalekites, advanced to attack Israel and took possession of the Vale of Palm Trees. ¹⁴The Israelites were subject to Eglon king of Moab for eighteen years. ¹⁵When they cried to the LORD for help, he raised up a man to deliver them, Ehud son of Gera the Benjamite, who was left-handed. The Israelites sent him to pay their tribute to Eglon king of Moab. ¹⁶Ehud made himself a two-edged sword, only fifteen inches long, which he fastened on his right side under his clothes, ¹⁷and he brought the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Eglon was a very fat man. ¹⁸When Ehud had finished presenting the tribute, he sent on the men who had carried it, ¹⁹and he himself turned back from the Carved Stones at Gilgal. 'My lord king,' he said, 'I have a word for you in private.' Eglon called for silence and dismissed all his attendants. ²⁰Ehud then came up to him as he sat in the roof-chamber of his summer palace and said, 'I have a word from God for you.' ²¹So Eglon rose from his seat, and Ehud reached with his left hand, drew the sword from his right side and drove it into his belly. ²²The hilt went in after the blade and the fat closed over the blade; he did not draw the sword out but left it protruding behind. ²³Ehud went out to the porch, shut the doors on him and fastened them. ²⁴When he had gone away, Eglon's servants came and, finding the doors fastened, they said, 'He must be relieving himself in the closet of his summer palace.' ²⁵They waited until they were ashamed to delay any longer, and still he did not open the doors of the roof-chamber. So they took the key and opened the doors; and there was their master lying on the floor dead. ²⁶While they had been waiting, Ehud made his escape; he passed the Carved Stones and escaped to Seirah. ²⁷When he arrived there, he sounded the trumpet in the hill-country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came down from the hills with him at their head. ²⁸He said to them, 'Follow me, for the LORD has delivered your enemy the Moabites into your hands.' Down they came after him, and they seized the fords of the Jordan against the Moabites and allowed no man to cross. ²⁹They killed that day some ten thousand Moabites, all of them men of substance and all fighting men; not one escaped. ³⁰Thus Moab on that day became subject to Israel, and the land was at peace for eighty years.

³¹After Ehud there was Shamgar of Beth-anath [of Beth-anath: *or* son of Anath]. He killed six hundred Philistines with an ox-goad, and he too delivered Israel.

4¹After Ehud's death the Israelites once again did what was wrong in the eyes of the LORD, ²so he sold them to Jabin the Canaanite king, who ruled in Hazor. The commander of his forces was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-of-the-Gentiles. ³The Israelites cried to the LORD for help, because Sisera had nine hundred chariots of iron and had oppressed Israel harshly for twenty years. ⁴At that time Deborah wife of Lappidoth [wife of Lappidoth: *or* a spirited woman], a prophetess, was judge in Israel. ⁵It was her custom to sit beneath the Palm-tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel

in the hill-country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her for justice. ⁶She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, 'These are the commands of the LORD the God of Israel: "Go and draw ten thousand men from Naphtali and Zebulun and bring them with you to Mount Tabor, ⁷and I will draw Sisera, Jabin's commander, to the Torrent of Kishon with his chariots and all his rabble, and there I will deliver them into your hands." ' ⁸Barak answered her, 'If you go with me, I will go; but if you will not go, neither will I.' ⁹'Certainly I will go with you,' she said, 'but this venture will bring you no glory, because the LORD will leave Sisera to fall into the hands of a woman.' So Deborah rose and went with Barak to Kedesh. ¹⁰Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh and marched up with ten thousand men, and Deborah went with him.

¹¹Now Heber the Kenite had parted company with the Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law, and he had pitched his tent at Elon-bezaananim near Kedesh.

¹²Word was brought to Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor; ¹³so he summoned all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and his troops, from Harosheth-of-the-Gentiles to the Torrent of Kishon. ¹⁴Then Deborah said to Barak, 'Up! This day the LORD gives Sisera into your hands. Already the LORD has gone out to battle before you.' So Barak came charging down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men at his back. ¹⁵The LORD put Sisera to rout with all his chariots and his army before Barak's onslaught; but Sisera himself dismounted from his chariot and fled on foot. ¹⁶Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth, and the whole army was put to the sword and perished; not a man was left alive. ¹⁷Meanwhile Sisera fled on foot to the tent of Jael wife of Heber the Kenite, because Jabin king of Hazor and the household of Heber the Kenite were at peace. ¹⁸Jael came out to meet Sisera and said to him, 'Come in here, my lord, come in; do not be afraid.' So he went into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. ¹⁹He said to her, 'Give me some water to drink; I am thirsty.' She opened a skin full of milk, gave him a drink and covered him up again. ²⁰He said to her, 'Stand at the tent door, and if anybody comes and asks if someone is here, say No.' ²¹But Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent-peg, picked up a hammer, crept up to him, and drove the peg into his skull as he lay sound asleep. His brains oozed out on the ground, his limbs twitched, and he died. ²²When Barak came up in pursuit of Sisera, Jael went out to meet him and said to him, 'Come, I will show you the man you are looking for.' He went in with her, and there was Sisera lying dead with the tent-peg in his skull. ²³That day God gave victory to the Israelites over Jabin king of Canaan, ²⁴and they pressed home their attacks upon that king of Canaan until they had made an end of him.

5¹That day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song:

²For the leaders, the leaders [*Or For those who had flowing locks*] in Israel,
for the people who answered the call,
bless ye the LORD.

³Hear me, you kings; princes, give ear;
I will sing, I will sing to the LORD.
I will raise a psalm to the LORD the God of Israel.

⁴O LORD, at thy setting forth from Seir,
when thou camest marching out of the plains of Edom,
earth trembled; heaven quaked;
the clouds streamed down in torrents.

⁵Mountains shook in fear before the LORD, the lord of Sinai,
before the LORD, the God of Israel.

⁶In the days of Shamgar of Beth-anath [*of Beth-anath: or son of Anath*],
in the days of Jael, caravans plied no longer;
men who had followed the high roads
went round by devious paths.

⁷Champions there were none,
none left in Israel,
until I [*Or you*], Deborah, arose,
arose, a mother in Israel.

⁸They chose new gods,
they consorted with demons [*Or satyrs*].
Not a shield, not a lance was to be seen
in the forty thousand of Israel.

⁹Be proud at heart, you marshals of Israel;
you among the people that answered the call,
bless ye the LORD.

¹⁰You that ride your tawny she-asses,
that sit on saddle-cloths,
and you that take the road afoot,
ponder this well.

¹¹Hark, the sound of the players striking up
in the places where the women draw water!
It is the victories of the LORD that they commemorate there,
his triumphs as the champion of Israel.
Down to the gates came the LORD's people:

¹²Rouse, rouse yourself, Deborah,
rouse yourself, lead out the host.
Up, Barak! Take prisoners in plenty,
son of Abinoam.

¹³Then down marched the column [*prob. rdg, Heb survivor*] and its
chieftains,
the people of the LORD marched down [*prob. rdg, Heb adds to me*] like
warriors.

¹⁴The men of Ephraim showed a brave front in the vale,
crying, 'With you, Benjamin! Your clansmen are here!'
From Machir down came the marshals,
from Zebulun the bearers of the musterer's staff.

¹⁵Issachar joined with Deborah in the uprising [*in the uprising: prob. rdg, Heb my officers*],
Issachar stood by Barak;
down into the valley they rushed.
But Reuben, he was split into factions,
great were their heart-searchings.

¹⁶What made you linger by the cattle-pens

to listen to the shrill calling of the shepherds? [*prob. rdg, Heb adds Reuben was split into factions, great were their heart-searchings.*]

¹⁷Gilead stayed beyond Jordan;
and Dan, why did he tarry by the ships?
Asher lingered by the sea-shore,
by its creeks he stayed.

¹⁸The people of Zebulun risked their very lives,
so did Naphtali on the heights of the battlefield.

¹⁹Kings came, they fought;
then fought the kings of Canaan
at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo;
no plunder of silver did they take.

²⁰The stars fought from heaven,
the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.

²¹The Torrent of Kishon swept him away,
the Torrent barred his flight, the Torrent of Kishon;
march on in might, my soul!

²²Then hammered the hooves of his horses,
his chargers galloped, galloped away.

²³A curse on Meroz,
said the angel of the LORD;
a curse, a curse on its inhabitants,
because they brought no help to the LORD,
no help to the LORD and the fighting men.

²⁴Blest above women be Jael,
the wife of Heber the Kenite;
blest above all women in the tents.

²⁵He asked for water: she gave him milk,
she offered him curds in a bowl fit for a chieftain.

²⁶She stretched out her hand for the tent-peg,
her right hand to hammer the weary.
With the hammer she struck Sisera, she crushed his head;
she struck and his brains ebbed out.

²⁷At her feet he sank down, he fell, he lay;
at her feet he sank down and fell.
Where he sank down, there he fell, done to death.

²⁸The mother of Sisera peered through the lattice,
through the window she peered and shrilly cried,
'Why are his chariots so long coming?
Why is the clatter of his chariots so long delayed?'

²⁹The wisest of her princesses answered her,
yes, she found her own answer:

³⁰They must be finding spoil, taking their shares,
a wench to each man, two wenches,
booty of dyed stuffs for Sisera,
booty of dyed stuffs,

dyed stuff, and striped, two lengths of striped stuff –
to grace the victor's neck.'

³¹So perish all thine enemies, O LORD;
but let all who love thee be like the sun rising in strength.

The land was at peace for forty years.

6¹THE ISRAELITES DID WHAT WAS WRONG in the eyes of the LORD and he delivered them into the hands of Midian for seven years. ²The Midianites were too strong for Israel, and the Israelites were forced to find themselves hollow places in the mountains, and caves and strongholds. ³If the Israelites had sown their seed, the Midianites and the Amalekites and other eastern tribes would come up and attack Israel. ⁴They then pitched their camps in the country and destroyed the crops as far as the outskirts of Gaza, leaving nothing to support life in Israel, sheep or ox or ass. ⁵They came up with their herds and their tents, like a swarm of locusts; they and their camels were past counting. They had come into the land for its growing crop [for its growing crop: *or* and laid it waste], ⁶and so the Israelites were brought to destitution by the Midianites, and they cried to the LORD for help. ⁷When the Israelites cried to the LORD because of what they had suffered from the Midianites, ⁸he sent them a prophet who said to them, 'These are the words of the LORD the God of Israel: ⁹I brought you up from Egypt, that land of slavery. I delivered you from the Egyptians and from all your oppressors. I drove them out before you and gave you their lands. ¹⁰I said to you, "I am the LORD your God: do not stand in awe of the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are settling." But you did not listen to me.'

¹¹Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah which belonged to Joash the Abiezerite. His son Gideon was threshing wheat in the winepress, so that he might get it away quickly from the Midianites. ¹²The angel of the LORD showed himself to Gideon and said, 'You are a brave man, and the LORD is with you.'
¹³Gideon said, 'But pray, my lord, if the LORD really is with us, why has all this happened to us? What has become of all those wonderful deeds of his, of which we have heard from our fathers, when they told us how the LORD brought us out of Egypt? But now the LORD has cast us off and delivered us into the power of the Midianites.'
¹⁴The LORD turned to him and said, 'Go and use this strength of yours to free Israel from the power of the Midianites. It is I that send you.'
¹⁵Gideon said, 'Pray, my lord, how can I save Israel? Look at my clan: it is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's family.'
¹⁶The LORD answered, 'I will be with you, and you shall lay low all Midian as one man.'
¹⁷He replied, 'If I stand so well with you, give me a sign that it is you who speak to me. ¹⁸Please do not leave this place until I come with my gift and lay it before you.' He answered, 'I will stay until you come back.'
¹⁹So Gideon went in, prepared a kid and made an ephah of flour into unleavened cakes. He put the meat in a basket, poured the broth into a pot and brought it out to him under the terebinth. As he approached, ²⁰the angel of God said to him, 'Take the meat and the cakes, and put them here on the rock and pour out the broth', and he did so. ²¹Then the angel of the LORD reached out the staff in his hand and touched the meat and the cakes with the tip of it. Fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the cakes; and the angel

of the LORD was no more to be seen. ²²Then Gideon knew that it was the angel of the LORD and said, 'Alas, Lord GOD! Then it is true: I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face.' ²³But the LORD said to him, 'Peace be with you; do not be afraid', you shall not die.' ²⁴So Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it Jehovah-shalom [*That is the LORD is peace*]. It stands to this day at Ophrah-of-the-Abiezrites.

²⁵That night the LORD said to Gideon, 'Take a young bull of your father's, the yearling bull [the yearling bull: *prob. rdg, Heb the second bull, seven years old*], tear down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father and cut down the sacred pole which stands beside [*Or on*] it. ²⁶Then build an altar of the proper pattern [of ... pattern: *or with the stones in rows*] to the LORD your God on the top of this earthwork [*Or stronghold or refuge*]; take the yearling bull and offer it as a whole-offering with the wood of the sacred pole that you cut down.' ²⁷So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD had told him. He was afraid of his father's family and his fellow-citizens, and so he did it by night, and not by day. ²⁸When the citizens rose early in the morning, they found the altar of Baal overturned and the sacred pole which had stood beside it cut down and the yearling bull offered up as a whole-offering on the altar which he had built. ²⁹They asked each other who had done it, and, after searching inquiries, were told that it was Gideon son of Joash. ³⁰So the citizens said to Joash, 'Bring out your son. He has overturned the altar of Baal and cut down the sacred pole beside' it, and he must die.' ³¹But as they crowded round him Joash retorted, 'Are you pleading Baal's cause then? Do you think that it is for you to save him? Whoever pleads his cause shall be put to death at dawn. If Baal is a god, and someone has torn down his altar, let him take up his own cause.' ³²That day Joash named Gideon Jerubbaal [*That is Let Baal plead*], saying, 'Let Baal plead his cause against this man, for he has torn down his altar.'

³³All the Midianites, the Amalekites, and the eastern tribes joined forces, crossed the river and camped in the Vale of Jezreel. ³⁴Then the spirit of the LORD took possession of Gideon; he sounded the trumpet and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him. ³⁵He sent messengers all through Manasseh; and they too were called out. He sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they came up to meet the others. ³⁶Gideon said to God, 'If thou wilt deliver Israel through me as thou hast promised – ³⁷now, look, I am putting a fleece of wool on the threshing-floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I shall be sure that thou wilt deliver Israel through me, as thou hast promised.' ³⁸And that is what happened. He rose early next day and wrung out the fleece, and he squeezed enough dew from it to fill a bowl with water. ³⁹Gideon then said to God, 'Do not be angry with me, but give me leave to speak once again. Let me, I pray thee, make one more test with the fleece. This time let the fleece alone be dry, and all the ground be covered with dew.' ⁴⁰God let it be so that night: the fleece alone was dry, and on all the ground there was dew.

7¹Jerubbaal, that is Gideon, and all the people with him rose early and pitched camp at En-harod [*That is Spring of Fright*]; the Midianite camp was in the vale to the north of the hill of Moreh. ²The LORD said to Gideon, 'The people with you are more than I need to deliver Midian into their hands: Israel will claim the glory for themselves and say that it is their own strength that has given them the victory. ³Now make a proclamation for all the people to hear, that anyone who is scared or frightened is to leave Mount Galud

[*prob. rdg, Heb Mount Gilead*] at once and go back home.' Twenty-two thousand of them went, and ten thousand were left. ⁴The LORD then said to Gideon, 'There are still too many. Bring them down to the water, and I will separate them for you there. When I say to you, "This man shall go with you", he shall go; and if I say, "This man shall not go with you", he shall not go.' ⁵So Gideon brought the people down to the water and the LORD said to him, 'Make every man who laps the water with his tongue like a dog stand on one side, and on the other every man who goes down on his knees and drinks.' ⁶The number of those who lapped was three hundred, and all the rest went down on their knees to drink, putting their hands to their mouths. ⁷The LORD said to Gideon, 'With the three hundred men who lapped I will save you and deliver Midian into your hands, and all the rest may go home.' ⁸So Gideon sent all these Israelites home, but he kept the three hundred, and they took with them the jars [*prob. rdg, Heb provisions*] and the trumpets which the people had. The Midianite camp was below him in the vale.

⁹That night the LORD said to him, 'Go down at once and attack the camp, for I have delivered it into your hands. ¹⁰If you are afraid to do so, then go down first with your servant Purah ¹¹and listen to what they are saying. That will give you courage to go down and attack the camp.' So he and his servant Purah went down to the part of the camp where the fighting men lay. ¹²Now the Midianites, the Amalekites, and the eastern tribes were so many that they lay there in the valley like a swarm of locusts; there was no counting their camels; in number they were like grains of sand on the sea-shore. ¹³When Gideon came close, there was a man telling his companion a dream. He said, 'I dreamt that I saw a hard, stale barley-cake rolling over and over through the Midianite camp; it came to a tent, hit it [*prob. rdg, Heb adds and it fell*] and turned it upside down, and the tent collapsed.' ¹⁴The other answered, 'Depend upon it, this is the sword of Gideon son of Joash the Israelite. God has delivered Midian and the whole army into his hands.' ¹⁵When Gideon heard the story of the dream and its interpretation, he prostrated himself. Then he went back to the Israelite camp and said, 'Up! The LORD has delivered the camp of the Midianites into your hands.' ¹⁶He divided the three hundred men into three companies, and gave every man a trumpet and an empty jar with a torch inside it. ¹⁷Then he said to them, 'Watch me: when I come to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do. ¹⁸When I and my men blow our trumpets, you too all round the camp will blow your trumpets, and shout, "For the LORD and for Gideon!" '

¹⁹Gideon and the hundred men who were with him reached the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch; the sentries had just been posted. They blew their trumpets and smashed their jars. ²⁰The three companies all blew their trumpets and smashed their jars, then grasped the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right, and shouted, 'A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!' ²¹Every man stood where he was, all round the camp, and the whole camp leapt up in a panic and fled. ²²The three hundred blew their trumpets, and throughout the camp the LORD set every man against his neighbour. The army fled as far as Beth-shittah in Zererah, as far as the ridge of Abel-meholah by Tabbath. ²³The Israelites from Naphtali and Asher and all Manasseh were called out and they pursued the Midianites. ²⁴Gideon sent men through all the hill-country of Ephraim with this message: 'Come down and cut off the Midianites. Hold the fords of the Jordan against them as far as Beth-barah.' So all the Ephraimites were called out and they held the fords of the Jordan as far as Beth-barah.

²⁵They captured the two Midianite princes, Oreb and Zeeb. Oreb they killed at the Rock of Oreb, and Zeeb by the Winepress of Zeeb, and they kept up the pursuit of the Midianites; afterwards they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb across the Jordan to Gideon.

8¹The men of Ephraim said to Gideon, 'Why have you treated us like this? Why did you not summon us when you went to fight Midian?'; and they reproached him violently. ²But he said to them, 'What have I done compared with you? Are not Ephraim's gleanings better than the whole vintage of Abiezer? ³God has delivered Oreb and Zeeb, the princes of Midian, into your hands. What have I done compared with you?' At these words of his, their anger died down.

⁴Gideon came to the Jordan, and he and his three hundred men crossed over to continue the pursuit, weary though they were. ⁵He said to the men of Succoth, 'Will you give these men of mine some bread, for they are weary, and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian?' ⁶But the chief men of Succoth replied, 'Are Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hands, that we should give your army bread?' ⁷Gideon said, 'For that, when the LORD delivers Zebah and Zalmunna into my hands, I will thresh your bodies with desert thorns and briars.' ⁸He went on from there to Penuel and made the same request; the men of Penuel answered like the men of Succoth. ⁹He said to the men of Penuel, 'When I return safely, I will pull down your castle.'

¹⁰Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with their army of fifteen thousand men. These were all that remained of the whole host of the eastern tribes; a hundred and twenty thousand armed men had fallen in battle. ¹¹Gideon advanced along the track used by the tent-dwellers east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and his attack caught the army when they were off their guard. ¹²Zebah and Zalmunna fled; but he went in pursuit of these Midianite kings and captured them both; and their whole army melted away.

¹³As Gideon son of Joash was returning from the battle by the Ascent of Heres, ¹⁴he caught a young man from Succoth. He questioned him, and one by one he numbered off the names of the rulers of Succoth and its elders, seventy-seven in all. ¹⁵Gideon then came to the men of Succoth and said, 'Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me. "Are Zebah and Zalmunna", you said, "already in your hands, that we should give your weary men bread?" ' ¹⁶Then he took the elders of the city and he disciplined those men of Succoth with desert thorns and briars. ¹⁷He also pulled down the castle of Penuel and put the men of the city to death. ¹⁸Then he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, 'What of the men you killed in Tabor?' They answered, 'They were like you, every one had the look of a king's son.' ¹⁹'They were my brothers,' he said, 'my mother's sons. I swear by the LORD, if you had let them live I would not have killed you'; ²⁰and he said to his eldest son Jether, 'Up with you, and kill them.' But he was still only a lad, and did not draw his sword, because he was afraid. ²¹So Zebah and Zalmunna said, 'Rise up yourself and dispatch us, for you have a man's strength.' So Gideon rose and killed them both, and he took the crescents from the necks of their camels.

²²After this the Israelites said to Gideon, 'You have saved us from the Midianites; now

you be our ruler, you and your son and your grandson.' ²³Gideon replied, 'I will not rule over you, nor shall my son; the LORD will rule over you.' ²⁴Then he said, 'I have a request to make: will every one of you give me the earrings from his booty?' – for the enemy wore golden earrings, being Ishmaelites. ²⁵They said, 'Of course, we will give them.' So a cloak was spread out and every man threw on to it the golden earrings from his booty. ²⁶The earrings for which he asked weighed seventeen hundred shekels of gold; this was in addition to the crescents and pendants and the purple cloaks worn by the Midianite kings, not counting the chains on the necks of their camels. ²⁷Gideon made it into an ephod and he set it up in his own city of Ophrah. All the Israelites turned wantonly to its worship, and it became a trap to catch Gideon and his household.

²⁸Thus the Midianites were subdued by the Israelites; they could no longer hold up their heads. For forty years the land was at peace, all the lifetime of Gideon, ²⁹that is Jerubbaal son of Joash; and he retired to his own home. ³⁰Gideon had seventy sons, his own offspring, for he had many wives. ³¹He had a concubine who lived in Shechem, and she also bore him a son, whom he named Abimelech. ³²Gideon son of Joash died at a ripe old age and was buried in his father's grave at Ophrah-of-the-Abiezrites. ³³After his death, the Israelites again went wantonly to the worship of the Baalim and made Baal-berith their god. ³⁴They forgot the LORD their God who had delivered them from their enemies on every side, ³⁵and did not show to the family of Jerubbaal, that is Gideon, the loyalty that was due to them for all the good he had done for Israel.

9¹ABIMELECH SON OF JERUBBAAL went to Shechem to his mother's brothers, and spoke with them and with all the clan of his mother's family. ²'I beg you,' he said, 'whisper a word in the ears of the chief citizens of Shechem. Ask them which is better for them: that seventy men, all the sons of Jerubbaal, should rule over them, or one man. Tell them to remember that I am their own flesh and blood.' ³So his mother's brothers repeated all this to each of them on his behalf; and they were moved to come over to Abimelech's side, because, as they said, he was their brother. ⁴They gave him seventy pieces of silver from the temple of Baal-berith, and with these he hired idle and reckless men, who followed him. ⁵He came to his father's house in Ophrah and butchered his seventy brothers, the sons of Jerubbaal, on a single stone block, all but Jotham the youngest, who survived because he had hidden himself. ⁶Then all the citizens of Shechem and all Beth-millo came together and made Abimelech king beside the old propped-up terebinth at Shechem.

⁷When this was reported to Jotham, he went and stood on the summit of Mount Gerizim. He cried at the top of his voice: 'Listen to me, you citizens of Shechem, and may God listen to you:

⁸Once upon a time the trees came to anoint a king, and they said to the olive-tree: Be king over us. ⁹But the olive-tree answered: What, leave my rich oil by which gods and men are honoured, to come and hold sway over the trees?

¹⁰So the trees said to the fig-tree: Then will you come and be king over us? ¹¹But the fig-tree answered: What, leave my good fruit and all its sweetness, to come and hold sway over the trees?

¹²So the trees said to the vine: Then will you come and be king over us? ¹³But the vine answered: What, leave my new wine which gladdens gods and men, to come and hold sway over the trees?

¹⁴Then all the trees said to the thorn-bush: Will you then be king over us? ¹⁵And the thorn said to the trees: If you really mean to anoint me as your king, then come under the protection of my shadow; if not, fire shall come out of the thorn and burn up the cedars of Lebanon.'

¹⁶Then Jotham said, 'Now, have you acted fairly and honestly in making Abimelech king? Have you done the right thing by Jerubbaal and his household? Have you given my father his due – ¹⁷who fought for you, and threw himself into the forefront of the battle and delivered you from the Midianites? ¹⁸Today you have risen against my father's family, butchered his seventy sons on a single stone block, and made Abimelech, the son of his slave-girl, king over the citizens of Shechem because he is your brother. ¹⁹In this day's work have you acted fairly and honestly by Jerubbaal and his family? If so, I wish you joy in Abimelech and wish him joy in you! ²⁰If not, may fire come out of Abimelech and burn up the citizens of Shechem and all Beth-millo; may fire also come out from the citizens of Shechem and Beth-millo and burn up Abimelech.'
²¹After which Jotham slipped away and made his escape; he came to Beer, and there he settled out of reach of his brother Abimelech.

²²After Abimelech had been prince over Israel for three years, ²³God sent an evil spirit to make a breach between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem, and they played him false. ²⁴This was done on purpose, so that the violent murder of the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might recoil on their brother Abimelech who did the murder and on the citizens of Shechem who encouraged him to do it. ²⁵The citizens of Shechem set men to lie in wait for him on the hill-tops, but they robbed all who passed that way, and so the news reached Abimelech.

²⁶Now Gaal son of Ebed came with his kinsmen to Shechem, and the citizens of Shechem transferred their allegiance to him. ²⁷They went out into the country-side, picked the early grapes in their vineyards, trod them in the winepress and held festival. They went into the temple of their god, where they ate and drank and reviled Abimelech. ²⁸'Who is Abimelech,' said Gaal son of Ebed, 'and who are the Shechemites, that we should be his subjects? Have not this son of Jerubbaal and his lieutenant Zebul been subjects of the men of Hamor the father of Shechem? Why indeed should we be subject to him? ²⁹If only this people were in my charge I should know how to get rid of Abimelech! I would say to him, "Get your men together, and come out and fight." '
³⁰When Zebul the governor of the city heard what Gaal son of Ebed said, he was very angry. ³¹He resorted to a ruse and sent messengers to Abimelech to say, 'Gaal son of Ebed and his kinsmen have come to Shechem and are turning the city against you. ³²Get up now in the night, you and the people with you, and lie in wait in the open country. ³³Then be up in the morning at sunrise, and advance rapidly against the city. When he and his people come out, do to him what the situation demands.'
³⁴So Abimelech and his people rose in the night, and lay in wait to attack Shechem, in four

companies. ³⁵Gaal son of Ebed came out and stood in the entrance of the city gate, and Abimelech and his people rose from their hiding-place. ³⁶Gaal saw them and said to Zebul, 'There are people coming down from the tops of the hills', but Zebul replied, 'What you see is the shadow of the hills, looking like men.' ³⁷Once more Gaal said, 'There are people coming down from the central ridge of the hills, and one company is coming along the road of the Soothsayers' Terebinth.' ³⁸Then Zebul said to him, 'Where are your brave words now? You said, "Who is Abimelech that we should be subject to him?" Are not these the people you despised? Go out and fight him.' ³⁹Gaal led the citizens of Shechem out and attacked Abimelech, ⁴⁰but Abimelech routed him and he fled. The ground was strewn with corpses all the way to the entrance of the gate. ⁴¹Abimelech established himself in Arumah, and Zebul drove away Gaal and his kinsmen and allowed them no place in Shechem.

⁴²Next day the people came out into the open, and this was reported to Abimelech. ⁴³He on his side took his supporters, divided them into three companies and lay in wait in the open country; and when he saw the people coming out of the city, he rose and attacked them. ⁴⁴Abimelech and the company with him advanced rapidly and took up position at the entrance of the city gate, while the other two companies advanced against all those who were in the open and struck them down. ⁴⁵Abimelech kept up the attack on the city all that day and captured it; he killed the people in it, pulled the city down and sowed the site with salt. ⁴⁶When the occupants of the castle of Shechem heard of this, they went into the great hall [*Or vault*] of the temple of El-berith. ⁴⁷It was reported to Abimelech that all the occupants of the castle of Shechem had collected together. ⁴⁸So he and his people went up Mount Zalmon carrying axes; there he cut brushwood, and took it and hoisted it on his shoulder. He said to his men, 'You see what I am doing; be quick and do the same.' ⁴⁹So each man cut brushwood; then they followed Abimelech and laid the brushwood against the hall, and burnt it over their heads. Thus all the occupants of the castle of Shechem died, about a thousand men and women.

⁵⁰Abimelech then went to Thebez, besieged it and took it. ⁵¹There was a strong castle in the middle of the city, and all the citizens, men and women, took refuge there. They shut themselves in and went on to the roof. ⁵²Abimelech came up to the castle and attacked it. As he approached the entrance to the castle to set fire to it, ⁵³a woman threw a millstone down on his head and fractured his skull. ⁵⁴He called hurriedly to his young armour-bearer and said, 'Draw your sword and dispatch me, or men will say of me: A woman killed him.' So the young man ran him through and he died. ⁵⁵When the Israelites saw that Abimelech was dead, they all went back to their homes. ⁵⁶It was thus that God requited the crime which Abimelech had committed against his father by the murder of his seventy brothers, ⁵⁷and brought all the wickedness of the men of Shechem on their own heads. The curse of Jotham son of Jerubbaal came home to them.

10¹After Abimelech, Tola son of Pua, son of Dodo, a man of Issachar who lived in Shamir in the hill-country of Ephraim, came in his turn to deliver Israel. ²He was judge over Israel for twenty-three years, and when he died he was buried in Shamir.

³After him came Jair the Gileadite; he was judge over Israel for twenty-two years. ⁴He

had thirty sons, who rode thirty asses; they had thirty towns in the land of Gilead, which to this day are called Havvoth-jair [*That is Tent-villages of Jair*]. ⁵When Jair died, he was buried in Kamon.

⁶Once more the Israelites did what was wrong in the eyes of the LORD, worshipping the Baalim and the Ashtaroth, the deities of Aram and of Sidon and of Moab, of the Ammonites and of the Philistines. They forsook the LORD and did not worship him. ⁷The LORD was angry with Israel, and he sold them to the Philistines and the Ammonites, ⁸who [*prob. rdg, Heb adds in that year*] for eighteen years harassed and oppressed the Israelites who lived beyond the Jordan in the Amorite country in Gilead. ⁹Then the Ammonites crossed the Jordan to attack Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim, so that Israel was in great distress. ¹⁰The Israelites cried to the LORD for help and said, 'We have sinned against thee; we have forsaken our God and worshipped the Baalim.' ¹¹And the LORD said to the Israelites, 'The Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines; ¹²the Sidonians too and the Amalekites and the Midianites – all these oppressed you and you cried to me for help; and did not I deliver you? ¹³But you forsook me and worshipped other gods; therefore I will deliver you no more. ¹⁴Go and cry for help to the gods you have chosen, and let them save you in the day of your distress.' ¹⁵But the Israelites said to the LORD, 'We have sinned. Deal with us as thou wilt; only save us this day, we implore thee.' ¹⁶They banished the foreign gods and worshipped the LORD; and he could endure no longer to see the plight of Israel.

¹⁷Then the Ammonites were called to arms, and they encamped in Gilead, while the Israelites assembled and encamped in Mizpah. ¹⁸The people of Gilead and their chief men said to one another, 'If any man will strike the first blow at the Ammonites, he shall be lord over the inhabitants of Gilead.'

11¹Jephthah the Gileadite was a great warrior; he was the son of Gilead by a prostitute. ²But Gilead had a wife who bore him several sons, and when they grew up they drove Jephthah away; they said to him, 'You have no inheritance in our father's house; you are another woman's son.' ³So Jephthah, to escape his brothers, went away and settled in the land of Tob, and swept up a number of idle men who followed him.

⁴The time came when the Ammonites made war on Israel, ⁵and when the fighting began, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah from the land of Tob. ⁶They said to him, 'Come and be our commander so that we can fight the Ammonites.' ⁷But Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, 'You drove me from my father's house in hatred. Why come to me now when you are in trouble?' ⁸It is because of that', they replied, 'that we have turned to you now. Come with us and fight the Ammonites, and become lord over all the inhabitants of Gilead.' ⁹Jephthah said to them, 'If you ask me back to fight the Ammonites and if the LORD delivers them into my hands, then I will be your lord.' ¹⁰The elders of Gilead said again to Jephthah, 'We swear by the LORD, who shall be witness between us, that we will do what you say.' ¹¹Jephthah then went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him their lord and commander. And at Mizpah, in the presence of the LORD, Jephthah repeated all that he had said.

¹²Jephthah sent a mission to the king of Ammon to ask what quarrel he had with them

that made him invade their country. ¹³The king gave Jephthah's men this answer: 'When the Israelites came up from Egypt, they took our land from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok and the Jordan. Give us back these lands in peace.' ¹⁴Jephthah sent a second mission to the king of Ammon, ¹⁵and they said, 'This is Jephthah's answer: Israel did not take either the Moabite country or the Ammonite country. ¹⁶When they came up from Egypt, the Israelites passed through the wilderness to the Red Sea [*Or the Sea of Reeds*] and came to Kadesh. ¹⁷They then sent envoys to the king of Edom asking him to grant them passage through his country, but the king of Edom would not hear of it. They sent also to the king of Moab, but he was not willing; so Israel remained in Kadesh. ¹⁸They then passed through the wilderness, skirting Edom and Moab, and kept to the east of Moab. They encamped beside the Arnon, but they did not enter Moabite territory, because the Arnon is the frontier of Moab. ¹⁹Israel then sent envoys to the king of the Amorites, Sihon king of Heshbon, asking him to give them free passage through his country to their destination. ²⁰But Sihon would not grant Israel free passage through his territory; he mustered all his people, encamped in Jahaz and fought Israel. ²¹But the LORD the God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hands of Israel; they defeated them and occupied all the territory of the Amorites in that region. ²²They took all the Amorite territory from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. ²³The LORD the God of Israel drove out the Amorites for the benefit of his people Israel. And do you now propose to take their place? ²⁴It is for you to possess whatever Kemosh your god gives you; and all that the LORD our God gave us as we advanced is ours. ²⁵For that matter, are you any better than Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever quarrel with Israel or attack them? ²⁶For three hundred years Israelites have lived in Heshbon and its dependent villages, in Aroer and its villages, and in all the towns by the Arnon. Why did you not oust [*Or recover*] them during all that time? ²⁷We have done you no wrong; it is you who are doing us wrong by attacking us. The LORD who is judge will judge this day between the Israelites and the Ammonites.' ²⁸But the king of the Ammonites would not listen to the message which Jephthah had sent him.

²⁹Then the spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, by Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh over to the Ammonites. ³⁰Jephthah made this vow to the LORD: 'If thou wilt deliver the Ammonites into my hands, ³¹then the first creature that comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return from them in peace shall be the LORD's; I will offer that as a whole-offering.' ³²So Jephthah crossed over to attack the Ammonites, and the LORD delivered them into his hands. ³³He routed them with great slaughter all the way from Aroer to Minnith, taking twenty towns, and as far as Abel-keramim. Thus Israel crushed Ammon. ³⁴But when Jephthah came to his house in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him with tambourines and dances but his daughter, and she his only child; he had no other, neither son nor daughter. ³⁵When he saw her, he rent his clothes and said, 'Alas, my daughter, you have broken my heart, such trouble you have brought upon me. I have made a vow to the LORD and I cannot go back.' ³⁶She replied, 'Father, you have made a vow to the LORD; do to me what you have solemnly vowed, since the LORD has avenged you on the Ammonites, your enemies. ³⁷But, father, grant me this one favour. For two months let me be, that I may roam [*Or that I may go down country to*] the hills with my companions and mourn that I must die a virgin.' ³⁸'Go', he said, and he let her

depart for two months. She went with her companions and mourned her virginity on the hills. ³⁹At the end of two months she came back to her father, and he fulfilled the vow he had made; she died a virgin. It became a tradition ⁴⁰that the daughters of Israel should go year by year and commemorate the fate of Jephthah's daughter, four days in every year.

12¹The Ephraimites mustered their forces and crossed over to Zaphon. They said to Jephthah, 'Why did you march against the Ammonites and not summon us to go with you? We will burn your house over your head.' ²Jephthah answered, 'I and my people had a feud with the Ammonites, and had I appealed to you for help, you would not have saved us [and had I ... saved us: or I did appeal to you for help, but you would not save us] from them. ³When I saw that we were not to look for help from you, I took my life in my hands and marched against the Ammonites, and the LORD delivered them into my power. Why then do you attack me today?' ⁴Jephthah then mustered all the men of Gilead and fought Ephraim, and the Gileadites defeated them. ⁵The Gileadites seized the fords of the Jordan and held them against Ephraim. When any Ephraimite who had escaped begged leave to cross, the men of Gilead asked him, 'Are you an Ephraimite?', and if he said, 'No', ⁶they would retort, 'Say Shibboleth.' He would say 'Sibboleth', and because he could not pronounce the word properly, they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. At that time forty-two thousand men of Ephraim lost their lives.

⁷Jephthah was judge over Israel for six years; when he died he was buried in his own city in Gilead. ⁸After him Ibzan of Bethlehem was judge over Israel. ⁹He had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He gave away the thirty daughters in marriage and brought in thirty girls for his sons. He was judge over Israel for seven years, ¹⁰and when he died he was buried in Bethlehem.

¹¹After him Elon the Zebulunite was judge over Israel for ten years. ¹²When he died, he was buried in Aijalon in the land of Zebulun. ¹³Next Abdon son of Hillel the Pirathonite was judge over Israel. ¹⁴He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode each on his own ass. He was judge over Israel for eight years; ¹⁵and when he died he was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim on the hill of the Amalekite.

Israel oppressed by the Philistines

13¹ONCE MORE THE ISRAELITES DID WHAT WAS WRONG in the eyes of the LORD, and he delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.

²There was a man from Zorah of the tribe of Dan whose name was Manoah and whose wife was barren and childless. ³The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, 'You are barren and have no child, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son. ⁴Now you must do as I say: be careful to drink no wine or strong drink, and to eat no forbidden food; ⁵you will conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall touch his head, for the boy is to be a Nazirite consecrated to God from the day of his birth. He will strike the first blow to deliver Israel from the power of the Philistines.' ⁶The woman went and told her husband; she said to him, 'A man of God came to me; his appearance was that

of an [*Or the*] angel of God, most terrible to see. I did not ask him where he came from nor did he tell me his name. ⁷He said to me, "You shall conceive and give birth to a son. From this time onwards drink no wine or strong drink and eat no forbidden food, for the boy is to be a Nazirite consecrated to God from his birth to the day of his death." ⁸Manoah prayed to the LORD, 'If it please thee, O LORD, let the man of God whom thou didst send come again to tell us what we are to do with the boy who is to be born.' ⁹God heard Manoah's prayer, and the angel of God came again to the woman, who was sitting in the fields; her husband was not with her. ¹⁰The woman ran quickly and said to him, 'The man who came to me the other day has appeared to me again.' ¹¹Manoah went with her at once and approached the man and said, 'Was it you who talked with my wife?' He said, 'Yes, it was I.' ¹²'Now when your words come true,' Manoah said, 'what kind of boy will he be and what will he do?' ¹³The angel of the LORD answered him, 'Your wife must be careful to do all that I told her: ¹⁴she must not taste anything that comes from the vine. She must drink no wine or strong drink, and she must eat no forbidden food. She must do what I say.' ¹⁵Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, 'May we urge you to stay? Let us prepare a kid for you.' ¹⁶The angel of the LORD replied, 'Though you urge me to stay, I will not eat your food; but prepare a whole-offering if you will, and offer that to the LORD.' Manoah did not perceive that he was the angel of the LORD ¹⁷and said to him, "What is your name? For we shall want to honour you when your words come true.' ¹⁸The angel of the LORD said to him, 'How can you ask my name? It is a name of wonder.' ¹⁹Manoah took a kid with the proper grain-offering, and offered it on the rock to the LORD, to him whose works are full of wonder. ²⁰And while Manoah and his wife were watching, the flame went up from the altar towards heaven, and the angel of the LORD went up in the flame; and seeing this, Manoah and his wife fell on their faces. ²¹The angel of the LORD did not appear again to Manoah and his wife; and Manoah knew that he was the angel of the LORD. ²²He said to his wife, 'We are doomed to die, we have seen God [*Or a god*]', ²³but she replied, 'If the LORD had wanted to kill us, he would not have accepted a whole-offering and a grain-offering at our hands; he would not now have let us see and hear all this.' ²⁴⁻²⁵The woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson. The boy grew up in Mahaneh-dan between Zorah and Eshtaol, and the LORD blessed him, and the spirit of the LORD began to drive him hard.

14¹Samson went down to Timnath, and there he saw a woman, one of the Philistines. ²When he came back, he told his father and mother that he had seen a Philistine woman in Timnath and asked them to get her for him as his wife. ³His father and mother said to him, 'Is there no woman among your cousins or in all our own people? Must you go and marry one of the uncircumcised Philistines?' But Samson said to his father, 'Get her for me, because she pleases me.' ⁴His father and mother did not know that the LORD was at work in this, seeking an opportunity against the Philistines, who at that time were masters of Israel.

⁵Samson [*prob. rdg, Heb adds and his father and mother*] went down to Timnath and, when he reached the vineyards there, a young lion came at him growling. ⁶The spirit of the LORD suddenly seized him and, having no weapon in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as if it were a kid. He did not tell his parents what he had done. ⁷Then he went down and spoke to the woman, and she pleased him. ⁸After a time he went down again

to take her to wife; he turned aside to look at the carcass of the lion, and he saw a swarm of bees in it, and honey. ⁹He scraped the honey into his hands and went on, eating as he went. When he came to his father and mother, he gave them some and they ate it; but he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey out of the lion's carcass. ¹⁰His father went down to see the woman, and Samson gave a feast there as the custom of young men was. ¹¹When the people saw him, they brought thirty young men to be his escort. ¹²Samson said to them, 'Let me ask you a riddle. If you can guess it during the seven days of the feast, I will give you thirty lengths of linen and thirty changes of clothing; ¹³but if you cannot guess the answer, then you shall give me thirty lengths of linen and thirty changes of clothing.' 'Tell us your riddle,' they said; 'let us hear it.' ¹⁴So he said to them:

Out of the eater came something to eat;
out of the strong came something sweet.

At the end of three days they had failed to guess the riddle. ¹⁵On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, 'Coax your husband and make him tell you the riddle, or we shall burn you and your father's house. Did you invite us here to beggar us?' ¹⁶So Samson's wife wept over him and said, 'You do not love me, you only hate me. You have asked my kinsfolk a riddle and you have not told it to me.' He said to her, 'I have not told it even to my father and mother; and am I to tell you?' ¹⁷But she wept over him every day until the seven feast days were ended, and on the seventh day, because she pestered him, he told her, and she told the riddle to her kinsfolk. ¹⁸So that same day the men of the city said to Samson before he entered the bridal chamber [he entered ... chamber: *prob. rdg, Heb* the sun went down]:

What is sweeter than honey?
What is stronger than a lion?

and he replied, 'If you had not ploughed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle.' ¹⁹Then the spirit of the LORD suddenly seized him. He went down to Ashkelon and there he killed thirty men, took their belts and gave their clothes to the men who had answered his riddle; but he was very angry and went off to his father's house. ²⁰And Samson's wife was given in marriage to the friend who had been his groomsman.

15¹After a while, during the time of wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife, taking a kid as a present for her. He said, 'I am going to my wife in our bridal chamber', but her father would not let him in. ²He said, 'I was sure that you hated her, so I gave her in marriage to your groomsman. Her young sister is better than she – take her instead.' ³But Samson said, 'This time I will settle my score with the Philistines; I will do them some real harm.' ⁴So he went and caught three hundred jackals and got some torches; he tied the jackals tail to tail and fastened a torch between each pair of tails. ⁵He then set the torches alight and turned the jackals loose in the standing corn of the Philistines. He burnt up standing corn and stooks as well, vineyards and olive groves. ⁶The Philistines said, 'Who has done this?' They were told that it was Samson, because the Timnite, his father-in-law, had taken his wife and given her to his groomsman. So the Philistines came and burnt her and her father. ⁷Samson said, 'If you do things like this, I swear I will be revenged upon you before I have done.' ⁸He smote them hip and thigh with great slaughter; and after that he went down to live in a cave in the Rock of Etam.

⁹The Philistines came up and pitched camp in Judah, and overran Lehi. ¹⁰The men of Judah said, 'Why have you attacked us?' They answered, 'We have come to take Samson prisoner and serve him as he served us.' ¹¹So three thousand men from Judah went down to the cave in the Rock of Etam. They said to Samson, 'Surely you know that the Philistines are our masters? Now see what you have brought upon us.' He answered, 'I only served them as they had served me.' ¹²They said to him, 'We have come down to bind you and hand you over to the Philistines.' 'Then you must swear to me', he said, 'that you will not set upon me yourselves.' ¹³They answered, 'No; we will only bind you and hand you over to them, we will not kill you.' So they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the cave in the Rock. ¹⁴He came to Lehi, and when they met him, the Philistines shouted in triumph; but the spirit of the LORD suddenly seized him, the ropes on his arms became like burnt tow and his bonds melted away. ¹⁵He found the jaw-bone of an ass, all raw, and picked it up and slew a thousand men. ¹⁶He made this saying:

With the jaw-bone of an ass [*ass: Heb hamor*] I have flayed them like asses
[I have ... asses: *or* I have reddened them blood-red, *or* I have heaped
them in heaps; *Heb hamor himmartim*];
with the jaw-bone of an ass I have slain a thousand men.

¹⁷When he had said his say, he threw away the jaw-bone; and he called that place Ramath-lehi [*That is Jaw-bone Hill*]. ¹⁸He began to feel very thirsty and cried aloud to the LORD, 'Thou hast let me, thy servant, win this great victory, and must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?' ¹⁹God split open the Hollow of Lehi and water came out of it. Samson drank, his strength returned and he revived. This is why the spring in Lehi is called En-hakkore [*That is the Crier's Spring*] to this day.

²⁰Samson was judge over Israel for twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

16¹Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a prostitute and went in to spend the night with her. ²The people of Gaza heard that Samson had come, and they surrounded him and lay in wait for him all that night at the city gate. During the night, however, they took no action, saying to themselves, 'When day breaks we shall kill him.' ³Samson lay in bed till midnight; and when midnight came he rose, seized hold of the doors of the city gate and the two posts, pulled them out, bar and all, hoisted them on to his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill east of Hebron.

⁴After this Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah, who lived in the valley of Sorek. ⁵The lords of the Philistines went up country to see her and said, 'Coax him and find out what gives him his great strength, and how we can master him, bind him and so hold him captive; then we will each give you eleven hundred pieces of silver.' ⁶So Delilah said to Samson, 'Tell me what gives you your great strength, and how you can be bound and held captive.' ⁷Samson replied, 'If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings not yet dry, then I shall become as weak as any other man.' ⁸So the lords of the Philistines brought her seven fresh bowstrings not yet dry, and she bound him with them. ⁹She had men already hidden in the inner room, and she cried, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' But he snapped the bowstrings as a strand of tow snaps when it feels the fire, and his strength was not tamed. ¹⁰Delilah said to Samson, 'I see you have made a fool of me and told me lies. Tell me this time how you can be bound.' ¹¹He said

to her, 'If you bind me tightly with new ropes that have never been used, then I shall become as weak as any other man.' ¹²So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them. Then she cried, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!', while the men waited hidden in the inner room. He snapped the ropes off his arms like pack-thread. ¹³Delilah said to him, 'You are still making a fool of me and have told me lies. Tell me: how can you be bound?' He said, 'Take the seven loose locks of my hair and weave them into the warp, and then drive them tight with the beater; and I shall become as weak as any other man.' So she lulled him to sleep, ¹⁴wove the seven loose locks of his hair into the warp, and drove them tight with the beater, and cried, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' He woke from sleep and pulled away the warp and the loom with it [the warp ... with it: *prob. rdg, Heb adds an unintelligible word*]. ¹⁵She said to him, 'How can you say you love me when you do not confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and have not told me what gives you your great strength.' ¹⁶She so pestered him with these words day after day, pressing him hard and wearying him to death, ¹⁷that he told her his secret. 'No razor has touched my head,' he said, 'because I am a Nazirite, consecrated to God from the day of my birth. If my head were shaved, then my strength would leave me, and I should become as weak as any other man.' ¹⁸Delilah saw that he had told her his secret; so she sent to the lords of the Philistines and said, 'Come up at once, he has told me his secret.' So the lords of the Philistines came up and brought the money with them. ¹⁹She lulled him to sleep on her knees, summoned a man and he shaved the seven locks of his hair for her. She began to take him captive and his strength left him. ²⁰Then she cried, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' He woke from his sleep and said, 'I will go out as usual and shake myself'; he did not know that the LORD had left him. ²¹The Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza. There they bound him with fetters of bronze, and he was set to grinding corn in the prison. ²²But his hair, after it had been shaved, began to grow again.

²³The lords of the Philistines assembled together to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon and to rejoice before him. They said, 'Our god has delivered Samson our enemy into our hands.' ²⁴The people, when they saw him, praised their god, chanting:

Our god has delivered our enemy into our hands,
the scourge of our land who piled it with our dead.

²⁵When they grew merry, they said, 'Call Samson, and let him fight to make sport for us.' So they summoned Samson from prison and he made sport before them all. They stood him between the pillars, ²⁶and Samson said to the boy who held his hand, 'Put me where I can feel the pillars which support the temple, so that I may lean against them.' ²⁷The temple was full of men and women, and all the lords of the Philistines were there, and there were about three thousand men and women on the roof watching Samson as he fought. ²⁸Samson called on the LORD and said, 'Remember me, O Lord GOD, remember me: give me strength only this once, O God, and let me at one stroke be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes.' ²⁹He put his arms round the two central pillars which supported the temple, his right arm round one and his left round the other, and braced himself ³⁰and said, 'Let me die with the Philistines.' Then Samson leaned forward with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and on all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those he had killed in his life. ³¹His brothers and all his father's family came down, carried him up to the grave of his father Manoah between Zorah and Eshtaol and buried him there. He had

been judge over Israel for twenty years.

Years of lawlessness

17¹THERE WAS ONCE A MAN NAMED MICAH from the hill-country of Ephraim. ²He said to his mother, 'You remember the eleven hundred pieces of silver which were taken from you, and how you called down a curse on the thief in my hearing? I have the money; I took it and now I will give it back to you [and now ... you: *transposed from v3*].' His mother said, 'May the LORD bless you, my son.' ³So he gave the eleven hundred pieces of silver back to his mother, and she said, 'I now solemnly dedicate this money of mine to the LORD for the benefit of my son, to make a carved idol and a cast image.' ⁴He returned the money to his mother, and she took two hundred pieces of silver and handed them to a silversmith, who made them into an idol and an image, which stood in Micah's house.

⁵This man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and teraphim [*Or household gods*] and installed one of his sons to be his priest. ⁶In those days there was no king in Israel and every man did what was right in his own eyes. ⁷Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, from the clan of Judah, a Levite named Ben-gershom [*named Ben-gershom: prob. rdg, cp 18.30; Heb he lodged there*]. ⁸He had left the city of Bethlehem to go and find somewhere to live. On his way he came to Micah's house in the hill-country of Ephraim. ⁹Micah said to him, 'Where have you come from?' He replied, 'I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am looking for somewhere to live.' ¹⁰Micah said to him, 'Stay with me and be priest and father to me. I will give you ten pieces of silver a year, and provide you with food and clothes.' ¹¹The Levite agreed to stay with the man and was treated as one of his own sons. ¹²Micah installed the Levite, and the young man became his priest and a member of his household. ¹³Micah said, 'Now I know that the LORD will make me prosper, because I have a Levite for my priest.'

18¹In those days there was no king in Israel and the tribe of the Danites was looking for territory to occupy, because they had not so far come into possession of the territory allotted to them among the tribes of Israel. ²The Danites therefore sent out five fighting men of their clan from Zorah and Eshtaol to prospect, with instructions to go and explore the land. They came to Micah's house in the hill-country of Ephraim and spent the night there. ³While they were there, they recognized the speech of the young Levite; they turned there and then and said to him, 'Who brought you here? What are you doing? What is your business here?' ⁴He said, 'This is all Micah's doing: he has hired me and I have become his priest.' ⁵They said to him, 'Then inquire of God on our behalf whether our mission will be successful.' ⁶The priest replied, 'Go in peace. Your mission is in the LORD's hands.' ⁷The five men went on their way and came to Laish. There they found the inhabitants living a carefree life, in the same way as the Sidonians, a quiet, carefree folk, with no hereditary king to keep the country under his thumb [*with no ... thumb: prob. rdg, Heb and none humiliating anything in the land with inherited authority*]. They were a long way from the Sidonians, and had no contact with the Aramaeans. ⁸So the five men went back to Zorah and Eshtaol, and when their kinsmen

asked their news, ⁹they said, 'Come and attack them. It is an excellent country that we have seen. Will you hang back and do nothing about it? Start off now and take possession of the land. ¹⁰When you get there, you will find a people living a carefree life in a wide expanse of open country. God has delivered it into your hands, a place where there is no lack of anything on earth.'

¹¹And so six hundred armed men from the clan of the Danites set out from Zorah and Eshtaol. ¹²They went up country and encamped in Kiriath-jearim in Judah: this is why that place to this day is called Mahaneh-dan [*That is the Camp of Dan*]; it lies west of Kiriath-jearim. ¹³From there they passed on to the hill-country of Ephraim and came to Micah's house. ¹⁴The five men who had been to explore the country round Laish spoke up and said to their kinsmen, 'Do you know that in one of these houses there are now an ephod and teraphim, an idol and an image? Now consider what you had best do.' ¹⁵So they turned aside to Micah's house and greeted him. ¹⁶The six hundred armed Danites took their stand at the entrance of the gate, ¹⁷and the five men who had gone to explore the country went indoors to take the idol and the image, ephod and teraphim, while the priest was standing at the entrance with the six hundred armed men. ¹⁸The five men entered Micah's house and took the idol and the image, ephod and teraphim [*prob. rdg, Heb the idol of the ephod, and teraphim and image*]. The priest asked them what they were doing, ¹⁹but they said to him, 'Be quiet; not a word. Come with us and be our priest and father. Which is better, to be priest in the household of one man or to be priest to a whole tribe and clan in Israel?' ²⁰This pleased the priest; so he took the ephod and teraphim, the idol and the image, and joined the company. ²¹They turned and went off, putting the dependants, the herds, and the valuables in front. ²²The Danites had gone some distance from Micah's house, when his neighbours were called out in pursuit and caught up with them. ²³They shouted after them, and the Danites turned round and said to Micah, 'What is the matter with you? Why have you come after us?' ²⁴He said, 'You have taken my gods which I made for myself, you have taken the priest, and you have gone off and left me nothing. How dare you say, "What is the matter with you?"' ²⁵The Danites said to him, 'Do not shout at us. We are desperate men and if we fall upon you it will be the death of yourself and your family.' ²⁶With that the Danites went on their way and Micah, seeing that they were too strong for him, turned and went home.

²⁷Thus they carried off the priest and the things Micah had made for himself, and attacked Laish, whose people were quiet and carefree. They put them to the sword and set fire to their city. ²⁸There was no one to save them, for the city was a long way from Sidon and they had no contact with the Aramaeans [*prob. rdg, cp v7; Heb men*], although the city was in the vale near Beth-rehob. They rebuilt the city and settled in it, ²⁹naming it Dan after the name of their forefather Dan, a son of Israel; but its original name was Laish. ³⁰The Danites set up the idol, and Jonathan son of Gershom, son of Moses, and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the people went into exile. ³¹(They set up for themselves the idol which Micah had made, and it was there as long as the house of God was at Shiloh.)

19¹IN THOSE DAYS when no king ruled in Israel, a Levite was living in the heart of the hill-country of Ephraim. He had taken himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. ²In

a fit of anger she had left him and had gone to her father's house in Bethlehem in Judah. When she had been there four months, ³her husband set out after her with his servant and two asses to appeal to her and bring her back. She brought him in to the house of her father, who welcomed him when he saw him. ⁴His father-in-law, the girl's father, pressed him and he stayed with him three days, and they were well entertained during their visit. ⁵On the fourth day, they rose early in the morning, and he prepared to leave, but the girl's father said to his son-in-law, 'Have something to eat first, before you go.' ⁶So the two of them sat down and ate and drank together. The girl's father said to the man, 'Why not spend the night and enjoy yourself?' ⁷When he rose to go, his father-in-law urged him to stay, and again he stayed for the night. ⁸He rose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart, but the girl's father said, 'Have something to eat first.' So they lingered till late afternoon, eating and drinking together. ⁹Then the man stood up to go with his concubine and servant, but his father-in-law said, 'See how the day wears on towards sunset. Spend the night here and enjoy yourself, and then rise early tomorrow and set out for home.' ¹⁰But the man would not stay the night; he rose and left. He had reached a point opposite Jebus, that is Jerusalem, with his two laden asses and his concubine, ¹¹and when they were close to Jebus, the weather grew wild and stormy, and the young man said to his master, 'Come now, let us turn into this Jebusite town and spend the night there.' ¹²But his master said to him, 'No, not into a strange town where the people are not Israelites; let us go on to Gibeah. ¹³Come, we will go and find some other place, and spend the night in Gibeah or Ramah.' ¹⁴So they went on until sunset overtook them; they were then near Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin. ¹⁵They turned in to spend the night there, and went and sat down in the open street of the town; but nobody took them into his house for the night.

¹⁶Meanwhile an old man was coming home in the evening from his work in the fields. He was from the hill-country of Ephraim, but he lived in Gibeah, where the people were Benjamites. ¹⁷He looked up, saw the traveller in the open street of the town, and asked him where he was going and where he came from. ¹⁸He answered, 'We are travelling from Bethlehem in Judah to the heart of the hill-country of Ephraim. I come from there; I have been to Bethlehem in Judah and I am going home, but nobody has taken me into his house. ¹⁹I have straw and provender for the asses, food and wine for myself, the girl, and the young man; we have all we need, sir.' ²⁰The old man said, 'You are welcome, I will supply all your wants; you must not spend the night in the street.' ²¹So he took him inside and provided fodder for the asses; they washed their feet, and ate and drank. ²²While they were enjoying themselves, some of the worst scoundrels in the town surrounded the house, hurling themselves against the door and shouting to the old man who owned the house, 'Bring out the man who has gone into your house, for us to have intercourse with him.' ²³The owner of the house went outside to them and said, 'No, my friends, do nothing so wicked. This man is my guest; do not commit this outrage. ²⁴Here is my daughter, a virgin [*prob. rdg, Heb adds and his concubine*], let me bring her [*prob. rdg, Heb them*] out to you. Rape her [*prob. rdg, Heb them*] and do to her [*prob. rdg, Heb them*] what you please; but you shall not commit such an outrage against this man.' ²⁵But the men refused to listen to him, so the Levite took hold of his concubine and thrust her outside for them. They assaulted her and abused her all night till the morning, and when dawn broke, they let her go. ²⁶The girl came at daybreak and fell down at the entrance of the man's house where her master was, and

lay there until it was light. ²⁷Her master rose in the morning and opened the door of the house to set out on his journey, and there was his concubine lying at the door with her hands on the threshold. ²⁸He said to her, 'Get up and let us be off'; but there was no answer. So he lifted her on to his ass and set off for home. ²⁹When he arrived there, he picked up a knife, and he took hold of his concubine and cut her up limb by limb into twelve pieces; and he sent them through the length and breadth of Israel. ³⁰He told the men he sent with them to say to every Israelite, 'Has the like of this happened or been seen from the time the Israelites came up from Egypt till today? Consider this among yourselves and speak your minds.' So everyone who saw them said, 'No such thing has ever happened or been seen before.'

20¹All the Israelites, the whole community from Dan to Beersheba and out of Gilead also, left their homes as one man and assembled before the LORD at Mizpah. ²The leaders of the people and all the tribes of Israel presented themselves in the general assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand foot-soldiers armed with swords; ³and the Benjamites heard that the Israelites had gone up to Mizpah. The Israelites asked how this wicked thing had come about, ⁴and the Levite, to whom the murdered woman belonged, answered, 'I and my concubine came to Gibeah in Benjamin to spend the night there. ⁵The citizens of Gibeah rose against me that night and surrounded the house where I was, intending to kill me; and they raped my concubine and she died. ⁶I took her and cut her in pieces, and sent them through the length and breadth of Israel, because of the filthy outrage they had committed in Israel. ⁷Now it is for you, the whole of Israel, to say here and now what you think ought to be done.' ⁸All the people rose to their feet as one man and said, 'Not one of us shall go back to his tent, not one shall return home. ⁹This is what we will now do to Gibeah. We will draw lots for the attack: ¹⁰and we will take ten men out of every hundred in all the tribes of Israel, a hundred out of every thousand, and a thousand out of every ten thousand, to collect provisions from the people for those who have taken the field against Gibeah in Benjamin to avenge the outrage committed in Israel.' ¹¹Thus all the Israelites to a man were massed against the town.

¹²The tribes of Israel sent men all through the tribe of Benjamin saying, 'What is this wicked thing which has happened in your midst? ¹³Hand over to us those scoundrels in Gibeah, and we will put them to death and purge Israel of this wickedness.' But the Benjamites refused to listen to their fellow-Israelites. ¹⁴They flocked from their cities to Gibeah to go to war with the Israelites, ¹⁵and that day they mustered out of their cities twenty-six thousand men armed with swords. There were also seven hundred picked men from Gibeah, ¹⁶left-handed men, who could sling a stone and not miss by a hair's breadth. ¹⁷The Israelites, without Benjamin, numbered four hundred thousand men armed with swords, every one a fighting man. ¹⁸The Israelites at once moved on to Bethel, and there they sought an oracle from God, asking, 'Which of us shall attack Benjamin first?', and the LORD's answer was, 'Judah shall attack first.' ¹⁹So the Israelites set out at dawn and encamped opposite Gibeah. ²⁰They advanced to do battle with Benjamin and drew up their forces before the town. ²¹The Benjamites made a sally from Gibeah and left twenty-two thousand of Israel dead on the field that day. ²³ [*vv22 and 23 transposed*] The Israelites went up to Bethel [*to Bethel: prob. rdg, cp vv18, 26; Heb*

omitted], lamented before the LORD until evening and inquired whether they should again attack their brother Benjamin. The LORD said, 'Yes, attack him.' ²²Then the Israelites took fresh courage and again formed up on the same ground as the first day. ²⁴So the second day they advanced against the Benjamites, ²⁵who sallied out from Gibeah to meet them and laid another eighteen thousand armed men low. ²⁶The Israelites, the whole people, went back to Bethel, where they sat before the LORD lamenting and fasting until evening, and they offered whole-offerings and shared-offerings before the LORD. ²⁷In those days the Ark of the Covenant of God was there, ²⁸and Phinehas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, served before the LORD [*Or before the Ark*]. The Israelites inquired of the LORD and said, 'Shall we again march out, to battle against Benjamin our brother or shall we desist?' The LORD answered, 'Attack him: tomorrow I will deliver him into your hands.' ²⁹Israel then posted men in ambush all round Gibeah.

³⁰On the third day the Israelites advanced against the Benjamites and drew up their forces at Gibeah as they had before; ³¹and the Benjamites sallied out to meet the army. They were drawn away from the town and began the attack as before by killing a few Israelites, about thirty [*Or about thirty wounded men*], on the highways which led across open country, one to Bethel and the other to Gibeah. ³²They thought they were defeating them once again, but the Israelites had planned a retreat to draw them away from the town out on to the highways. ³³Meanwhile the main body of Israelites left their positions and re-formed in Baal-tamar, while those in ambush, ten thousand picked men all told, burst out from their position in the neighbourhood of Gibeah and came in on the east of the town. ³⁴There was soon heavy fighting; yet the Benjamites did not suspect the disaster that was threatening them. ³⁵So the LORD put Benjamin to flight before Israel, and on that day the Israelites killed twenty-five thousand one hundred Benjamites, all armed men.

³⁶The men of Benjamin now saw that they had been defeated, for all that the Israelites, trusting in the ambush which they had set by Gibeah, had given way before them. ³⁷The men in ambush made a sudden dash on Gibeah, fell on the town from all sides and put all the inhabitants to the sword. ³⁸The agreed signal between the Israelites and those in ambush [*prob. rdg, Heb adds an unintelligible word*] was to be a column of smoke sent up from the town. ³⁹The Israelites then faced about in the battle; and Benjamin began to cut down the Israelites, killing about thirty of them [*to cut ... them: or to kill about thirty wounded men among the Israelites*], in the belief that they were defeating them as they had done in the first encounter. ⁴⁰As the column of smoke began to go up from the town, the Benjamites looked back and thought the whole town was going up in flames. ⁴¹When the Israelites faced about, the Benjamites saw that disaster had overtaken them and were seized with panic. ⁴²They turned and fled before the Israelites in the direction of the wilderness, but the fighting caught up with them and soon those from the town were among them, ⁴³cutting them down. They hemmed in the Benjamites, pursuing them without respite [*without respite: or from Nohah*], and overtook them at a point to the east of Gibeah. ⁴⁴Eighteen thousand of the Benjamites fell, all of them fighting men. ⁴⁵The survivors turned and fled into the wilderness towards the Rock of Rimmon. The Israelites picked off the stragglers on the roads, five thousand of them, and chased them until they had cut down and killed two thousand

more. ⁴⁶Twenty-five thousand armed men of Benjamin fell in battle that day, all fighting men. ⁴⁷The six hundred who survived turned and fled into the wilderness as far as the Rock of Rimmon, and there they remained for four months. ⁴⁸The Israelites then turned back to deal with the Benjamites, and put to the sword the people in the towns and the cattle, every creature that they found; they also set fire to every town within their reach.

21¹In Mizpah the Israelites had bound themselves by oath that none of them would marry his daughter to a Benjamite. ²The people now came to Bethel and remained there in God's presence till sunset, raising their voices in loud lamentation. ³They said, 'O LORD God of Israel, why has it happened in Israel that one tribe should this day be lost to Israel?' ⁴Next day the people rose early, built an altar there and offered whole-offerings and shared-offerings. ⁵At that the Israelites asked themselves whether among all the tribes of Israel there was anyone who did not go up to the assembly before the LORD; for under the terms of the great oath anyone who had not gone up to the LORD at Mizpah was to be put to death. ⁶And the Israelites felt remorse over their brother Benjamin, because, as they said, 'This day Israel has lost one whole tribe.' ⁷So they asked, 'What shall we do for wives for those who are left? We have sworn to the LORD not to give any of our daughters to them in marriage. ⁸Is there anyone in all the tribes of Israel who did not go up to the LORD at Mizpah?' Now it happened that no one from Jabesh-gilead had come to the camp for the assembly; ⁹so when they held a roll-call of the people, they found that no inhabitant of Jabesh-gilead was present. ¹⁰Thereupon the community sent off twelve thousand fighting men with orders to go and put the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead to the sword, men, women, and dependants. ¹¹'This is what you shall do,' they said: 'put to death every male person, and every woman who has had intercourse with a man, but spare any who are virgins.' ¹²This they did. Among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead they found four hundred young women who were virgins and had not had intercourse with a man, and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh in Canaan. ¹³Then the whole community sent messengers to the Benjamites at the Rock of Rimmon to parley with them, and peace was proclaimed. ¹⁴At this the Benjamites came back, and were given those of the women of Jabesh-gilead who had been spared; but these were not enough.

¹⁵The people were still full of remorse over Benjamin because the LORD had made this gap in the tribes of Israel, ¹⁶and the elders of the community said, 'What shall we do for wives for the rest? All the women in Benjamin have been massacred.' ¹⁷They said, 'Heirs there must be for the remnant of Benjamin who have escaped! Then Israel will not see one of its tribes blotted out. ¹⁸We cannot give them our own daughters in marriage because we have sworn that there shall be a curse on the man who gives a wife to a Benjamite.' ¹⁹Then they bethought themselves of the pilgrimage in honour of the LORD, made every year to Shiloh, the place which lies to the north of Bethel, on the east side of the highway from Bethel to Shechem and to the south of Lebonah. ²⁰They said to the Benjamites, 'Go and hide in the vineyards ²¹and keep watch. When the girls of Shiloh come out to dance, sally out of the vineyards, and each of you seize one of them for his wife; then make your way home to the land of Benjamin. ²²Then, if their fathers or brothers come and complain to you, say to them, "Let us keep them with your approval, for none of us has captured a wife in battle. Had you offered them to us, the

guilt would be yours.” ’

²³All this the Benjamites did. They carried off as many wives as they needed, snatching them as they danced; then they went their way and returned to their patrimony, rebuilt their cities and settled in them. ²⁴The Israelites also dispersed by tribes and families, and every man went back to his own patrimony.

²⁵In those days there was no king in Israel and every man did what was right in his own eyes.