**Judges Commentary**

**Judges Chapter 1**

Jdg 1:1

**“asked of Yahweh.”** Likely by going to the priests or the High Priest.

**“go up for us first.”** That is, who will lead the charge. The text is not saying that Judah will attack and the other tribes hang back, but rather that the troops of Judah will be up front in the battle. God chooses Judah to take the lead, and this is somewhat typological of Judah’s lead over the tribes, especially in light of the Messiah being from Judah. We see this again in Judges 20:18-19 when Judah is chosen to go first but all the tribes of Israel participate in the battle.

Jdg 1:2

**“And Yahweh said.”** Yahweh would have “spoken” through a mediator of some kind, such as a priest or the Urim and Thummim, but an important thing to consider is that Yahweh was with Israel.

Jdg 1:3

**“Judah said to Simeon his brother.”** Judah and Simeon were both from Jacob, but more than that, they were full birth brothers from Jacob and Leah.

Jdg 1:4

**“Yahweh gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand.”** We see the hand of Yahweh in the victory. Yahweh is the ultimate cause of victory, and trying to be successful in life without Yahweh is difficult at best.

Jdg 1:5

**“Bezek.”** Likely an unknown town somewhere in Judah, not the Bezek in Samaria far north of Judah.

Jdg 1:6

**“cut off his thumbs and his big toes.”** This humiliates a person and disables them very effectively.

Jdg 1:8

**“the mouth of the sword.”** Used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

Jdg 1:9

**“the Shephelah.”** The Shephelah is the area of rolling hills east of Israel’s coastal plain and between the coastal plain and the hill country (see commentary on Josh. 9:1).

Jdg 1:10

**“Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron.”** Specifically, Caleb of the tribe of Judah attacked the city of Hebron, but he would have had at least some other Judeans with him, and perhaps some warriors from other tribes as well (Josh. 14:6-15; 15:13-16). The verb can be read that Judah “had gone up.” This seems to be a description of what had happened in Joshua 15:14.

**“Kiriath-arba, and they struck Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai.”** “Kiriath-arba” means, “The City of Arba,” and Arba was the father of Anak (cf. Josh. 14:15; 15:13). Arba was one of the Nephilim. “The City of Arba” was renamed “Hebron,” and it and the pasturelands around it were given to some of the priests.

The reason that these three men, Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai, are specifically mentioned is that they were Nephilim, part of the race of “fallen ones,” which means they were likely huge in stature and incredibly evil (Num. 13:33). Hebron was called “Kiriath-arba,” which means “the city of Arba,” and Arba was one of the Nephilim and the father of Anak (Josh. 21:11).

Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai were obviously very powerful and influential, because they are specifically mentioned three times in Scripture (Num. 13:22; Josh. 15:14, and Judg. 1:10). They were destroyed by Caleb and the Judean men who fought with him (Josh. 15:14, Judg. 1:10). Caleb was given Hebron as his personal inheritance because he had been faithful to Yahweh, especially because he and Joshua were the two faithful spies who Moses sent out from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the Promised Land (Num. 13:1-33).

Abraham’s wife Sarah died in Kiriath-arba (Gen. 23:2).

[For more on the Nephilim, see commentary on Gen. 6:4.]

**“struck.”** In this case, “struck” means “killed.”

Jdg 1:11

**“he went against the inhabitants of Debir.”** The war against Debir is also in Joshua 10:38-39). The account in Judges is not a second battle but a record of the battle recorded in Joshua, but with more detail. Joshua 15:15 is almost exactly the same as Judges 1:11, the verb “went” is different.

Jdg 1:14

**“It came to pass.”** Judges 1:14 is worded exactly the same as Joshua 15:18.

Jdg 1:15

**“She said to him.”** This is paralleled in Joshua 15:19.

Jdg 1:16

**“And the children of the Kenite.”** That is, the Kenite people. They went with the people of Judah and it seems they were at least to a certain extent assimilated into Judah.

**“City of Date Palms.”** The palm trees in Israel were date palms, not coconut palms. The City of Date Palms is Jericho.

**“which is in the Negev of Arad.”** A powerful town in the Negev of Judah. The “wilderness of Judah” was large and in several geographic regions of Judah, so it makes sense that the text would specify the wilderness of Judah in the Negev.

**“lived with the people.”** That is, the Kenites lived with the people, Israel, but specifically the people of Judah.

Jdg 1:17

**“Zephath.”** The location of this city is unknown.

**“devoted it to destruction.”** For more on things “devoted” to Yahweh and devoted to destruction, see commentary on Joshua 6:17.

**“And they called.”** The Hebrew is literally, “and he called,” with the “he” being the collective tribes. This is a case where a plural subject, Judah and Simeon, is paired with a singular verb, “he called” (cf. Gen. 49:16).

**“Hormah.”** The city name means “destruction.”

Jdg 1:18

**“Judah captured Gaza.”** The verse says that Judah captured Gaza, but there is some doubt about that. The Septuagint says that Judah did “not” capture these cities. which seems to accord with Joshua 13:2-3. Also, in Joshua 12 these cities are not listed as having been conquered. If they were captured, for some reason they did not hold it long. The Philistines quickly inhabited it (Judg. 6:4).

Jdg 1:19

**“and he drove.”** The “he” refers collectively to Judah.

Jdg 1:20

**“the sons of Anak.”** Anak was one of the Nephilim, the “Fallen Ones,” just as Numbers 13:33 says.

[For more on the Nephilim, see commentary on Gen. 6:4.]

Jdg 1:21

**“but the Jebusites live in Jerusalem among the children of Benjamin to this day.”** The Jebusites lived in Jerusalem, which was in the tribal territory of Benjamin, so the Benjamites lived all around the Jebusites.

Jdg 1:22

**“and Yahweh was with them.”** So Yahweh had been with Judah, and He also was with the house of Joseph, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, but likely here the emphasis is on the tribe of Ephraim (Judg. 1:27). Bethel is in the tribal area of Ephraim. And Yahweh was with Ephraim too!

Jdg 1:24

**“scouts.”** More literally “watchmen” or “guards,” but these were the watchmen of the Israelite invasion force.

**“we will deal mercifully with you.”** The verb *hesed* is hard to translate here. It can have the meaning of mercifully, especially in light of the fact that the rest of the city was destroyed. It can also mean faithfully, meaning that the man would not be double-crossed after showing the people how to enter the city.

Jdg 1:25

**“And he showed them the entrance into the city.”** This would be a concealed small entrance into the city. The man did not show them the main city gate.

**“the mouth of the sword.”** Used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

Jdg 1:26

**“into the land of the Hittites.”** This is likely ancient Anatolia, eastern Turkey.

Jdg 1:28

**“completely dispossess them.”** The Hebrew text uses the figure of speech polyptoton (“many inflections”) for emphasis, using the word “dispossess” twice but in different forms. The same construction occurs in Joshua 17:13. See commentary on Joshua 17:13.

[See Word Study: “Polyptoton.”]

Jdg 1:30

**“in their midst.”** The Hebrew is “in his midst,” portraying the tribe of Zebulun as one person.

Jdg 1:32

**“but the Asherites lived in the midst of the Canaanites.”** This is a change from the more usual statement that the Canaanites lived among the Israelites. Apparently, when it came to the tribe of Asher there were more Canaanites in the area than Asherites.

Jdg 1:35

**“but the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed so that they became subject to forced labor.”** It seems that once most of the Danites left their assigned territory and went north, people from the tribe of Ephraim did what the Danites could not do; they moved into the area. However, instead of killing off the Amorites as Moses and Joshua commanded, they put them to forced labor.

Jdg 1:36

“**the ascent of Akrabbim.”** Literally, the ascent of the scorpions” (cf. Num. 34:4; Joshua 15:3). This is likely a slope out of the Zin Valley in the Negev southwest of the Dead Sea, going north.

**“the rock.”** This may be the name of a town in Edom.

**Judges Chapter 2**

Jdg 2:1

**“And an angel of Yahweh went up from Gilgal to Bochim.”** This is an interesting statement because it shows that there are spiritual realities and spiritual necessities that are not apparent to humans at the time they occur. Even if a person saw this angel on the road walking from Gilgal up to Bochim, they would not have known it was an angel. It was only at a later point in time that it became known that the angel traveled from Gilgal to Bochim. Most scholars believe that Bochim is the town of Bethel which is 15 miles to the west and uphill from Gilgal, and it was given the designation “Bochim,” meaning “Weepers,” because of the weeping that occurred there. It is also possible, however, that this “angel” is a human messenger of Yahweh, in that case likely a Levite (cf. Mal. 2:7).

The town of Gilgal is significant because of all the things that happened there and because it was Israel’s first base camp in the Promised Land after Joshua crossed the Jordan River. It seems that by his lonely uphill walk, the angel was making a bold statement about where Israel had been under Joshua when they first crossed the Jordan River compared to where they were now in the period of the judges after Joshua was dead.

When Israel first crossed the Jordan River and camped at Gilgal the men were circumcised and God rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off them. The Promised Land was before them and the future looked bright indeed. God’s angels were directing them, and God provided miracle conquests, such as at Jericho. But by Judges 2, the Israelites had rejected the covenant and disobeyed God, and so the angel announced that God would not be with them as before, which is why the people wept at “Weepers.”

So, even though no one saw it at the time, in obedience to God the angel walked from Gilgal, where the future of Israel looked so bright, to Bochim, where the present was ungodly and the future was looking bleak and difficult. What the angel did was not noticed in the physical realm at the time, and some people might argue that the journey was just show and had no real effect. But it would be shortsighted to think that way, because God does not give His angels busywork with no real purpose. In the battle between good and evil, spiritual realities are just as important, and likely more important, than physical realities. We are in no position to gauge what happened in the spiritual world, and perhaps later in the physical world, because of that uphill hike. There is always a benefit to obeying God, even if we do not see it in the physical world, and God likely put this little sentence in His Word about what angels do behind the scenes to remind us of that fact.

**“And he said, ‘I brought you up out of Egypt and I led you to the land.’”** The idea that God brought Israel up out of Egypt and led them into the Promised Land occurs a number of times in Scripture, but in this case, the wording is different, While in other places the verb translated “brought” is a past tense verb, here in Judges 2:1 the verb “brought” is in the imperfect tense and could well be translated as a future verb: “I will bring you up out of Egypt.” This is difficult to bring into English because it would confuse the reader, but the implication is profound. It makes the sentence read more as if it were saying, “I said I will bring you up out of Egypt, and I led you into the land I promised to give….” In other words, God is making the point that He said he would do something, then He did it. God is faithful to His word. In contrast, Israel said they would serve God, and then they did not do it. We learn from Judges that Israel broke the covenant and worshiped and served pagan gods. Against the backdrop of God’s faithfulness, Israel’s unfaithfulness stands out very clearly.

Jdg 2:2

**“But you have not listened to my voice.”** That might include the covenant with the Gibeonites.

Jdg 2:3

**“but they will be *thorns* in your sides.”** See Joshua 23:13.

Jdg 2:5

**“they sacrificed there to Yahweh.”** They either built an altar or there was one there from an earlier time. Offering a sacrifice is an appropriate response to their sin.

Jdg 2:6

**“Now when Joshua had sent the people away.”** This is a summary statement; Joshua had already been recorded as having died.

Jdg 2:9

**“Timnath-heres.”** The city is called Timnath-sereh in the book of Joshua (Josh. 19:50; 24:30).

**“north of the mountain of Gaash.”** The sense is that Joshua was buried to the north (but likely close to) the mountain of Gaash. The burial would never be in the city because touching a tomb made a person unclean.

Jdg 2:12

**“made Yahweh angry.”** What Israel did made God angry. It is somewhat of an overstatement to use the word “provoke,” which usually contains intent, “to stir up purposely.” The people did not set out to make God angry; nevertheless, what they did angered God.

**“bow down.”** The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth. It is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Jdg 2:13

“**Ashtaroths.”** The word “Ashtaroths” is a plural feminine noun, usually understood to be fertility goddesses. It is possible in this context that the singular god Baal is paired with the Ashtaroths, feminine goddesses because in that culture it was common for a powerful man to have more than one wife.

Jdg 2:14

**“sold them into the hands of their enemies.”** The fact that God “sold” Israel portrays them as slaves. Israel served Yahweh, who brought them out of Egypt, and so when they were not happy with Him as a “master,” He sold them to other masters, as if they might be happy with them, but of course they never were.

Jdg 2:15

**“for evil.”** Here, “evil” is describing bad things, disaster.

**“as Yahweh had spoken.”** God had said that if Israel forsook God they would be destroyed (cf. Deut. 6:15; 7:4).

Jdg 2:16

**“But Yahweh raised up.”** Judges 2:16-23 starts a new section of Judges and basically describes the cycle that goes throughout the rest of the book. Israel sins, Israel is defeated and enslaved; Israel cries out to God for help; God raises up a judge to deliver Israel; Israel ignores the judge and gets caught up in sin again; and the cycle repeats.

**“judges who saved them.”** In this verse, it is the judges who saved Israel, but in other verses, Yahweh is said to save the people. Both statements are true: Yahweh and the judges worked together to save Israel.

Jdg 2:17

**“obeyed.”** The Hebrew is “listened to,” but it means “obeyed.”

Jdg 2:18

**“and saved them.”** Here in Judges 2:18, it is Yahweh who is saving Israel, while Judges 2:16 it was the judge who saved Israel. The judge and Yahweh worked in concert.

Jdg 2:19

**“they turned back.”** They turned back from following the judge to their evil ways.

Jdg 2:23

**“neither did he give them into the hand of Joshua.”** God had said He would not give the Promised Land all at once to Joshua, and would not drive out the inhabitants quickly. God had various reasons for that, for example, Israel did not have enough people to occupy the entire land and God did not want the dangerous wild animals to multiply (Exod. 23:29-30; Deut. 7:22).

**Judges Chapter 3**

Jdg 3:1

**“known.”** In this case, “known by experience.”

Jdg 3:3

**“Mount Baal-hermon.”** This is Mount Hermon. There must have been some form of Baal worship happening on Mount Hermon.

Jdg 3:6

**“and they took their daughters as wives for themselves.”** The Israelites were warned against this in Joshua 23:12.

Jdg 3:7

**“forgot Yahweh.”** It is not as if Israel forgot who Yahweh was. They “ignored” Yahweh.

Jdg 3:8

**“Aram-naharaim.”** This could be Aram of the two rivers, often thought of as Mesopotamia. But that could be a copiest error for an area much closer to Israel.

Jdg 3:9

**“raised up a savior.”** There are many “saviors” in the Bible. God is the savior, and He often works through human saviors.

**“Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother.”** Although the reading of the text can be confusing, it is saying that Kenaz was Caleb’s younger brother, and Othniel was the son of Kenaz, and therefore Caleb’s nephew. Caleb was the son of Jephunneh (Num. 13:6), so the natural understanding of the text would be that Kenaz was also the son of Jephunneh (although sometimes “brothers” had the same mother but different fathers if a father had died). So from the information in the text, we can discern that Caleb and Kenaz were brothers and Othniel was Caleb’s nephew.

Jdg 3:11

**“And the land had rest.”** The land itself is said to be “quiet,” “peaceful,” “at rest.”

**“40 years.”** This is the total time of Othniel, including the eight years of slavery.

Jdg 3:12

**“And the children of Israel again did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh.”** The account of Ehud and the Israelites against Eglon and the Moabites and their allies has many unusual and even humorous things, and so some more liberal scholars feel it was an invented account and not historical. But there is no evidence for that opinion at all, and the record shows that God, the masterful Author, has a sense of irony and humor when looking at many human interactions.

**“And Yahweh strengthened Eglon...against Israel.** This is what many scholars refer to as “the idiom of permission.” Yahweh did not directly strengthen Moab against Israel. Israel disobeyed the commandments that Yahweh had given, and in doing that, Yahweh, the righteous God, could not protect them from themselves or their enemies. Their disobedience to Yahweh allowed demonic forces to come against them in various ways, including motivating the Moabites to attack Israel.

The attack and subjugation of Israel by Moab was unwarranted and evil, and reveals the evil and unrighteousness of the Devil, who certainly was the motivation behind the Moabite attack. When Israel left Egypt and headed to the Promised Land, Yahweh forbade Israel from attacking Moab (Deut. 2:8-9). Also, Moab enlisted the help of the Ammonites and Amalekites, two historical enemies of Israel, and Yahweh had forbidden Israel from attacking Ammon when they came out of Egypt (Deut. 2:19).

[For more on the idiom of permission, see commentary on Exod. 4:21.]

**“Eglon the king of Moab.”** The name “Eglon” is a diminutive form of the word for “bull,” thus meaning something like “bull calf.” This may be the actual name of the historical character, but also it is not beyond God to assign people names that add to the storyline. A great example of that is Delilah, the woman who deceived Samson. “Delilah” means “wasting away; pining away,” and that is exactly what happened to Samson after he met her. It is unlikely that parents would name a new baby girl “wasting away,” but when we read in Judges 16:4 that Samson loved “Delilah,” we get a quick snapshot of what will happen to Samson after that. Given that, Eglon, the “bull calf” ended up being a sacrifice to Yahweh, and in fact, there are a number of Hebrew words in the record of Ehud and Eglon that relate to sacrifices (see “tribute” in Judg. 3:15; “fat” in Judg. 3:17).

Jdg 3:13

**“City of Date Palms.”** The palm trees in Israel were date palms, not coconut palms.

**“children of Ammon.”** So the Moabites and Ammonites, both from Abraham’s nephew Lot, align together against Israel.

**“possessed the City of Date Palms.”** The city of Jericho, now called the City of Date Palms, was the first city taken by Israel in the Promised Land. Now they begin to lose their inheritance and Jericho is the first city lost to the pagan enemies.

Jdg 3:14

**“served Eglon the king of Moab 18 years.”** The Israelites had voluntarily served pagan gods, so now they will be made to serve pagan kings. Although the Bible does not describe the severity of the service, we can surmise that much was demanded of Israel in tribute and resources, and with thousands of Moabite soldiers in Israel (cf. Judg. 3:28-29), no doubt the people were personally attacked and abused as well.

**“18 years.”** Eighteen years is not a long time historically, but it is a long time if you are suffering, which the Israelites were. The Bible does not tell us when in that 18-year period the Israelites began to cry out earnestly to Yahweh, but we can safely surmise that it would have been in the first few years. That makes an important spiritual point: if you willingly disobey God and have troubles because of it, often you cannot just say “I’m sorry” to God and have those troubles vanish. Sometimes the spiritual and physical consequences of sin take time to reverse, and sometimes, as we see here in Judges 3, it also takes courage and sacrifice to reverse those consequences.

Jdg 3:15

**“And the children of Israel cried out to Yahweh.”** The Bible does not tell us exactly what the Israelites said as they cried out to God, but no doubt many asked for forgiveness. God does not generally deliver people just because they don’t like the circumstances they are in.

**“so Yahweh raised up a savior for them.”** Here we see God’s grace and mercy in raising up a savior to a mostly unthankful and undeserving people. It is records like this that should give all of us hope that even if we don’t deserve it, if we cry out to God for help and mercy, He hears us and will respond.

It is also important to notice that when God raises up people to do His work it is not all fun, glory, and fame. Most of God’s work is costly, and this refers to God’s real work, not the glitzy ostentatious religious stuff that so many T.V. evangelists and others like them tout as God’s work. God’s work is fighting the Devil and his evil systems and it tasks courage and means making sacrifices. The Apostle Paul described his life as “in frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from *my own* people, in danger from the Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the open country, in danger at sea, in danger among false brothers; in labors and struggles, in many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and without adequate clothing” (2 Cor. 11:26-27). No wonder God promises rich rewards to his faithful servants!

**“Ehud the son of Gera.”** The name “Ehud” means “Where is the splendor?” or “Where is the majesty” and thus “reflects the despondency of the times.”[[1]](#footnote-11452) Given the name, it is quite likely that Ehud was born early on in Israel’s subjugation to Moab and named from the circumstances that he was born into.

**“a left-handed man.”** The Hebrew is an idiom, a man who was limited (or “bound”) in his right hand. It likely is the standard idiom for “left-handed,” although there is a small but unlikely possibility that Ehud was somehow crippled in his right hand. The idiom is clearly used in Judges 20:16.

**“The children of Israel sent by his hand.”** It is with some irony that Ehud was a “Benjamite” (“Benjamin” means “son of my right hand”), but he was left-handed. Ehud is the only man in the Bible who is named who is left-handed. It is more irony that the text says the Israelites sent a tribute to Eglon “by his hand.” Why not just say that Israel sent the tribute by Ehud? And why send a tribute by a left-handed man? The record abounds with irony and subtle humor. In this section of Scripture, we see how the work of God can do what the work of humans cannot do. The Israelites sent a tribute to Eglon, but that would not have ended their subjugation, if anything it would have extended it. However, God used that human effort to give an opportunity to Ehud, who had the spirit of God, to open a relationship with the Moabite king, Eglon, and eventually get close enough to him to kill him and begin the deliverance of Israel.

**“tribute.”** The Hebrew word translated as “tribute” is *minchah* (#04503 מִנְחָה), and it is another word in the record of Ehud and Eglon that points to Eglon being a type of sacrifice to Yahweh. While *minchah* can mean a gift, present, or tribute, and that is its primary meaning here, it also was the word used for the grain offering that was offered with animal sacrifices (e.g., Num. 28:18-20), and that meaning subtlety points to Eglon being the meat sacrifice and the “tribute” being the grain offering that was offered along with him (for more on the sacrificial language in this record, see commentary on Judg. 3:12).

Jdg 3:16

**“had two edges.”** The Hebrew is literally, “two mouths.” The sword “ate” in both directions. The weapon was actually a long dagger, and the fact that it had two edges is important because a double-edged dagger can more easily be thrust straight ahead into a body. While stabbing can be done with a single-edge blade, a double-edged weapon cuts both sides of the wound (and can be wiggled side to side for even more damage) and thus causes much more bleeding than a single-edged weapon. If the dagger pierces the heart, the issue is moot, but Ehud had no guarantee that he would land a blow that killed quickly—many stabbing victims die because they bleed out, and so Ehud gave himself the best advantage he could when selecting the weapon.

**“gomed.”** A “gomed” is likely just shorter than a cubit. Likely 16 inches or so.

**“he strapped it under his clothing on his right thigh.”** The fact that Ehud was left-handed may have really helped him here. It is quite likely that Eglon’s guards would have thought that Ehud was right-handed and thus would not have looked very hard at his right side, but would look more closely at his left side to see if there were any signs of a weapon.

Jdg 3:17

**“He offered the tribute.”** More literally, “He brought near the tribute.” The text is using sacrificial language.

**“a very fat man.”** Eglon is the only man who is named and specifically called “fat” in the Bible (although the High Priest Eli is called “heavy,” 1 Sam. 4:18). And Ehud is the only man in the Bible who is named and called “left-handed.” So this is a conflict between two unique men: lefty versus fatty. Looked at another way, being left-handed was a terrible cultural disadvantage and considered a curse, while the fact that Eglon was fat showed that he had the best of life: a sedentary lifestyle and loads of food. So this record subtly shows that being disadvantaged but with God is always better than being worldly advantaged but without God.

It is worth noting that although the Hebrew word translated as “fat” here in Judges 3:17 is occasionally applied to humans (Ps. 73:4; Dan. 1:15) it is primarily used of animals (e.g., Gen. 41:2-4, 18, 20; 1 Kings 5:3; Ezek. 34:3, 26; Zech. 11:16). That Eglon was “very fat” reminds us of the “fatted calf,” a calf that had been purposely fattened up for slaughter (Luke 15:23, 27, 30). Thus that Eglon is specifically called “very fat” adds to the motif of sacrifice to God that permeates the Ehud-Eglon record (see commentary on Judg. 3:12). Daniel Block writes: “Eglon is portrayed as a fattened calf going to the slaughter.”[[2]](#footnote-13520)

It is also worth noting that the word “fat” is used of the minds of people who are stubborn, stupid, or unresponsive to truth (e.g. Isa. 6:10), and although the word “fat” is not specifically used of the minds of Eglon and his men, that was certainly the case. For example, Eglon was mentally “fat” (stupid) when he dismissed his bodyguard with Ehud in the room, and, frankly, the bodyguard was stupid to leave or go far away.

Jdg 3:18

**“he sent away the people who had carried the tribute.”** The tribute given to the king of Moab would have been quite large and required many men to carry it. Beyond that, however, it was often the custom to employ more men than really necessary to carry a tribute to royalty to give the impression that the king was really getting a lot of tribute and a tribute carried by 100 men was considered more honorable than a tribute carried by 50 men even if the tribute was the same but each individual load was smaller.

That Ehud gave the tribute bearers time and space to escape if his plan failed shows that Ehud really cared about others. He did not have a guarantee that his plot to kill Eglon would succeed; it was risky. And if it failed he did not want to have other people die with him. Killing Eglon was a one-man job and he did it alone.

Jdg 3:19

**“turned back from the carved idols.”** It is possible that Ehud acted as if he had received an oracle (a revelation) from the idol gods, and that made Eglon willing to listen to his “secret message.”

**“that were near Gilgal.”** This was early in the Judges period, and so not long after the death of Joshua (likely less than 75 years), and yet already Gilgal, which had been Joshua’s headquarters for years, had now become a place of pagan worship. The Devil is aggressive and persistent, and he works to promulgate ungodliness in every place and in every aspect of life. If believers are not diligent to be and stay godly, the Devil will always replace the godly with the ungodly, and sooner rather than later.

**“I have a secret message for you.”** Here we see Ehud deceive the king by using language that has a double meaning. The words “secret message” can also be understood to mean “hidden thing,” and indeed Ehud had a “hidden thing” for the king, the hidden dagger. Of course, King Eglon would not have expected or seen the double meaning in Ehud’s words, but took them in a straightforward manner. King Eglon was more likely to believe Ehud because he had just presided over bringing the king a large tribute.

**“The king said.”** The Hebrew text just has the pronoun “he,” but it refers to the king.

**“And all who were standing by him went out from him.”** This was the work of God and as good as Ehud could have hoped for. He could not have made this happen, only prayed that it would happen. It turned what otherwise would likely have been a suicide mission into a great victory for God. The fact that the bodyguard left the room, and seemingly moved out of range of easily being able to hear any disturbance in the room, is a reflection of how “fat” (stupid, unaware) their minds were. Who would leave the king alone with an enemy? Beyond that, the king was clearly overconfident in sending his bodyguard out of the room. It seems like Eglon had been expecting something important to happen for him to act that way, but exactly what it was we have no knowledge of.

Jdg 3:20

**“I have a message from God to you!”** Ehud did or said something that made Eglon stand up, which opened him up to attack.

Jdg 3:21

**“And Ehud reached with his left hand.”** The fact that Ehud reached with his left hand may have caught Eglon off guard. He likely had not noticed before that Ehud was left-handed, and so Ehud’s left-handed reach may have bought Ehud the few extra seconds he needed to grab the dagger and kill Eglon with it.

Jdg 3:22

**“and the handle also went in after the blade.”** So the dagger did not have a hilt, which would have kept the dagger handle from going into Eglon. Actually, it was a smart move not to put a hilt on the dagger because it could have easily gotten entangled in Ehud’s robe when he was drawing it from his right thigh, which would have spoiled the attack. Ehud did not try to take the dagger out, which was a wise move. For one thing, he was vastly outnumbered by the guards anyway, and would have almost assuredly lost a fight if one got started. But beyond that, there would have been no easy way to get the dagger out of Eglon and clean it without getting blood on his clothes, and any blood would have alerted anyone he passed that something was very wrong. He did the right thing by just leaving the scene as quickly as possible but without looking hurried.

**“and the feces came out.”** It is not an uncommon occurrence that when someone dies their bowels relax and their excrement comes out. That apparently happened in this case, as various commentators point out.[[3]](#footnote-24617) This is bolstered by the fact that when the guards came to check on the king, they thought he was having a bowel movement, no doubt because of the smell of the feces, and given the fact that Eglon was very fat, we can assume that his excrement had a very strong odor that was very recognizable.

Jdg 3:23

**“and locked them.”** In order to lock the door, Ehud would have had to have the key, which he would have taken from the king.

Jdg 3:24

**“cool inner room.”** This is a different word for “room” than the “upper room,” and may refer to an inner bathroom, or it may simply be another way of describing the cool upper room.

**“covering his feet.”** An idiom and euphemism for having a bowel movement, in the process of which a person covers their feet with their body. Saul did the same thing (1 Sam. 24:3).

Jdg 3:25

**“waited anxiously.”** A rare use from a word that means to tremble, dance, or writhe. The servants waited anxiously. That the servants waited without bursting in is part of ancient Eastern life. Even with the lack of things that today give us privacy in our houses such as glass windows and easily closed doors, the people of the ancient Near East were very private and proper about some things. Because of that, in the Bible we have no graphic descriptions of how people went to the bathroom, what women did when on their period, the stages of labor, how a mother cleaned up after her baby, or a host of other ordinary yet private things. Historians wish we had records of those things, but we do not. Here in Judges 3:25 we see how the servants, even though anxious, did not want to intrude on the privacy of the king.

**“were embarrassed.”** “Embarrassed” or “ashamed.”

**“lord.”** In the Hebrew text, the word is a grammatical plural, “lords.” This is a plural of emphasis.

Jdg 3:26

**“Seirah.”** The word means “hairy,” and the location of it is unknown. It seems to be in the hill country of Ephraim (Judg. 3:27). The location was likely referred to as “hairy” because of the trees there.

Jdg 3:27

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

**“in the hill country of Ephraim.”** Ehud was from the tribe of Benjamin (Judg. 3:15), but in this record, he went to rally an army from Ephraim. Ephraim was a stronger and more prominent tribe than Benjamin, and that may have been why. Also, we do not know for certain when the war between Benjamin and Israel occurred in which most of the men of Benjamin were killed (Judg. 19-21). If it was before this, then the Benjamites would not have been able to muster an army.

**“and he was before them.”** Ehud still needed to take the lead and give the people confidence in what they were doing. Good leaders know when to lead and when to encourage others to lead. Ehud was a great leader and he went before his men to encourage and inspire them, and to set an example for them to see.

Jdg 3:28

**“for Yahweh has given your enemies the Moabites into your hand.”** Ehud, the courageous yet humble warrior, gives the glory of the victory to Yahweh, and does not draw attention to himself. Beyond that, however, here we see Ehud as not only a physical warrior, but as a spiritual leader. Israel had been under servitude to Moab precisely because they did not glorify Yahweh and obey Him. Here, by Ehud’s bold declaration that it was Yahweh who delivered Israel, hopefully some Israelites will recommit themselves to serving Yahweh.

**“the fords of the Jordan.”** The British explorers in the 1800s apparently discovered five fords in the Jordan River close to the area of Jericho. Since most ancient Israelites and Moabites did not live near water there was no opportunity for them to learn to swim, and so flowing water like the Jordan River posed a real danger to them. Thus, the safe way to cross was to go to a fording place where the water was not very deep. So to kill the Moabite soldiers the Israelites did not have to guard the whole Jordan River, but only the fords.

Jdg 3:29

**“and no one escaped.”** The Israelite victory was complete. It is worth noting that the Israelites did not take any prisoners, they killed the enemy; all of them. For one thing, there were no prisons in ancient Israel. People who were worthy of capital punishment—for murder, kidnapping, rape, etc.—were executed, and people who were only guilty of lesser crimes were fined or punished in some other way. These Moabites had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for 18 years, and no doubt there had been murders, rapes, and other crimes worthy of death, not to mention that this was war, not just an internal civil action.

[For more on the death penalty and the execution of criminals, see commentary on Exod. 21:12.]

Jdg 3:30

**“So Moab was subdued.”** Israel got free from slavery under Moab. In the battle, however, there is no indication that Israel’s troops crossed the Jordan and went after the heartland of Moab. Israel was free from Moab but did not conquer Moab. The Moabites would soon crown another king.

**“The land had rest: 80 years.”** The chronology of the Judges period fits into the general chronology of the Old Testament. Men like Ivan Panin worked hard for years on the chronology and discovered that when it came to the formula in Judges, “the land had rest: 80 years,” the key to making the whole period of the Judges work was to include the years of slavery or subjugation into the full period of 80 years. Thus the period of Ehud was not 18 years of subjugation and then 80 years of peace, but a total of just 80 years. When the Judges chronology is worked like that, it fits perfectly into the 480 years between the Exodus and the start of the foundation of Solomon’s Temple (1 Kings 6:1).

Jdg 3:31

**“struck down of the Philistines.”** This is the first battle in the Bible that was specifically with the Philistines. Some Philistine cities like Gaza were mentioned, but not the Philistines themselves.

**“oxgoad.”** A long pointed stick that may have had a metal point on the end.

[See commentary on Acts 26:14.]

**Judges Chapter 4**

Jdg 4:2

**“Yahweh sold them into the hand of Jabin.”** The fact that God “sold” Israel portrays them as slaves. Israel served Yahweh, who brought them out of Egypt, and so when they were not happy with Him as a “master,” He sold them to other masters, as if they might be happy with them, but of course they never were.

**“Jabin king of Canaan.”** This is obviously not the “Jabin” of the book of Joshua (Josh. 11:1). “Jabin” is apparently a dynastic name. Family names were passed down generation after generation.

**“Harosheth-hagoyim.”** That is “Harosheth of the Gentiles.” This is likely because this was a city that Israel had not conquered and so Gentiles lived there. “Harosheth” has to do with plowing a field, so this was likely a fertile spot in the Jezreel Valley and perhaps at the foot of Mount Carmel (but the exact location is not precisely known).

Jdg 4:3

**“severely oppressed.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “strongly oppressed.”

Jdg 4:4

**“wife of Lappidoth.”** It has been suggested that since Lappidoth means “torches,” the phrase should be translated “a fiery woman,” rather than “the wife of Lappidoth.” However, although that is semantically a possibility, as Everett Fox points out, “the form [of the Hebrew] here generally calls for a proper name.”[[4]](#footnote-16854)

Also, it would be rare indeed for a woman in that culture to not be married, so much so that a woman without children was considered cursed. Far from being any kind of detraction, saying that Deborah was the wife of Lappidoth would give her standing and credibility in the culture, and also likely a good deal of personal satisfaction. That the Bible does not say anything else about her family is not unusual since she herself is the focus. Moses’ sister Miriam was a powerful woman, and yet we know nothing of her husband or children, and that is also true of other women in the Bible who powerfully served God. It is apparent from the biblical record that Deborah, whose name means “bee” in Hebrew, was a determined and fiery woman, but that fact does not need to be specifically pointed out.

Jdg 4:5

**“sitting *as judge*.”** Kings and judges “sat,” that is, ruled or judged. The Bible would not be saying that she lived under a palm tree. That is where Deborah held court, if you will.

**“between Ramah and Bethel.”** Ramah is in the tribal area of Benjamin and Bethel is in Ephraim, so Deborah was judging quite close to the southern border of Ephraim.

**“for judgment.”** Deborah was known to have the spirit of God upon her, and so the “judgments” she made involved all kinds of things people would want to have God’s direction about.

Jdg 4:7

**“I will deploy against you.”** This is Yahweh speaking (Judg. 4:6, “Has not Yahweh commanded you saying…..”). Yahweh will cause the Canaanites to be drawn out against Israel.

Jdg 4:8

**“If you will go with me.”** Barak’s statement is not an act of cowardice, although it does show that he did not have confidence that he would not need further information once the battle was near. Deborah was a prophetess and it was customary for the king to have prophets, seers, diviners, etc., with him at the sight of battle to keep him informed. And Deborah did go with Barak to the battle (Judg. 4:9), and she told Barak when to start the attack (Judg. 4:14).

Jdg 4:9

**“go, yes, go,”** This is the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

**“but it will not be your glory...because.”** This prophecy of Deborah to Barak is not a rebuke to Barak, but rather a prophetic warning to him to protect his heart from being overly disappointed when he did not get to kill Sisera. God’s plan was to give Sisera, who had been cruel to so many women and families, into the hand of a woman.

**“your glory.”** This was an idiomatic phrase that might be used here because sometimes when a warrior killed another warrior and took his armor and weapons, they were considered “his glory.” Even though Barak’s army defeated Sisera’s army, Deborah told Barak, in terms he would clearly understand, that he would not have the opportunity to kill Sisera, the commander of the Canaanite army.

Jdg 4:10

**“and 10,000 men.”** In Judges 3, the Israelites defeated 10,000 Moabites with the help of God. Now, with the help of God, 10,000 Israelites defeat the Canaanites.

**“went up at his feet.”** This is an idiom. In this case, it means behind him.

Jdg 4:11

**“the brother-in-law of Moses.”** When Moses lived in Midian he married Zipporah, but there is some confusion in the text about who Moses’ relatives are. In many English versions, the names Reuel, Jethro, and Hobab are all used for Moses’ father-in-law. There are several scholarly ideas as to how to sort this out, but there is no need to delve into all the different opinions. Instead, the Bible student simply needs to know the situation and the easy solution. As we will see, Reuel and Jethro are different names for the same man, while Hobab is Moses’ brother-in-law, not his father-in-law.

Moses’ father-in-law is called “Reuel” (Exod. 2:18; Num. 10:29), but he is also called “Jethro” (Exod. 3:1; 4:18; 18:1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12). We get some help as to why that is from Exodus 3:1 and 18:1, where the man is called, “Jethro, the priest of Midian.” The easy solution is that Reuel and Jethro are the same man, and “Jethro” is Reuel’s priestly name, because it is twice used with the description, “the priest of Midian.” Also, although “Jethro,” like most Hebrew words, can have more than one meaning, it is significant that it means “excellent, excellence,” and thus the name/designation “Jethro” (“Excellence”) fits with his position as the priest of Midian.

In most English versions, however, “Hobab” is also said to be the father-in-law of Moses (Judg. 4:11). However, we get help from Numbers 10:29 because it says that Hobab is the son of Reuel: “Hobab, the son of Moses’ father-in-law, Reuel the Midianite.” If Reuel and Jethro are the same person, and Hobab is the son of Reuel, then Hobab is Moses’ brother-in-law, not his father-in-law.

Obviously, Hobab cannot be both the father-in-law and brother-in-law of Moses, but there is an easy solution to this apparent contradiction. Hebrew is a consonantal language and originally it only had two vowels, aleph and ayin, both of which are pronounced as a variation of the letter “A.” The rest of the Hebrew alphabet is consonants. Many centuries later, after the time of Christ, “vowel points,” little markings, were added to the Hebrew text to help people pronounce and understand the text, which was very important since fewer and fewer people spoke Hebrew regularly. In Hebrew, the words for “father-in-law” and “brother-in-law” are based on the same consonants, and the vowel points that distinguish the two words in the current Masoretic text were added by interpreters. So the Hebrew root words are the same and the distinction between “brother-in-law” and “father-in-law” has to be concluded from the context. Since the Bible tells us that Hobab is the son of Reuel, we know that Hobab and Reuel are not the same person and Hobab is Moses’ brother-in-law.[[5]](#footnote-30765)

A number of English translations have corrected Judges 4:11 to read that Hobab is the “brother-in-law” of Moses rather than his “father-in-law” (cf. ASV, BBE, RV, NIV, NLT).

**“as far away as the oak.”** Because of bandits and raiders, it was not generally considered safe for someone to pitch their tent away from the main encampment of their tribe. We do not know how far the oak of Zaanannim by Kadesh was from the main Kenite camp, but it was far enough away that it was specifically mentioned, and Sisera was able to approach Jael’s tent without being intercepted by any other men of the Kenite tribe, which would never have happened had Heber’s tent been in or close to the outskirts of the Kenite camp.

**“Kadesh.”** The word “*kadesh*” means separated, and is from the same root as *kodesh* (or qodesh), meaning “holy.” There were a number of cities named Kadesh in the Bible; at least 3. For Heber to be as far north as Kadesh (the one near the Sea of Galilee, south of what would be Tiberias; not the Kadesh adjacent to the Hulah Valley north and west of Lake Hulah) is very unusual, because the majority was in the area of Judah (Judg. 1:16).

Jdg 4:13

**“chariots of iron.”** The chariots would not have been totally made of iron, but would have had iron protective plates, iron rims on the wheels, etc.

**“brook Kishon.”** The brook Kishon runs on the south side of the Jezreel Valley, and is seasonal. It does not run year around, but during and for a while after the rainy season.

Jdg 4:15

**“into a panic.”** This is what Yahweh did to the Egyptians; the Hebrew uses the same word for panic (Exod. 14:24-25).

**“army.”** Same word as in Exod. 14:24 with the Egyptian army.

**“the mouth of the sword.”** Used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

**“got down from.”** The chariots were supposed to give the Canaanites an advantage, but with God’s intervention, they became a liability.

Jdg 4:16

**“edge.”** The word “edge” is literally, “mouth.” The sword is being personified here as if it had a huge mouth and was devouring the enemy.

Jdg 4:17

**“Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber.”** It is noteworthy that Sisera’s army fled west toward home, but Sisera fled east, in the opposite direction of his army. The fact that he fled “to the tent...of Heber” meant he knew Heber was there and was intending to hide there. Also, it is almost certain that the ultimate goal of Sisera was to reach Hazor, which was well fortified and had many soldiers there to protect King Jabin.

**“To the tent of Jael.”** It is possible, even likely, that Heber had more than one wife, each of whom, according to custom, would have their own tent. For an unstated reason, Sisera went to Jael’s tent. It would have been Heber’s tent, but the tent used by Heber and his wife Jael, and therefore referred to in the text as Jael’s tent.

**“for there was peace.”** The word translated “peace” is the Hebrew word *shalom*, and it indicates much more than just the Heber and Jabin (and thus Sisera) were not at war; they very likely had covenants of peace and protection between them.[[6]](#footnote-20234)

Jdg 4:18

**“Turn aside.”** Jael spoke politely, as if Sisera was walking by and had somewhere to go and she was asking him to stop and rest awhile. This was a polite way of inviting people to you (cf. Gen. 19:2; Ruth 4:1).

**“blanket.”** The Hebrew word refers to a thick coverlet, like a thick blanket. Although thick cloth was used for rugs, the translation “rug,” which appears in many English versions, is misleading and hardly warranted. The ground in the Galilee is dirt, not sand, and covering the commanding general of the kingdom in which you live with a dirty rug would have been an insult and totally unacceptable. Jael would not have done it, and Sisera would not have accepted it.

Jdg 4:19

**“skin-bottle.”** A “bottle” or container made from animal skin.

[For more on skin-bottles, which were usually made from the skins of goats, see commentary on 1 Sam. 10:3.]

**“skin-bottle of milk.”** Showing hospitality and going above and beyond what was asked. There may also be a kind of mother image going on, because in Judges 5, Deborah is referred to as a mother and Sisera’s mother is waiting for him to come home.

Jdg 4:22

**“So he went in to her *tent*, and behold, Sisera lay dead with the tent peg in his temple.”** The word “tent” is not in the Hebrew text, but it is implied in the context and is thus in many English versions (e.g., BBE, CJB, Douay, KJV, ESV, Geneva, NET, NJB, NLT, NRSV, RSV).

The way this record is written in the Hebrew text, why Jael killed Sisera is unclear. She treated him as an honored guest but then killed him. Many scholars assume she was duplicitous, and simply lied to Sisera and killed him when the opportunity presented itself. But there are a few lines of argument that militate against that opinion. A major one is that the text indicates that in the war between the Canaanites and Israel, Heber and his family sided with the Canaanites against Israel (Judg. 4:12). Judges 4:17 says there was “peace” (Heb. “*shalom*”) between Heber and the Canaanite king, Jabin, and that was no small matter. That meant there was a pledge and likely a covenant between them for military support and mutual security (see commentary on Judg. 4:17). Given that, it seems that Jael would not have suddenly turned against Sisera, especially without her husband’s knowledge and approval. Breaking an agreement like that could lead to her death or clan warfare and blood feud.

Also, Sisera was a seasoned warrior. He would not have gone into the tent of an enemy, especially when he was very tired and knew he was going to get some sleep. Heber or other family members might have shown up and killed him. The evidence is that he went there on purpose when fleeing from the battle and heading to Hazor, the Canaanite capital city. The fact that Sisera went into Heber’s tent when he was very tired showed he expected to be protected. Furthermore, Sisera asked Jael to lie for him, and if anyone came to the tent she was to tell them that no man was there (Judg. 4:20). Had Heber and Jael been enemies, that would have been an unexpected and unreasonable request.

Also, the ancient custom was that if someone came to your tent you were to protect and care for them. Books on the ancient customs of the Middle East show that people protected their sworn enemies because of that custom. But if Sisera had expected to be protected by the custom of hospitality while in the tent, he could not have expected that from the Israelites when he left, so he likely would not have gone to Heber’s tent for protection if Heber was an enemy. But beyond that, if Jael did not have the best of reasons for killing Sisera when he was in the tent, due to the law of hospitality, she herself may well have been killed or dragged into a blood feud that could last for years, sometimes even generations, for violating that law.

Scholars who believe that Jael was duplicitous and lied to Sisera either say she was justified because God moved her to do it, or, like C. F. Kiel, believe that she acted out of a love for Israel but on her own (but the Bible indicates that she was a friend of the Canaanites, not the Israelites). Kiel writes that Jael’s act “…was not morally justified, either by this prophetic announcement [Judg. 4:9] or by the fact it was commemorated in the song of Deborah in ch. 5:24ff. Even though there can be no doubt that Jael acted under the influence of religious enthusiasm for the cause of Israel and its God. …her heroic deed cannot be acquitted of the sins of lying, treachery, and assassination, which were associated with it. …For Jehovah, the God of Israel, not only abhors lying lips (Prov. 12:22), but hates wickedness and deception of every kind. …It is true, He punishes the ungodly at the hands of sinners; but the sinners whom he employs as the instruments of his penal justice…are not instigated to the performance of wicked deeds by an inward and secret impulse from Him. …divine purpose did not justify Jael in giving to the enemy of Israel a hospitable reception into her tent, making him feel secure both by word and deed, and then murdering him secretly while he was asleep. Such conduct as that was not the operation of the Spirit of God, but the fruit of a heroism inspired by flesh and blood….”[[7]](#footnote-16799)

F. Kiel is correct that God would never inspire someone to lie and commit murder in circumstances such as Jael was faced with. But yet it is clear that God was blessed with Jael’s action. Deborah the prophetess pronounced a blessing over her, saying, “Most blessed of women is Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, most blessed of women in the tent” (Judg. 5:24). So the evidence is that Jael was a friend of the Canaanites and Sisera could expect protection from her, and yet she killed him. Why? There is a very good likely reason that Jael killed Sisera. The family tents were divided by a curtain into the main living area and a private area where women stayed private and protected from men. That is almost certainly where Sarah was when Abraham entertained strangers (Gen. 18:9). Sisera was afraid for his life, and it is very likely that while Jael kept watch for him, he crept behind the curtain into the women’s quarters of the tent where no strange man was allowed, knowing that any Israelite searching for him would never violate a woman’s privacy and look for him in the woman’s part of the tent. But that would have been lethally problematic for Jael if her husband Heber came home. If Heber found Sisera sleeping in the women’s quarters he would have been obligated by custom to at least divorce her and very likely might have killed her. By sneaking into the women’s quarters, Sisera broke the most sacred rule of hospitality and endangered Jael’s life. He left her little choice but to kill him, which she did.

Barbara Bown writes about the record of Jael and Sisera, and says, “This [record] is very, very difficult for a Western mind to understand. In imagination let us make a visit to the camp of some Bedouins and learn of their strange manners and customs.… To these people, nothing would be more natural than Jael’s action. We must remember two things. First, there is an unwritten law, yet one that even the most unprincipled would never dare violate, the duty of entertaining strangers. You could not possibly pass an encampment of Bedouins without their coming out and inviting you in to rest and using almost the same words to you as used by Jael, ‘Come in, my lord, come in and rest.’ Secondly, no strange man is ever permitted to enter the woman’s part of the tent. They have another unwritten law that such an offender is worthy of death…. If a woman allowed a stranger to enter the woman’s part of the tent, she, too, would be worthy of death. [Sisera] no doubt, pushed his way into the woman’s section of the tent against Jael’s wishes, for entering here was the greatest insult and exposed her to dishonor and also death. If she ordered him to leave, he would likely have killed her to save his own life, while to allow him to stay would have exposed her to the anger of her husband, who would at once condemn her as unfaithful, and stone her to death as the common law provided. …Jael is called blessed in Judges 5:24, not because she committed murder, but because while defending her own character and her life too, she was ridding the Israelites of a very cruel tyrant.”[[8]](#footnote-13670)

The book, *Eastern Manners and Customs Described and Illustrated* says, “Among the customs peculiar to the East, and utterly opposed to the habits of the West, is that of excluding the females of the Mohammedan families from the common intercourse of life. … Even tents, we have seen, are divided with a view to the sequestering of the females. …into which [private women’s area] it was death to penetrate, even in the quest of transgressors. …We know, moreover, that Sisera in his flight sought safety in the retirement, or women’s portion, of Jael’s tent (Judg. 4:18).”[[9]](#footnote-17414)

In understanding this record in Judges 4, it is also worth noting that in the Ancient Near East, the women put up and took down the tents. This seems strange to Westerners today because it seems to be a man’s job, but at that time the women set up the tents. So Jael had handled a hammer and tent stake ever since she was a little girl and had no problem positioning the tent stake above Sisera’s head and driving it through his head with one blow of the hammer, thus killing Sisera and saving her honor.

It may be helpful to answer one more question, and that is, why is this not explained in more detail in the biblical record? It is common in the Bible not to explain or expound upon things that are “ordinary” or standard operating procedure. There are dozens of things about ordinary daily life in biblical times that we would love to know, but they are not described because they are just ordinary life and everyone knew them. To people familiar with the life of the tenting nomads, what Jael did was completely understandable and could be seen from the events themselves.

Jdg 4:23

**“before the children of Israel.”** That is, right in the presence of the children of Israel, who had an involvement in the work of God.

Jdg 4:24

**“pressed harder and harder against Jabin.”** The Israelites did not destroy Jabin right after killing Sisera and his army. The full destruction of Hazor took some time after Sisera and his army were killed.

**“destroyed.”** The Hebrew is more literally “cut off” Jabin, but in this context, it means destroyed.

**Judges Chapter 5**

Jdg 5:1

**“Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang.”** The verb “sang” is a feminine singular verb even though Deborah and Barak are two people. This a one of the many cases where a plural subject takes a singular verb. The verb is likely feminine because Deborah is mentioned first and the women are emphasized in Judges 4 and 5.

**“sang.”** It is hard to know exactly how they “sang.” The word for “song” and “poem” are the same word in Hebrew. Whether they “sang” or “spoke” the words is not known.

Jdg 5:3

**“sing...sing praise.”** The Hebrew uses two different words for “sing.”

Jdg 5:4

**“went forth out of Seir.”** The poet is calling people’s attention to what God had done around the time of the Exodus and compares it to His mighty deeds in the Judges period (cf. Deut. 33:2).

**“field of Edom.”** See Genesis 32:3. The Hebrew there is “field,” as here in Judges.

Jdg 5:5

**“quaked.”** Some scholars see the Hebrew word as being “flowed,” meaning “melted,” as if saturated by rain.

Jdg 5:7

**“Village life.”** The word implies unwalled, open villages. The word is singular but implies the people who live in the villages.

Jdg 5:8

**“Israel chose.”** The text is literally “He chose,” but often “Israel” is used as a collective singular, and would take the pronoun “he.” It is also possible that “God” [Elohim] is the subject of the sentence and then it would read, “God chose new, then war was in the gates,” and “new” would be an adjective describing “new” leaders, such as Deborah, who then went to war (cf. NET). However, the fact that God consistently warned Israel that idolatry would lead to war and enslavement, and that is a major theme of Judges, is support for the traditional translation: “Israel chose new gods; then there was war in the gates” (cf. Deut. 32:17, “new *gods*”).

**“Was there a shield or spear seen among 40,000 in Israel?”** The Canaanites had oppressed Israel for 20 years, and they disarmed Israel. This is still a tactic of the enemy today. A disarmed people is a weak and controllable people.

Jdg 5:9

**“leaders.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “decree makers; lawmakers.” It apparently refers to people in every level of any organization who make the rules and decrees.

**“offered themselves willingly.”** Some versions translate the Hebrew as “volunteered,” but the meaning is the same.

**“Bless Yahweh!”** Deborah is excited and thankful that there has been a change of heart in Israel and that people are willing to take a stand against evil.

Jdg 5:10

**“you who ride on white female donkeys.”** This refers to the wealthy. The poorer people walked on the road, as Judges 5:10 says. The color could be “white” or simply “light-colored” (NET).

**“rich carpets.”** The Hebrew word is used only here, and is related to the word “measure,” and carpet material was measured and sold even as carpet is sold by its measurements today.

**“you who walk on the road.”** After Deborah and Barak defeated the Canaanites, the roads were once again occupied.

Jdg 5:11

**“righteous acts.”** The Hebrew word is more literally, “righteousnesses” (a noun), but it refers to what we would call His righteous acts.

**“went down to the gates.”** They gathered at the gates of the cities for war, to support Deborah and Barak.

Jdg 5:12

**“Get up, get up, Deborah!”** Although most other English versions say “Awake,” Deborah was not asleep, nor even mentally “asleep.” She was waiting for guidance from Yahweh and, especially given the tense time, would have been wide awake both physically and mentally. When she got the revelation from Yahweh to move forward, then she needed to move quickly and decisively, thus the imperative fourfold exhortation to “get up.” Using a different Hebrew word, Barak was told to “stand up” and get moving.

**“speak forth a song.”** This is recounting the events before the battle, so Deborah is not rousing herself to action just to sing a cheerful melody. In this case, her “song” was most likely either her prophetic call to Barak to gather an army against the enemy (Judg. 4:6-7) or her final call to start the battle (Judg. 4:14), or perhaps even both.

**“capture your captives.”** This was a refrain commonly spoken by women as their men returned home from a battle with loot and possible captives (cf. Ps. 68:18).

Jdg 5:13

**“for me.”** Who the “for me” refers to is unclear, and scholars have suggested Deborah, Barak, and Yahweh. In any case, in the end, it is all for Yahweh.

Jdg 5:14

**“whose root was against Amalek.”** The Hebrew can be translated that way, and it is true that the root of Ephraim was against Amalek. Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim and as early as the wilderness wanderings with Moses, Joshua led the battles against the Amalekites (Exod. 17:8-13). The idea that Ephraim’s root was “in Amelek” is “strange,”[[10]](#footnote-28280) and forces people to say that Amalek must have controlled some of the territory inherited by Ephraim, but that is unlikely and without any proof. But even if it were the case, that would not make Ephraim’s root Amalek.

Since the Amalekites were not in this battle, one might ask why they even come up in Deborah’s poem. Apparently, they come up because they were the quintessential enemies of Israel. They were the first ones to attack Israel after Israel left Egypt (Exod. 17:8) and God said He would make war on them continually (Exod. 17:16). So here in Judges 5, although the Canaanites were the ones who oppressed Israel for 20 years (Judg. 4:3), Deborah mentions them in her poem for effect and emphasis.

**“After you, Benjamin, among your peoples.”** This is not a complete sentence in English, and it is not a complete sentence in Hebrew. In fact, the versions are divided as to what it means and how to translate it. The two primary interpretations are that it is saying that Benjamin followed Ephraim into battle ( CJB, HCSB, NIV, NJB), and that Ephraim followed Benjamin into battle (ESV, NASB, NET, NLT). Judges 5 is Hebrew poetry, and like most poetry, some sentences are incomplete and vocabulary words are used in unusual ways, making this chapter difficult to understand in a precise way. The text is simply unclear about who followed who into battle.

**“the officer’s staff.”** The Hebrew text is unclear because the phrase is used only here, and so the English versions translate it in many different ways, including “the pen of the writer” (KJV); “census-counter’s staff” (Fox); and “staff of office” (NASB). Zebulun was in the heat of the battle (Judg. 5:18), so they apparently were taking some form of leadership or forward role in the fighting, so “officer’s staff” seemed logical and was similar to many other English versions.

Jdg 5:15

**“the plain.”** The Jezreel Valley at the foot of Mount Tabor is actually a wide plain, and the Hebrew word can mean “valley” or “plain.”

**“behind him.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “at his feet,” using the same idiom as in Judges 4:10.

**“Among the divisions.”** The Hebrew word translated “divisions” can refer to the divisions of a tribe, thus “clans,” and it can also relate to streams of water, such as “by the watercourses.” The Transjordan tribal area of Reuben was divided by deep valleys that had water running through them, and those natural valleys may have divided the people of Reuben into different clans or groups. It seems that the word was purposely used to portray the different groups in Reuben.

**“deliberations of heart.”** There is some manuscript discrepancy, and some manuscripts read “searchings,” but the Masoretic Text is more difficult and likely to be original. Furthermore, Judges 5:16 has “searchings,” and it is common in Hebrew poetry that the same fact is stated in two different ways. In this case, “deliberations” would be in verse 15 and “searchings” is in verse 16. The people of Reuben thought about the situation and the plight of their fellow Israelites but did nothing about it.

Jdg 5:16

**“campfires.”** The meaning of the Hebrew word is debated. For “campfires,” see Word Biblical Commentary[[11]](#footnote-19490) for Judges 5:16. The only other place this Hebrew word is used is Genesis 49:14.

**“the playing of pipes.”** The Hebrew word can also be “whistle,” but that does not make as much sense here. A shepherd might whistle for the flock to follow or come, but he would not normally be sitting, he would be up and moving and getting the attention of the sheep.

Jdg 5:17

**“Gilead.”** There is no tribe of Gilead, so this may be a circumlocution for the tribe of Gad. The tribe of Dan was located in the Transjordan, east of the Jordan River.

**“ships.”** The original allotment of Dan had access to the Mediterranean Sea.

**“harbors.”** The Hebrew word is only used here in the Bible, and it has the connotation of being a place that is protected from the force of the ocean and used as a landing place for boats. It could be translated “bay,” since it is naturally occurring and not man-made. Asher was in north Israel, and the Mediterranean coast of Asher had many more bays and jetties than did the lower coast of Israel.

Jdg 5:19

**“at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo.”** Taanach and Megiddo are both on the southern side of the Jezreel Valley; Taanach is more southeast and Megiddo is more southcentral. The cities are about five miles apart.

**“They took no plunder of silver.”** This is an ironic and perhaps even humorous way of saying the Canaanites lost the battle.

Jdg 5:21

**“brook...brook...brook.”** There is an irony here. Ordinarily, the “brook” Kishon was no threat to the Canaanite chariots, but with God’s involvement, even a small “brook” helped Israel. This battle also highlights the spiritual battle between Yahweh and Baal, the storm god. Who is in charge of the water? The Canaanites would say Baal is, but in this record, Yahweh shows, as He did when he covered the Egyptians with the sea, that He was stronger than the pagan gods and in ultimate control of the water. Although Baal is not mentioned in this record, he is in the next record in which God empowers Gideon. Gideon’s family lived in the area and had an altar to Baal.

**“O my soul, march on in strength.”** The Hebrew text is poetry, and therefore very difficult to assign only one meaning. The verse can also legitimately mean something such as, “O my soul, trample on the strong.” Both meanings are true and both apply here, so this verse is a good example of a double entendre (the figure of speech amphibologia).

[See Word Study: “Amphibologia.”]

Jdg 5:22

**“Then the horse.”** Although some scholars see this verse as the Canaanite army trying to desperately escape, it seems to be more of a summary of the attack, with the hoofs hammering the ground in the attack. By the time of the escape, the ground was soaked and there would not be the hammering of the ground. The word “then” at the start of the sentence does not demand strict chronological order.

**“hammered.”** There is a wordplay here with the word “hammer” because it is the same root as in Judges 5:26 with the hammer that Jael used to kill Sisera.

**“because of the galloping.”** The galloping caused the hoofs to hammer the ground.

**“mighty ones.”** This word could refer to the horses, or the riders, or the combination of the horse and rider as a “mighty one.” Most scholars think it just refers to the horses, but there are verses in Scripture where the mighty ones are people.

Jdg 5:23

**“Meroz.”** If this is a location, the location is unknown.

**“Curse, yes, curse.”** This is the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis (see commentary on Gen. 2:16). There is also a sharp contrast between Judges 5:23 and 5:24 in that this verse starts with “curse,” while Judges 5:24 with “bless.”

**“the mighty.”** This refers to people, whereas “mighty ones” in Judges 5:22 is different and does not have to refer to people.

Jdg 5:24

**“women in the tent.”** The text describes women in terms of their major domestic sphere in the ancient biblical world.

Jdg 5:25

**“She brought near *to him* curds.”** The Hebrew word translated “brought near” is *qarab* (#07126 קָרַב), and it is used in Leviticus 1 of “bringing near” an offering to God; “approaching” God with an offering (see commentary on Lev. 1:2, “approaches with”). There are other Hebrew words for the simple act of bringing, or giving, something to someone, so it seems that this is the author’s deliberate use of *qarab* in a way that adds to the irony of the whole situation between Jael and Sisera. Jael “brought near” the curds as if bringing a sacrifice or offering to Sisera, but as the record continued, Sisera himself became the sacrifice.

**“curds.”** The Hebrew is difficult to exactly reproduce in English. It is milk that is in the process of souring, but it is not really “curds” in the true sense of the word, although that is close, nor is it “butter” (KJV), “curdled milk” (HCSB); “cream” (DBY, NKJV); or “yogurt” (NLT). In the hot climate of the ancient Near East, “milk” did not stay milk for very long, so it was always in the process of becoming something more cheese-like.

Jdg 5:26

**“She reached out her hand.”** This verse has five verbs in quick succession, showing the determination of Jael and the quick succession of what happened in the event. Sisera was a strong and experienced warrior, and Jael had to move quickly and decisively when the opportunity arose. Hesitation could have cost her her life. The are times in life when slow and thoughtful action is important, and other times when quick decisive action is necessary. The wise person knows the difference and knows how to act in both situations.

Jdg 5:27

**“Between her feet.”** The idea is “between her legs,” and the inference is clearly sexual. In this case, there is a difference between biblical idioms and modern ones that puts the translator in a dilemma. Judges 5:27 is such a case, because although the Hebrew text says “between her feet,” the modern reader would better understand the Bible if it said, “between her legs.” Nevertheless, it seems better to translate the Hebrew literally as “between her feet” and teach the English reader that it referred to the man’s position in sexual intercourse. Although some English versions read “at her feet,” the reading “between her feet” gets the right meaning, and many modern versions have that reading (e.g., CSB, DBY, Douay, ESV, NASB, NET, NJB, YLT).

Judges 4 and 5 are the record of the Canaanite oppression of Israel and Israel’s deliverance by Deborah and Barak. The Canaanite oppression lasted 20 years and involved things that were common in Canaanite culture, such as sexual oppression of all types, including rape and the kidnapping and enslaving of women. The oppression and subjugation of women by the Canaanites are reversed by God in Judges 4 and 5, because Deborah and Jael, two women, are the major players in the destruction of the Canaanites, and it makes sense that the sexual repression under the Canaanites is represented in an ironic and reversed way in Judges 4 and 5: there are a lot of sexual terms and innuendo in those two chapters. For example, when the text says, “Between her feet,” there is a clear sexual innuendo, but also irony. Usually when a warrior invades the tent of another man’s wife and is “between her feet,” the woman is being raped—but not in this case. Here, Jael is the dominant one and Sisera has been penetrated by a tent peg.

The idioms, innuendos, and the fact that Judges 5 is Hebrew poetry and therefore often does not use prose-like sentences makes literal translation difficult, and the English reader is forced to learn some of the idioms to best understand the text. For example, the Hebrew, the word “feet” was a clear sexual reference, but not so much in English. There are a number of references in the Bible that show that “feet” often represented or were associated with the genital area. In Ezekiel 16:25, the wanton woman “spread her feet wide to everyone who passed by.” In Isaiah 7:20, the cruel Assyrian captors would “shave the hair of the feet” of the Jewish captives, a reference to shaving their pubic hair as a sign of domination designed to embarrass and fulfill sexual lust. Sadly, in Isaiah 7:20 many English versions have “shave the hair of the legs,” which misses the point of the Hebrew text entirely, and gives a false and meaningless interpretation in English. Then, the Assyrians led their shamed and oppressed captives away “naked and barefoot” and “with buttocks bared” (Isa. 20:4).

In 2 Kings 18:27 and Isaiah 36:12, the Hebrew phrase for urine is, “the water of the feet.” In Deuteronomy 28:57, the woman gives birth “between her feet.” That seems to be the proper idea also in Genesis 49:10, which foretells that the scepter will not depart from Jacob, or a “ruler” “from between his feet” until the Messiah comes. In other words, Judah’s descendants would rule until the Messiah, and indeed, Judah’s line was traced to the Messiah, as we see from the genealogies in Matthew and Luke. The word for “ruler” can also be scepter or “ruler’s staff,” as many translations have, but commentators have struggled trying to explain why the scepter would be between the ruler’s feet. The better explanation seems to be the common one, that rulers would be descendants of Judah.[[12]](#footnote-14634)

Any Hebrew reader clearly got the sexual reference in the phrase, “between her feet” in Judges 5:27 (especially because it is unlikely that Sisera was actually between her feet when she killed him, she likely stood beside him), but the English reader may not understand the sexual reference because we use “legs,” not “feet,” and speak of the man being “between her legs.” Although sexual idioms used the word “feet,” other words were used idiomatically for the genitals as well. For example, Jeremiah 13:22 uses “heel” and says her “heel” was violated, speaking of the woman being raped. The word “thigh” was also used for the genitals (see commentary on Gen. 24:2).

**“bowed down.”** This is a word that is used of submission. It is not to bow down in worship, but to bow down or bend the knee in submission. This is irony. For 20 years the oppressed Israelite women “bowed down” to Sisera, no doubt unwillingly, but now he unwillingly bows down and submits to a woman.

**“destroyed!”** This is more irony in the text. The Hebrew word is *shadad* (#07703 שָׁדַד), and it is not the standard word for “dead.” It means more like “ravished, ruined, destroyed,” and can have sexual overtones and in some contexts refer to rape. Sisera had ravished many women, and now he is ravished, despoiled, ruined, destroyed, by a woman.

Jdg 5:28

**“so shamefully late.”** The Hebrew word translated “long” in some versions is related to shame. Fox (The Schocken Bible) has “shamefully-late,” and Rotherham’s Emphasised Bible has “ashamed to come.”

**“the hoofbeats from his chariots delayed?”** The Hebrew word can refer to the sound of the chariots (NIV) or the sound of the horse’s hoofs (NASB). It usually involves the sound of footsteps, so the hoofbeats of the horses seems likely correct.

Jdg 5:29

**“her ladies.”** In another context, this could be “princesses,” but her son was not a king, so “ladies” is better here.

Jdg 5:30

**“woman.”** The Hebrew word is “womb,” which highlights the sexual nature of the Canaanite oppression of Israel. Sexual perversity in life and worship was part of the Canaanite lifestyle, and even Sisera’s mother expected him to come home from the battle with a “womb” or two—slave women for his pleasure. It was fitting in this time of Canaanite oppression, which brought suffering upon the women, that Deborah would arise as the prophetess who would engineer the defeat of the Canaanites, and Jael the wife of Heber would kill Sisera, the Canaanite commander.

**“for the necks *as* spoil?”** This is a very difficult phrase in Hebrew, but it is poetry. The idea seems to be that the garments were taken as spoil (cf. ESV). However, it could be that the garments were on the necks of the spoil (the women), or even that the garments were for the necks of the spoilers, but that involves a change to the text.

Jdg 5:31

**“O Yahweh.”** The sentence changes abruptly from direct address to speaking of God in the third person.

**Judges Chapter 6**

Jdg 6:2

**“the dens.”** This is the only time this word occurs in the Old Testament. It may refer to longer dens, such as tunnels. Or it may refer to secret hiding places for things as well as people.

Jdg 6:3

**“them.”** The Hebrew is singular and refers to Israel, but the word “them” is clearer in English.

Jdg 6:4

**“them.”** The singular changes to plural here, and refers to Israel as “them.”

Jdg 6:6

**“brought very low.**” This is a purposely vague phrase and no doubt refers to the physical state of poverty and neediness, as well as the mental state of discouragement and despair.

Jdg 6:11

**“oak.”** This is not the normal word for “oak,” and it may be a terebinth, but in any case, it would have been a big tree with cultic significance.[[13]](#footnote-32738)

**“Ophrah.”** Within Manasseh, but the location is not exactly known. Some say the modern city of Afula in the Jezreel Valley, but that is not certain.

**“to hide it.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “to cause it to flee from the Midianites.” The idea was to hide it, but the Hebrew is graphic and poetic: even the wheat had to flee from the Midianites.

Jdg 6:12

**“angel of Yahweh appeared to him.”** The angel was sitting under a tree. The idiom “appeared to him” likely does not mean that he popped in close to Gideon, but rather that Gideon noticed him. At this point Gideon did not know it was an angel, he thought it was a prophet sent by God. He discovered it was an angel when it burned up the offering and disappeared (Judg. 6:21-22).

Jdg 6:13

**“Oh, my lord.”** Gideon did not know this was an angel at this time. Gideon uses “adoni” here, meaning “my lord,” a title for other humans. As the record moves on, Gideon’s knowledge of the situation changes. For example, in Judges 6:15, Gideon refers to this “person” as *Adonai*, generally used of an angel or God.

**“why then has all this happened to us.”** A quite common idiom. Literally, “why then has all this found us?” (cf. Josh. 2:23).

Jdg 6:14

**“And Yahweh turned.”** This is Yahweh in the person of His representative.

**“Go in this your might.”** The phrase “this your might” seems to indicate that Yahweh is supplying Gideon strength.

**“save Israel.”** The judges were called “saviors.”

Jdg 6:15

**“O Lord.”** This is the Hebrew *Adonai*, and it is stronger than the word for Lord in Judges 6:13. Gideon’s recognition of who he is dealing with is deepening and that is reflected in the way he addresses the messenger of Yahweh.

**“how can I save Israel?”** Moses started the same way, with much doubt and God had to say that He would be with Moses (cf. Exod. 3:10-12).

**“least.”** This could refer to the least significant or even to the youngest member of the family.

Jdg 6:16

**“as one man.”** In other words, “just as if they were only one man.” There are hoards of them, but Gideon will strike them just as if they were only one man.

Jdg 6:17

**“Please.”** Gideon is polite, unassuming, even perhaps doubtful, as if he might be turned down.

**“show me a sign.”** Gideon is not yet really trusting that he has Yahweh’s support. God had to give Moses signs too, and the signs had a “voice” as if they themselves spoke (Exod. 4:1-8). The Jews demand signs (1 Cor. 1:22).

**“that you are speaking with me.”** This is almost idiomatic. Gideon is not as much speaking to the messenger as he is speaking directly to Yahweh, although he might be looking at the messenger.

Jdg 6:18

**“gift.”** The Hebrew “gift” is used quite a bit with sacrifices. The offering is almost like Passover: a goat and unleavened bread (the Passover lamb could be a goat). There is something going on in Gideon’s mind that he will be more certain that this messenger represents Yahweh if Gideon gets to bring an offering.

**“sit.”** The Hebrew word usually means “sit,” but it can mean “live” or “dwell,” or also “wait.” In this case, it may mean “wait,” but it could also have its most common meaning of “sit,” and it may indicate that the angel had never gotten up from sitting under the tree (see Judg. 6:11).

Jdg 6:19

**“So Gideon went.”** Gideon went away, but the text does not say where. We do not know how far away he went, but that is likely why he made sure the stranger would stay and wait for him.

**“a young goat.”** A huge sacrifice for Gideon since meat was scarce.

**“a young goat and unleavened bread.”** This seems to make an allusion to Passover, with its unleavened bread and goat. But the unleavened bread may have been because Gideon was in a hurry.

**“an ephah of flour.”** This is almost 8 gallons (over 23 quarts; 22 liters). This is a huge amount of flour and shows the extreme sacrifice Gideon was willing to make to please God and win His favor.

**“under the oak.”** The angel was still sitting under the oak.

Jdg 6:20

**“And he did so.”** No doubt Gideon knew hungry people who would have loved to have had the meat and broth, and he could have argued with this stranger, but the fact he obeyed showed his heart to please God even if the request was difficult.

**“lay them on this rock.”** In this case, the rock became an altar. The word for “rock” indicates a larger rock, not a small one. Fox (Schocken Bible) has “boulder,” but that may be too big.

Jdg 6:21

**“staff.”** This is a staff for leaning on, a walking stick. Men usually traveled with a staff (see commentary on Exod. 4:20).

**“departed out of his sight.”** The Hebrew is “went from his eyes.” So the angel disappeared.

Jdg 6:22

**“Because I have seen the angel of Yahweh face to face.”** Gideon remembered what God said to Moses, that no one could see Him and live (Exod. 33:20). But Gideon had been seeing this angel of God all along and had not died, so why would he die now? For one thing, this was not God Himself, but an angel. More to the point, however, was that even at the time of Moses people knew that God had appeared in human form to Adam and Eve (they heard His footsteps, Gen. 3:8), Abraham (Gen. 12:7; 15:1; 17:1; 18:1), Jacob (Gen. 28:13), and Moses and the elders of Israel (Exod. 24:9-11), and they had not died. What God told Moses was couched in that specific context and involved a human seeing God in a fuller way than God’s appearance in human form communicated.

There may be other thoughts going through Gideon’s mind as well as the idea that seeing God could be fatal. Gideon may think that God might be upset that Gideon did not recognize who he was speaking to earlier in the conversation, and also Gideon may have had in mind that there were times when angels came to destroy, such as at Sodom and Gomorrah, the angel of death in Egypt at the Passover, the angel who opposed Balaam the false prophet (Num. 22:23); the angel who could have destroyed Jerusalem (2 Sam. 24:16); the angel who destroyed the Assyrian army (Isa. 37:36); and the angel who killed Herod (Acts 12:23).

[For more on God appearing in human form, see commentary on Gen. 18:1 and Acts 7:55.]

Jdg 6:23

**“You will not die.”** This may have also comforted and encouraged Gideon as he moved forward in his ministry and destroyed the altar of Baal.

Jdg 6:24

**“Yahweh is Peace.”** This is likely the main meaning of the phrase “Yahweh-shalom.” However, it could have other implied meanings as well, such as “Yahweh sends peace,” or “Yahweh is at peace with me.”

**“To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.”** When Judges was written that altar was still in place.

Jdg 6:25

**“the Asherah.”** From the context we can see it was a wooden pole goddess.

Jdg 6:26

**“and build an altar.”** This is one of the few occasions when God told someone to build an altar that was not together with the Tabernacle.

Jdg 6:27

**“ten men of his servants.”** That Gideon had more than ten servants (he took ten of his servants) shows that he was not as poor as he portrayed himself to be. To run a large household he had to have leadership skills, and was the mighty warrior, at least potentially, that the angel said he was (Judg. 6:12).

**“and did as Yahweh had spoken to him.”** Gideon’s obedience to God was a key to his victories.

Jdg 6:30

**“He must die because he has broken down the altar of Baal.”** This is exactly the opposite of what the Mosaic Law said, which said to execute people who abandoned Yahweh and led the people of Israel after pagan gods (Deut. 13:1-13; 21:18-21).

Jdg 6:31

**“Will you contend for Baal? Or will you yourselves save him?”** It is supposed to be the god who protects the people, not the other way around. The word for “contend” is *yerub* (the imperfect jussive verb), “let him contend,” and that is where “Yeru-baal” comes from, using the “b” that ends *yerub* as also the “b” that begins “Baal.” The Hebrew verb translated “contend” is *reeb* (#07378 רִיב), related to the noun, #07379, cf. Hos. 4:1). It has a wide semantic range, including both legal and non-legal meanings. It can mean to conduct or decide a legal case or carry on a legal dispute with, or it can simply mean to struggle, strive, or quarrel with. Here in Judges 6:31 it has legal overtones. Joash is saying something akin to, “will you contend for Baal in a court, will you open a legal case and dispute for him?” He is not making the simple statement, “Will you fight for Baal?” Joash goes on to say that if Baal is really a god then he can defend himself if someone has destroyed his property and his honor.

**“Let the one who will contend for him, be put to death by morning.”** Understood the way it is translated in the REV, Joash is saying that if someone is going to defend Baal then he should be executed because if Baal is really a god he will defend himself and needs no human intervention. However, the same Hebrew sentence can be translated, “The one who contends against him will be put to death before morning,” meaning that if Baal is really a god, then he will defend himself quickly and the offending party, in this case, Gideon, will die very quickly. So the two meanings of the sentence are: that if Baal is a god he needs no defense and anyone who suggests he does should be put to death; and if Baal is really a god he will defend himself and put the guilty party to death very quickly.

Joash is in a tough spot. He wants to support Baal and not overly offend the people of the city (after all, the altar of Baal was on his property), but he also wants to defend his son and keep him from being killed. The ambiguous way he spoke was a delicate way of supporting both positions. They both allow for Baal to be recognized as a god and they both have the end result of protecting Gideon. Also, if Baal is angry and wants to defend himself, that option is open to him.

**“let him contend for himself.”** This same idea, and the same verbal root, is in Psalm 74:22 when the psalmist asks God to plead His cause. Also, in Psalm 35:1, David asks God to contend against the people who contend against David.

Jdg 6:32

**“he named him.”** That is, Joash named Gideon.

**“Jerubbaal.”** The name is ambiguous and Baal could be the subject or object of the verb, and thus “Jerubbaal” could mean “Baal contends *against*,” but also perhaps “Contender *against* Baal” since Gideon broke down the altar of Baal.

Jdg 6:34

**“the spirit of Yahweh clothed Gideon.”** This same terminology is used here and in 1 Chronicles 12:18 of Amasai, and in 2 Chronicles 24:20 of Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest.

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn that was blown to call assemblies, or call people to worship or to battle.

Jdg 6:35

**“messengers.”** This is the same Hebrew word as in Judges 6:11, where the “messenger” was most likely an angel. But angels were “messengers” of God, and occasionally it is difficult to tell whether the messenger is a human or angelic messenger.

**“to meet them.”** That is, to meet the ones that were already gathered.

Jdg 6:39

**“make a test only one *more* time with the fleece.”** Gideon is looking for a sign that God is involved in the battle and will give victory to Gideon. A secondary motive for the second test might be that since Baal was the storm and rain god, to make absolutely sure that God was more powerful or more in control than Baal, Gideon asks twice.

**Judges Chapter 7**

Jdg 7:1

**“the camp of Midian.”** There were 135,000 Midianites (Judg. 8:10). Gideon, with God’s help, defeated them with 300 men (Judg. 7:7).

**“by the hill of Moreh in the plain.”** The “plain” is part of what we know as the Jezreel Valley, but it is so broad it is really a plain at this point. Gideon’s men were about a mile away from the Midianites.

Jdg 7:3

**“Whoever is fearful and trembling.”** God told Israel not to be fearful going into battle (Deut. 20:1-9). If part of the army is fearful, it can ruin the morale of the rest of the army.

**“from Mount Gilead.”** The Ein Harod spring is at the foot of Mount Gilboa, whereas “Gilead” is in the Transjordan. It is possible that here the Hebrew word “Gilead” is translated from a root that can mean “afraid,” and that this is related somehow to being afraid. There are other possibilities as well, one being that there was a mountain referred to as Gilead that was close by but which is now unknown.

Jdg 7:4

**“separate them.”** This is a word used in the refining of metals.

Jdg 7:8

**“So they took the people’s food.”** Gideon’s 300 men took the shofars and food of the other men, who returned to their tents.

**“all the men of Israel.”** This is a hyperbole for the vast majority. Gideon sent home 9,700 men of the 10,000.

**“was beneath him in the plain.”** So at some point, Gideon and his army climbed Mount Gilboa.

Jdg 7:9

**“go down against the camp.”** In other words, go and attack the camp.

Jdg 7:10

**“go down with Purah your servant to the camp.”** It is unfortunate that Judges 7:10 breaks here, because the whole sentence is: “But if you are afraid to go down *and attack*, you go down with Purah your servant to the camp and hear what they say; and afterward your hands will be strengthened to go down against the camp.” The text is playing “go down” against itself. Gideon could “go down” and attack, but if he is too afraid to do that, then he can “go down” and hear what the people are saying. The verse breaks were added centuries after even the text of the New Testament was written.

Jdg 7:12

**“as the sand that is on the seashore for multitude.”** It was Abraham’s descendants that were to be as numerous as the sand on the seashore, but due to the sin of Israel the situation is reversed and the enemy is that numerous (Gen. 22:17; 32:12).

Jdg 7:13

**“turned it upside down.”** The Hebrew is related to the tumbling of the barley bread loaf. The loaf tumbled and the tent tumbled.

Jdg 7:15

**“interpretation.”** The Hebrew is “breaking,” like the police “breaking” a case; discovering the truth of it. “Interpretation” catches the sense in this case.

**“bowed down *in worship*.”** Gideon was so struck by the power and providence of God that he bowed down right there on the spot. The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth. It is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Jdg 7:18

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

Jdg 7:19

**“just set the watch.”** The Hebrew uses the figure polyptoton to emphasize that the watch was newly set. They set, set the watch.

[See Word Study: “Polyptoton.”]

Jdg 7:20

**“for Yahweh and for Gideon.”** This can also be translated, “of Yahweh and of Gideon,” which has more emphasis on Yahweh’s part in the battle.

Jdg 7:21

**“They each stood in his place.”** Gideon’s godly men stood firm and the enemy did not, they cried out and ran away.

Jdg 7:22

**“the army fled.”** They are fleeing to the east, as we would expect; heading toward home.

Jdg 7:23

**“The men of Israel.”** The Hebrew is “the man of Israel.” The warriors of Israel were together like one man.

**“out of Naphtali and out of Asher.”** A lot of these warriors were likely among the men who were sent home. Where are the men of Zebulun? We would expect them in this list.

Jdg 7:24

**“fords.”** The Hebrew is literally “waters,” but in this case, it refers to the fording areas used for crossing the Jordan.

Jdg 7:25

**“Oreb.”** Hebrew means “Raven.”

**“Zeeb.”** Hebrew means “Wolf.”

**“beyond the Jordan.”** This refers to the west side of the Jordan River. Judges 8:4 shows that Gideon was west of the Jordan.

**“And they pursued Midian, and they brought the heads.”** The Hebrew text is difficult to exactly translate, which explains the numerous English translations. It seems that Ephraim joined the battle with new energy and defeated Oreb and Zeeb and continued the chase of Midian while sending the heads of the commanders to Gideon as evidence of what they had accomplished.

**Judges Chapter 8**

Jdg 8:1

**“contended.”** The verb is the same root word as is in Gideon’s new name, “Jerub.”

Jdg 8:2

**“What have I done now in comparison with you?”** This exemplifies Proverbs 15:1, that a soft answer turns away wrath.

**“gleaning of the grapes.”** (cf. Jer. 6:9; 49:9).

Jdg 8:3

**“God has given into your hand.”** This is a continuation of Gideon’s soft answer in Judges 8:2. He is saying that God supported Ephraim.

Jdg 8:4

**“came to the Jordan and passed over.”** Gideon pursued the Midianites over the Jordan River eastward.

**“he and the 300 men.”** This would be the original 300 men chosen by God to fight Midian.

Jdg 8:5

**“Sukkoth.”** A town at the mouth of the Jabbok River, the exact location is unknown (Gen. 33:17).

Jdg 8:6

**“palm...hand.”** The Hebrew text uses two different words for hand. There was a practice in the ancient Near East and Egypt of cutting off the hand of the dead enemy to count the number of defeated men. It may be in this case that the leaders of Sukkoth were saying that Gideon had not yet defeated the Midianites and cut off their hands. In any case, the leaders of Sukkoth were afraid that Gideon would not succeed in putting an end to Zebah and Zalmunna and were afraid of their revenge for supporting Gideon.

Jdg 8:8

**“up from there to Penuel.”** Gideon is going up in elevation into the hills of Gilead. Penuel was a site named by Jacob, where he wrestled with the angel of Yahweh (Gen. 32:31).

Jdg 8:9

**“this tower.”** Towns often had a strong tower in them that was used as a last-ditch defense against attackers.

Jdg 8:10

**“about 15,000 men,”** Although Gideon had killed many, he was still outnumbered fifty to one.

**“those who had fallen.”** That is “fallen” in battle; that is, were killed.

Jdg 8:11

**“the Road of the Tent Dwellers.”** Or, the Road of the Nomads. This was likely a main north-south road on a ridge, and the Midianites were headed south, back toward their homeland.

**“for the army was feeling secure.”** The Midianites had covered so much ground that they would have thought that no one would follow them that far without giving up the pursuit.

Jdg 8:12

**“threw the whole army into a panic.”** Gideon had killed the two commanders and captured the two kings, so the army “trembled,” that is, were in a panic.

Jdg 8:13

**“the Ascent of Heres.”** The location is unknown.

Jdg 8:15

**“He came to the men of Sukkoth.”** That Gideon came to Sukkoth before Penuel indicates that after the battle with Zebah and Zalmunna, Gideon came back a different way than he had gone.

Jdg 8:16

**“he taught.”** Some modern versions amend the Hebrew text by one letter so that “taught” reads “threshed,” which matches Judges 8:7, but “taught” makes sense also (see [NET text note](https://classic.net.bible.org/verse.php?book=Jdg&chapter=8&verse=16&tab=commentaries)).

Jdg 8:17

**“tore down the tower of Penuel.”** Tearing down the tower meant demolishing the last defense of the city and leaving the people of the city defenseless. To reach Penuel from Sukkoth, he had to go back to the east and uphill again. Gideon did not say he would kill the men of Penuel, but they likely put up a fight and were killed.

Jdg 8:21

**“the crescent-shaped *ornaments*.”** Crescent-shaped ornaments, like the crescent moon, were sometimes used to ward off evil spirits. Arabs today still often put chains with moon-shaped ornaments around the camels’ necks, but sometimes that is just decoration to attract attention or because it has been passed down as tradition. Also, it was quite common for women, especially young women, to wear the crescent moon as an apotropaic amulet to provide protection from evil and evil spirits (Isa. 3:18).

Jdg 8:22

**“Then the men of Israel.”** This was more likely a group of local men, not all of Israel.

**“Rule over us...for you have saved us out of the hand of Midian.”** Israel wanted kings to provide military victory. These men were suggesting a dynastic rule, one that extends from father to son. That was the kind of rulership that they understood.

Jdg 8:23

**“Yahweh will rule over you.”** Gideon is a prime example of so many people who worship God but then don’t realize how they let “other gods” into their lives, something that God abhors. God wants to be the one and only God and object of worship in each person’s life, and furthermore, bringing “other gods” into one’s life opens the door for Satan to come in in various ways. Just after saying that Yahweh will rule over the people, Gideon made an idol of gold, which became a snare to him and to Israel. God does not need any help from idols, “lucky” things, or anything like that. The first commandment is “You must not have any other gods besides me,” and the Shema of Israel is “Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone” (Deut. 6:4). God does not want to compete with any other gods or object for a person’s love and attention, and each believer has to be diligent to keep those things out of their life.

The Hebrew can also be taken in a jussive sense: “Let Yahweh rule over you.”

Jdg 8:24

**“earring.”** The Hebrew is just “rings,” but the rings were typically not of the kind worn on the finger but in the ears or nose, however, we cannot rule out that some of the rings came from people’s fingers.

**“Ishmaelites.”** There were different tribes that were descendants of Ishmael (Gen. 17:20).

Jdg 8:25

**“give, yes, give.”** This is the figure of speech polyptoton, used for emphasis

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

**“onto it.”** The Hebrew text is “there.” They threw the earrings there, on the blanket.

Jdg 8:26

**“1,700 shekels.”** 1,700 shekels is roughly 42.5 pounds (19 kg). A shekel was roughly .4 ounces (11 or 11.5 grams). See commentary on Genesis 24:22, “shekel.”

**“purple.”** Purple dye was rare and very expensive, so the purple clothing was on the kings of Midian. See commentary on 2 Chronicles 3:14, “purple.”

**“chains.”** Or “collars,” but even if “collars” is correct, it is not the tight-fitting collar worn by modern dogs, but a loose collar, often of leather with decorations or even bells on it.

Jdg 8:27

**“ephod.”** Exactly what this “ephod” is, is unknown. Exodus 28:4-8 describe it as part of the garments the High Priest wore, and it was part of the garments that allowed the High Priest to get God’s decision on a matter (1 Sam. 23:9). Although an “ephod” might also be some kind of idol that was used for divining or finding the will of God, it is also possible that here in Judges, Gideon fashioned some kind of image or statue shaped like an ephod or even a gold garment that would go over a wood or stone statue of some kind, and then that “ephod” would be used to divine the will of God. That would well explain how the ephod would be a snare to Gideon and Israel because they would seek answers from it and not only offend God but often be led astray.

**“prostituted themselves *by going* after it​.”** Israel was married by covenant to God, but now they were committing adultery with an ephod idol.

Jdg 8:30

**“thigh.”** An idiom. A euphemism for the genitals.

[For more information on sexual euphemisms and “thigh,” see commentary on Isa. 47:2.]

Jdg 8:31

**“concubine.”** Generally, a “concubine” was a lesser wife; a wife of lesser status to the husband, often given as a gift or bought as a slave.

**“Abimelech.”** That Gideon would name his son Abimelech shows that although he had said to the people that he would not rule over them but Yahweh would rule over them (Judg. 8:23), his heart was changing. “Abimelech” is “*Abi*” (“my father”) and “*melech*” (“king”), and “Abimelech” means “my father *is* king.” It is also possible that Gideon was simply referring to God as “father” here, in the sense of “My God is king.” However, it certainly suited Abimelech’s purposes to later assume that Gideon meant to refer to himself as a king because the son of a king, Abimelech” was a king, which is what Abimelech aspired to be.

Jdg 8:33

**“It came to pass when Gideon died.”** This starts another section of Judges, after Gideon died. It would have been helpful to start chapter 9 with this verse.

**“the children of Israel turned back.”** (cf. Judg. 2:19).

**“Baal-berith.”** More literally, “Baal of the Covenant.” It likely means that the people who worshiped this Baal made a covenant with him, or the local people made a covenant with him. Of course, this is a direct insult to God, who had made a covenant with Israel (Exod. 24).

Jdg 8:34

**“remember Yahweh.”** In this case, the word “remember” has an idiomatic sense, a meaning that some scholars refer to as the “pregnant sense” of the word. Idiomatically, “remember” often means to act upon one’s knowledge. In this case, to “remember Yahweh” means to obey, worship, serve, etc.

[For more on the idiomatic sense of “remember,” see commentary on Luke 23:42.]

**Judges Chapter 9**

Jdg 9:2

**“leaders of Shechem.”** The Hebrew word translated “leaders” is Baal, which was used of lords, leaders, landowners, and occasionally of free citizens (cf. Josh. 24:11).

Jdg 9:4

**“70 *pieces* of silver.”** It is as if the men of Shechem are giving Abimelech 1 piece of silver for each person they will murder (except Abimelech was excepted).

**“the house of Baal-berith.”** The “house” is the temple, and “Baal-berith” means “Baal of the covenant” or “Lord of the covenant.” So the people of Shechem had a temple to Baal and called him the Lord of the covenant. No wonder they did not mind supporting Abimelech in the murder of Gideon’s sons.

Jdg 9:5

**“to Ophrah.”** For Abimelech to murder all of Gideon’s sons right in Ophrah near Gideon’s house is incredibly coldhearted.

**“70 men.”** This is the number of all the sons of Gideon, 70 men (Judg. 8:30). Two were not killed. Abimelech instigated the murder and Jotham escaped, so there were 68 men murdered.

**“on one stone.”** The fact that 68 men were executed on one stone shows they were not killed while defending themselves, but were captured and then sacrificed, almost certainly to Baal. Occasionally human sacrifice was made to Baal. A sacrifice of this nature reveals how ruthless and cold-hearted Abimelech was.

Jdg 9:6

**“leaders.”** The Hebrew is *baal*, in this context likely the leaders or landowners.

**“Beth-millo.”** Beth-millo could be another site location nearby Shechem, or it could possibly be another area of Shechem, such as a specially built-up or fortified area of Shechem.

**“oak of the pillar.”** The “pillar” seems to be something “set up,” and associated with a place, not just a single pillar. So the oak of the pillar would have been in the general area of the pillar, or thing that had been set up.

Jdg 9:8

**“One *day* the trees went out.”** Jotham starts this poetic fable as we would start a story, “One day,” except we often say, “Once upon a time.” Jotham’s fable is short but powerful, and is about the trees wanting a king (Judg. 9:8-15).

In this fable, the trees are the common people, and this is different from the metaphorical use of trees in many other places in the Bible where the trees are the leaders, the powerful people in the kingdom (see commentary on Luke 3:9). The common people are often referred to as “sheep,” but not here. In this case, Jotham correctly points out that the common people often do not want to participate in governing themselves or take much responsibility for how their lives are governed (even today a significant percentage of the population of the USA does not vote, and few of those who do vote make much effort to find out much about the candidates). Thus, the trees seek out a leader and are persuaded by boastful talk and big promises, and do not recognize “bramble-people” and work to keep them from gaining power in the kingdom.

The trees’ desire to have a king is parallel to the people of Shechem wanting a king (Judg. 9:2-6). Later, Israel would want a king and anointed Saul (1 Sam. 10:1; 11:15). However, in rejecting God as king, the men of Shechem and later all Israel caused themselves great pain. Part of that pain is due to the kind of people who often get into politics, although thankfully there are exceptions. Usually, good and godly people see the value in productive work, like the olive tree, fig tree, and grapevine did, and get fulfillment from that work (Judg. 9:9-13). In contrast, “bramble people” enjoy the attention of others and lording it over others, and we see that in the demands of the bramble (Judg. 9:15).

The productive trees had no interest in reigning over others, and called it “swaying back and forth,” which was a sarcastic reference that gives the correct impression of a lot of movement and show, but without anything of value being accomplished, and that is often what ungodly leaders are about. They create a lot of drama, but not valuable production. People involved in godly and valuable production tend to realize it, and have no desire to leave their production to go get involved with a lot of show, glamor, and controlling behavior. In contrast, “bramble people” love the attention of others and will give up much to be “in the limelight” and in control of others.

Like the bramble itself, “bramble people” do not produce good things for life. Furthermore, the demand of the bramble to “come and take refuge under my shade” is at best a useless, stupid demand that the other trees don’t need to obey to do well, and at worst a self-delusion. Although we do not know exactly what the “bramble” is (the exact identification of the bush or tree called *atat* in Hebrew is not known), it seems certain that the *atat* plant does not produce a lot of shade that the other trees could take refuge in. But being arrogant and overly self-important, the bramble leader threatens the other plants (people) that if they don’t obey they will be burned up. The bramble says that if you won’t come to it for refuge, “let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon” (Judg. 9:15). The bramble is so self-important and deluded that it deems itself far more important than others, including those that would be usually well-known to be important, such as the cedars of Lebanon, and therefore bramble people, like the bramble itself, see no problem with destroying others. Abimelech was a bramble person and one way he demonstrated that fact was by murdering his brothers so he could be king.

James Jordan correctly observes that the bramble ruler “is oriented toward tyrannical rule. He represents the ungodly man who builds up a society based on taking what other people have labored to produce. His is a socialistic society, based on the massive confiscation of the wealth of other people, their hard-earned savings and capital. His is an imperialistic society, based on the conquest of weaker people and of their production. His is a slave society, based on the forced labor of other people. The bramble society is indeed the society of the curse. True to his unregenerate nature, the bramble man is a man of wrath. If things don’t go his way, he intends for fire to consume those who obstruct his plans.”[[14]](#footnote-31876)

Sadly, societies are full of people who are like Abimelech: self-important murderous “kings” who want to control others, dictate what they do, and take what they have earned (for a “good cause” of course). Furthermore, just as sadly, because of the demonic power behind them, they will exist and thrive until Christ comes and conquers the earth. The very good news is that when Jesus Christ comes he will destroy the bramble people and set up rulers who will be wonderful. The prophecy is that the rulers that Christ will appoint in the next life will be “like a shelter from the wind,” like “a refuge from the storm,” “like streams of water in a dry land, like the shade of a great rock in a weary land” (Isa. 32:2). What a blessing it will be to live with that kind of government.

[For more on the future reign of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on how the future will unfold from this present age to the Millennial Kingdom to the Everlasting Kingdom, see commentary on Rev. 21:1.]

**“to anoint a king.”** The first time in the Old Testament the anointing of a king is mentioned. Although there was not yet a king in Israel, there would have been in other nations.

Jdg 9:13

**“new wine.”** The joy that the new wine brings is more the joy of the harvest than the joy of inebriation.

**“that cheers God.”** There were wine and oil offerings to God, but more likely than that, God is joyful at the abundance His creation produces to bless humankind. Although the Hebrew can read “God” or “gods,” and some versions go with “gods,” that seems less likely here because Jotham was a godly man, and mentioning offerings to the “gods” seems out of his social context.

Jdg 9:15

**“the cedars of Lebanon.”** The best of the best are destroyed by the vindictive acts of bramble people.

Jdg 9:17

**“life.”** The Hebrew is *nephesh*, “soul,” here referring to one’s life.

**“risked his life.”** An idiom; more literally, “he threw his soul aside.”

Jdg 9:18

**“his female servant.”** This is even more derogatory than “concubine,” which while a wife of lesser status, is still a wife. Jotham seems to be being purposely derogatory.

Jdg 9:20

**“may fire come out.”** The Hebrew can also be translated, “Let fire come out,” and also, “fire will come out.” If translated the last way, Jotham’s words are a prophecy.

Jdg 9:21

**“went to Beer.”** The word “Beer” means well or cistern, and there were lots of them. The location of this Beer is unknown.

**“away from the face of Abimelech his brother.”** That is, away from Abimelech’s anger. Some versions nuance the text to, “for fear of Abimelech,” and that is the basic idea in the verse. The Hebrew can also be translated, “because of the face of Abimelech his brother.”

Jdg 9:23

**“Then God sent an evil spirit.”** This is the idiom of permission. God does not send evil spirits to afflict people, especially when both sides of the conflict are ungodly. Neither Abimelech nor the leaders of Shechem were godly, and both came under the influence of evil spirits, which were responsible for the conflict, devastation, and loss of life, which is what the Devil and his henchmen are always trying to do (cf. John 10:10). Both Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem disobeyed God’s commands, which is why the Bible says “God sent” the evil spirit—God gave commands in His law, which then forced the Jews to either obey or disobey. They chose to disobey God, and the consequence of that was being afflicted by an evil spirit. However, since God gave the law which forced the choice and ultimately resulted in an evil consequence, God, via the idiom of permission, was said to send the evil spirit.

[For a more complete explanation of the idiom of permission, see commentary on Rom. 9:18.]

Jdg 9:26

**“Gaal.”** Related to “to abhor, to loathe.” This would not have been his birth-name, but a name he earned by how he lived.

**“Ebed.”** *Ebed* means “servant, slave.” Thus Gaal son of Ebed can mean something like “Loathsome, son of a slave.”

**“with his brothers.”** This use of “brothers” means relatives, extended family.

**“moved into Shechem.”** Or they “crossed through” Shechem, but the fact that they are there for a while seems to indicate they moved in, even if just temporarily (cf. ESV).

Jdg 9:27

**“trod the grapes.”** The grape harvest is typically in July (it may be a little later, but July is later).

**“the house of their god.”** That is, the temple of their god.

**“and reviled Abimelech.”** Although the Hebrew word is used for “cursed,” it can also have the idea of “reviled”[[15]](#footnote-10226) or “made light of.”[[16]](#footnote-23363) Since we have a record of what they said in Judges 9:28, “reviled” is a good translation.

Jdg 9:28

**“Who is Abimelech, and who are *we of* Shechem that we should serve him?”** The emphasis here is “WHO is Abimelech, and WHO ARE WE of Shechem, that WE should serve HIM (HE should be serving US!).

**“the son of Jerubbaal.”** “Jerubbaal” is Gideon, and Gideon was not from Shechem, so the point that Gaal is making is that Abimelech was not really from Shechem.

**“Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem!”** The verb “serve” is an imperative, and Hamor the father of Shechem goes back to the time of Jacob, which predates the founding of Israel. Whether or not the men of Shechem were Israelites who moved there or a mix of Israelites and native Canaanites, they were worshiping the local god Baal-berith and identified themselves more with Hamor, an early ruler of Shechem than with the Israelites who came into the land from Egypt. So Gaal is telling them to not serve Gideon’s son Abimelech but to serve him, he apparently being a native of Shechem.

**“Why should we serve him.”** The rhetorical question gets people to say, “Yes, why indeed?” and rebel against Abimelech.

Jdg 9:29

**“were under my hand.”** An idiom (more literally, “in my hand”), meaning under my care and command.

**“And he said to Abimelech.”** Gaal may have spoken into the air because Abimelech was not there, but Gaal was speaking as if he were.

**“Increase your army.”** In other words, do your best to gather and enlarge your army.

Jdg 9:31

**“secretly.”** The idea of “secretly” is in the LXX and may well be in the Hebrew. However, some scholars think the Hebrew refers to a place name. But the name here is somewhat different than the place name in Judges 9:41, and it seems that if this was a place it would be the same here as in Judges 9:41. The Hebrew word translated “secretly” only occurs here in the entire Bible, so scholars have suggested different meanings for it such as “secretly,” “deceitfully,” “treacherously,” etc.

Jdg 9:36

**“You are seeing the shadow.”** The mountains around Mout Gerizim and Mount Ebal cast shadows that move with the sun, and Zebul uses that fact to distract Gaal and give Abimelech more time in his attack.

Jdg 9:37

**“navel of the land.”** This seems to be a reference to a specific spot, just as the “oak of Meonenim.” is a specific oak.

Jdg 9:41

**“and his brothers.”** This use of “brothers” means relatives, extended family (cf. Judg. 9:26).

Jdg 9:46

**“the stronghold of the house of El-berith.”** Apparently, the temple of El-berith (“God of the Covenant”) had an especially fortified area known as the stronghold of the temple, and the people fled into it for safety. This tower may not have been in the city of Shechem, but close by Shechem.

**“underground chamber.”** This could have been an underground chamber under the tower. In 1 Sam. 13:6 the word refers to a cellar or cave.

Jdg 9:48

**“Mount Zalmon.”** Mentioned here and in Psalm 68:14.

**“tree branches.”** The Hebrew word translated “branches” is uncommon and seems to refer to smaller clusters of branches, which would burn fast and hot. The word “trees” is plural.

Jdg 9:50

**“went to Thebez.”** Thebez has not been positively located; there are some likely candidates.

**“and captured it.”** This would refer to the outer city, not the fortified tower in the city.

Jdg 9:54

**“his armor-bearer.”** Abimelech was killed by his armor-bearer, and King Saul asked his armor-bearer to kill him (1 Sam. 31:4).

Jdg 9:55

**“to his home.”** More literally, “to his place,” but here “place” is used idiomatically for home.

Jdg 9:56

**“to his father.”** Abimelech’s father is Gideon.

**“his 70 brothers.”** That is, Abimelech’s brothers. It is interesting that the evil that Abimelech did in killing his own brothers is considered an evil against Gideon, the father, who was dead at the time. Today we would consider the evil to be done against the brothers, which is also true.

**Judges Chapter 10**

Jdg 10:2

**“in Shamir.”** Tola was from the tribe of Issachar, but he was buried in Ephraim, in the town of Shamir.

Jdg 10:4

**“donkey’s...cities.”** The words in Hebrew are a wordplay, being very close. E. Fox (The Schocken Bible) picks up the wordplay by saying that the men rode on burros and lived in boroughs.

**“Havvoth.”** Related to a tent encampment.

Jdg 10:6

**“the Baals and the...and the...and the..and the.”** The figure polysyndeton (“many ands”) emphasizes all the different pagan gods. Note that the gods are all plural, the many gods of the pagans, and the sharp contrast with the singular “Yahweh,” the one God of Israel and the singular pronoun “him.”

[See Word Study: “Syndeton.”]

Jdg 10:12

**“the Maonites.”** Who these people are is not clear. The Septuagint has “Midianites,” and that could be possible.

Jdg 10:13

**“Yet you have forsaken me.”** Amazing that the people would forsake God who had done so much for them for so long.

**“not continue to save you.”** This phrase captures the thought of the Hebrew text. It is not that God says He will never again save Israel, but in these circumstances, He will not continue to save them.

Jdg 10:14

**“that you have chosen.”** Here again, we see that God gives people the free will to choose who they will worship and serve.

**“distress.”** In this case, the Hebrew word “distress” is due to an outside force.

Jdg 10:16

**“was exasperated over the misery of Israel.”** The Hebrew has an ambiguity that needs to be brought into English. Is God exasperated with the trouble Israel is causing Him by not worshiping Him or fulfilling His purposes, or is God exasperated with the trouble that Israel is in? The Hebrew text can be read both ways, and frankly, both are likely true, but the fact that God sends a deliverer in the person of Jephthah shows He was still willing to help Israel. Nevertheless, God is not fooled. He knows that Israel’s “repentance” was not a real change of heart, but only a way that they could get what they wanted at the time. That fact showed up in the fact that shortly after Israel was out of trouble they returned to their evil ways (Judg. 13:1).

This record is an important lesson for God’s people. Too often believers act like these Israelites. We make promises to God to get what we want or to get relief from problems, and often because of His love and mercy, God grants our requests. But just because it seems that God has heard our pleas and given us what we want does not mean that He is fooled into thinking we have had a heart change and a genuine commitment to worship and obey Him. God has a long-term point of view and knows that there is a Day of Judgment coming in which people will be righteously judged. Believers should know that too, and not try to get short-term benefits from God apart from a genuine change of heart and a long-term commitment to serve God.

Jdg 10:17

**“Then the children of Ammon.”** Judges 10:17 begins a new episode in the history of Israel; the Ammonite attack in the Transjordan. Chapter 11 should have started here, and Judges 10:17 should have been Judges 11:1.

**“were gathered together.”** The leaders of Ammon gathered the people. At this point, the Ammonites had the advantage of effective leadership, while the Israelites did not, and so they haphazardly “assembled themselves together,” and the leadership did not direct the men, but instead spoke to one another about finding a leader (Judg. 10:18).

**“encamped in Gilead.”** The Ammonites were pressing into Gilead, Israelite territory in the Transjordan (east of the Jordan River).

**“in Mizpah.”** Likely the place where Jacob and Laban parted company (Gen. 31:49). Mizpah is a common name for a place, and the word “mizpah” means “lookout,” so it is a place with a wide view for protection.

Jdg 10:18

**“He will be head over.”** There is no mention of “king,” but the “head” might be the equivalent of a king, but the Abimelech episode may have caused people to avoid any idea of a king.

**Judges Chapter 11**

Jdg 11:1

**“Now Jephthah.”** Judges 11:1 is the direct continuation of Judges 10. The immediate context of Judges 11:1 is Judges 10:17, so for the best understanding, start reading the Jephthah record with Judges 10:17.

**“was a valiant warrior.”** Judges 11:1-3 are almost parenthetical and introduce Jephthah. He was a valiant warrior, something that had to have been demonstrated over time by his leadership and success in raids and skirmishes, nevertheless, he is a social outcast, which is explained in these verses. Judges 11:4 then picks up where Judges 10:17 left off, with the war between Israel and Ammon.

Jdg 11:2

**“have an inheritance.”** In this context, the inheritance involves land.

Jdg 11:3

**“the land of Tob.”** The identity of this area is uncertain, but it is most likely just out of Gilead to the north or northeast in the area of Bashan. Ironically, the area is called “Tob” (or Tov), “good,” but it was apparently not normally a good place to live, being adjacent to pagan lands and open to attacks and marauders. In spite of his circumstance, and in some respects due to them, Jephthah learned to rely on Yahweh and sharpened his fighting skills. He could fight off enemies and also attack to the north, east, or south without attacking Israel and fighting Israelites. The “worthless fellows” he gathered around him may have been worthless from the world’s point of view, but they became an excellent fighting force.

**“empty men.”** The meaning of the Hebrew is unclear and debated. It is literally, “empty men,” but that could easily mean that they were men like Jephthah himself, who had no good name and no land. This very much anticipates the men who joined David (1 Sam. 22:1-2). This does not mean that the men were ungodly or unprincipled. The men who followed David were in debt, discontented, etc., and could be referred to as “empty” from a social point of view. David also went out on raids when he was in the same situation.

**“went out with him *on raids*.”** This is where Jephthah would have gotten his reputation as a warrior. He could well have been raiding the enemies of Israel.

Jdg 11:8

**“That being so.”** In other words, “We agree we did that, so now we ourselves have come to get you and make you commander.”

**“head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.”** This is more than a military leadership position, but a permanent position in the leadership of the people.

Jdg 11:9

**“bring me back.”** That is, back to Gilead.

Jdg 11:10

**“be a witness.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “be a hearer between us,” in other words, Yahweh is listening and will hold their words against them and judge them if they are not telling the truth.

Jdg 11:11

**“and Jephthah spoke all his words before Yahweh in Mizpah.”** There is a certain aspect of a covenant between Jephthah and the men of Gilead here (cf. Judg. 11:10), and their words were spoken “before Yahweh,” with Yahweh as the witness.

Jdg 11:12

**“Then Jephthah sent messengers.”** Why Jephthah sent messengers is unclear. It may have to do with dignity and propriety, and perhaps also not wanting to be personally confrontational. It also keeps Jephthah safe from harm.

**“What is there between me and you.”** An idiom. The idiom has a wide semantic range, and so the context sets the meaning, but in this case, that is difficult. Jephthah could have been trying to make peace, saying, “What is the reason you are doing this,” or it may be more aggressive, “Why is there a fight between us?” It might be like in English, “What’s the problem here?” The idiom is used in 1 Kings 17:18; 2 Kings 3:13; 2 Chron. 35:21).

Jdg 11:13

**“Israel took away my land.”** This is revisionist history. Israel did no such thing. At the time of the Exodus, the Amorites controlled the land that Israel conquered, as Jephthah pointed out to the king of Ammon (Judg. 11:15-26). The record of Israel’s conquest of the Amorite territory east of the Jordan River is in Numbers 21:21-35 and Deuteronomy 2:24-36; 3:1-11. God specifically told Israel to not invade the Ammonite territory (Num. 21:24; Deut. 2:19, 27). The king of Ammon defined the land that Israel supposedly took by three rivers, the Arnon to the south, the Jabbok in the north, and the Jordan River on the west.

Often people lie when they want something, and the wise person is aware of that. Sadly, some people are so convinced of their lie (or greedy for what they want) that it leads to conflict, and the godly person must be prepared to enter into that conflict to protect his name, rights, and property. Evil will enlarge its boundaries unless people stand against it.

**“when he came up out of Egypt.”** The “he” represents Israel as a corporate entity, a singular. The text does not read “they.” Also, it is noteworthy that the king of Ammon acknowledges that Israel came up out of Egypt, something that many historians do not want to acknowledge today.

Jdg 11:16

**“Kadesh.”** That is, Kadesh-barnea.

Jdg 11:17

**“Then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom.”** This is described in Numbers 20:14-29.

Jdg 11:18

**“and circled around the land of Edom and the land of Moab.”** Israel had wanted to travel on the King’s Highway but ended up having to go quite far east to go around Edom and Moab through the Arabian desert.

**“the east side of the land of Moab.”** The Hebrew is more literally, the side of the rising of the sun.

**“they camped on the other side of the Arnon.”** The Israelites came out of the wilderness from the southeast, crossed the Arnon River into the territory of the Amorites, and camped there. South of the Arnon is Moab, so Israel did not camp in Moab.

Jdg 11:19

**“And Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites.”** This event is described in Numbers 21:21-35.

**“Heshbon.”** The capital city of the Amorites, where Sihon lived.

**“let us pass through your land to my place.”** In this sentence, Israel is both a lot of people (let ‘us’) and a collective singular, (“my” place).

Jdg 11:21

**“Yahweh, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel.”** It is almost like Jephthah is reviewing the history of the area as warning to the Ammonites. Israel had fought for this territory before, against the Amorites, and Yahweh had given them victory, so are you Ammonites sure you want to fight over it? Yahweh will again fight for Israel.

Jdg 11:22

**“and from the wilderness.”** That is, from the wilderness (desert) that is the east part of what is now the country of Jordan.

Jdg 11:23

**“Yahweh the God of Israel has dispossessed.”** Jephthah gives credit to where credit is due: Yahweh. Israel did not conquer the Amorites by their own strength. Verses like this are good evidence that Jephthah was a godly man.

Jdg 11:24

**“Chemosh your god gives you.”** Chemosh is normally viewed as a Moabite god, but it is conceivable that he was worshiped by Ammonites as well. It is highly unlikely that Jephthah recognized Chemosh as a legitimate god. Jephthah almost certainly said what he did about Chemosh to avoid an argument about the Ammonite god, and also to get agreement that if a god gave territory to you, then it was indeed your territory. If the king of Ammon agreed with that statement, then he would have to agree that the land he was invading belonged to Israel because it was given to them by Yahweh.

**“your god.”** The Hebrew text uses the plural, literally, “your gods,” but it is a grammatical plural, not that Chemosh was a plurality of gods.

**“whatever.”** The “whatever” includes the land and anyone on it.

Jdg 11:25

**“better, yes better….contend, yes contend...fight, yes, fight​**.**”** The Hebrew text uses the figure polyptoton for emphasis, repeating the words “better,” “contend,” and “fight”

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

**“Balak the son of Zippor.”** The record of Balak the king of Moab starts in Numbers 22. Jephthah may be saying to the Ammonite king, “Balak king of Moab fought against Israel and lost; do you think you are better than he was?”

Jdg 11:26

**“daughter-towns.”** The Hebrew text is just “daughters,” referring to small close-by towns that are supported by a “mother” town, a large and normally well-fortified town (see commentary on Josh. 15:45).

**“300 years.”** Jephthah’s point should be well taken, because if the Ammonites did not try to take their supposed territory back from Israel in 300 years, maybe that was because it was never theirs in the first place.

**“rescue them.”** This is tongue-in-cheek. Jephthah is making the situation more obvious by using irony. The towns did not need rescuing because they were not Ammonite in the first place.

Jdg 11:27

**“Yahweh the Judge, judge.”** This is the figure of speech antanaclasis for emphasis; using the same verb, judge, with different meanings. Also, here again, we see the godliness of Jephthah and his reliance on Yahweh. Also, we see that Jephthah recognized that Yahweh is the real “Judge,” and any earthly judge is at best a servant and representative of Yahweh. For earthly judges to act as if they are the final authority is nothing less than treason against the One who gives humans any authority at all. That Yahweh is “the Judge” behind the scenes shows that the book of Judges is not a haphazard collection of stories of the trials, tribulations, and occasional victories of Israel, but rather of God working to demonstrate His power and righteousness through frail and fallible human judges, whom He entrusted with His holy spirit to lead and protect others.

[For more on the figure of speech antanaclasis, see commentary on 1 Sam. 1:24.]

Jdg 11:29

**“and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh.”** Jephthah is moving toward the south, and we know he was also recruiting men to fight with him. In fact, the people of Ephraim were upset he did not call them (Judg. 12:1).

**“Mizpeh of Gilead.”** Likely the Mizpeh that Jacob named, but the location is not exactly known now, but some likely places have been suggested.

Jdg 11:30

**“And Jephthah vowed a vow.”** It seems that Jephthah vowed this vow when he was passing through Manasseh.

Jdg 11:31

**“whatever.”** This is masculine. It is likely that Jephthah did not even consider one of the women coming out to meet him. More likely a slave or servant. Jephthah was not expecting his daughter to come out of his house, but he was expecting someone or something to come out.

**“and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.”** We agree with E. W. Bullinger,[[17]](#footnote-18051) J. V. McGee,[[18]](#footnote-28467) and C. F. Keil[[19]](#footnote-22892) that Jephthah did not burn his daughter to death upon the altar, but rather dedicated her to the Lord to serve at the Tabernacle, in much the same way as Samuel’s parents dedicated him to the Lord and he served at the Tabernacle (1 Sam. 1:22-28).

There are many reasons to come to this conclusion; nevertheless, a large number of scholars think that Jephthah did indeed burn his daughter as a human sacrifice. Those scholars generally cast Jephthah as an ungodly and crafty man who lived on the east side of the Jordan and was influenced by the Ammonite and Moabite cultures that engaged in human sacrifice. But that opinion is at odds with the biblical text, which portrays Jephthah as a man of prayer and faith, and a hero of the faith (Heb. 11:32). Also, that ungodly portrayal of Jephthah is also at odds with the character of God, who called Jephthah one of the “judges” of Israel (Judg. 12:7) and supported him by putting His spirit upon him to empower him in war (Judg. 11:29).

Interestingly, scholars who assert that Jephthah dedicated his daughter to the Lord without killing her have reached that conclusion by two different ways. Scholars such as E. W. Bullinger see the Hebrew *vav*, usually translated “and,” as being an “or” instead of an “and.” In that case, Judges 11:31 would read, “…shall be Lord’s or I will offer it up as a burnt offering. Bullinger writes:

“The Hebrew *vav* is a connective particle, and is rendered in many different ways. It is also used as a disjunctive, and is often rendered ‘or’ (or, with a negative, ‘nor’)…Here, Jephthah’s vow consisted of two parts: (1) He would either dedicate it to Jehovah (according to Lev. 27); or (2) if unsuitable for this, he would offer it for a burnt offering. He performed his vow, and dedicated his daughter to Jehovah by perpetual virginity (Judg. 11:36, 39, 40); but he did not offer her as a burnt offering because it was forbidden by Jehovah and could not be accepted by Him.”[[20]](#footnote-29863)

Scholars such as C. F. Keil see the *vav* as an “and,” but conclude that Jephthah was using “burnt offering” in a way that refers to total dedication, not actually an offering that was burned upon the altar, and we believe that is more likely the case. There is biblical evidence that just as Samuel was given to the Lord to minister to Him, certain women were also given to the Lord (Exod. 38:8; 1 Sam. 2:22). Also, Keil correctly points out that we cannot expect every custom in the Bible to be spelled out for us in the text; we often have to be sensitive to the context to get the full picture of what is going on in Scripture.

Of the two alternative translations for the *vav*, “and” and “or,” the stronger case is for “and” because Jephthah’s saying, “whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return,” would normally have been spoken of a person. Even animals that were brought into the house at night for safety were outside during the day. In contrast, Jephthah’s servants in the house would have been looking for him to return, and he would have expected one of them to come out to meet him.

The evidence in Scripture is that Jephthah was a godly man and would have followed the Law of Moses. Although he lived on the east side of the Jordan, that does not mean he would not have known or obeyed Yahweh. Scripture never finds fault with Jephthah, and, as was previously stated, he is listed in Hebrews 11:32 as one of the heroes of faith. God put His spirit upon him to empower him, and Yahweh gave the Ammonites into his hand (Judg. 11:32). Many commentators state that Yahweh would have given him victory over the Ammonites without him vowing, and that may be the case, but it misses the point: the reason that Yahweh put His spirit upon Jephthah was certainly due to his godliness. Besides, when Israel sinned, they were often defeated, as Joshua found out the first time he attacked Ai (Josh. 7:1-11), and as God had said they would be (Deut. 28:25).

Also, God specifically called Jephthah one of the “judges” in Judges (Judg. 12:7). Only nine other people in Judges are called “judges,” and they were all people who had human weaknesses but walked with God. In contrast, there was a ruler in Judges who was not godly and ruled without the spirit of God. Earlier in Judges, Abimelech, a son of Gideon, was a crafty, deceitful man who “ruled” Israel for three years (Judg. 9:22) but is never said to have “judged” Israel, and never said to have had the spirit of God come upon him. Thus, the internal evidence in the book of Judges is that Jephthah was a godly man who walked with God.

Jephthah showed a very good knowledge of Israel’s history (Judg. 11:15-27) so we can assume he would have known the Law also, especially commandments such as “Do not murder” (Exod. 20:13) and the many commandments that forbid human sacrifices (Deut. 12:31; cf. Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5; Deut. 18:10). If God would “look the other way” when a man murdered someone in his household whom he had authority over, such as a child or slave, just because he had made a vow, that would have opened the door to much evil. Also, Jephthah was obviously very upset at the consequence of his vow and did not want to have to give his daughter to the Lord, and it seems from that, if Jephthah was the crafty, conniving man that many commentators paint him to have been, he would have figured out a way to get out of his vow. But instead, he saw the importance of keeping his vow to God even though he did not want to (Judg. 11:35). In fact, keeping one’s vows even when it hurts is the mark of a godly person (Ps. 15:4).

Also, although some commentators claim Jephthah made a “rash vow,” there is no actual indication of that in the text. He was not in a war at the time, and the fact that he tried to negotiate a peace treaty with the Ammonites rather than fight a war shows he was not arrogant or uncaring. He made his vow before he ever entered the war, just as Gideon had bargained with God using a fleece before he entered a war (Judg. 6:36-40). It is more reasonable to believe that Jephthah understood what his vow meant than to say he made a rash vow, but we can see he was caught off guard when his daughter was the first one out of his house—he almost certainly expected it to be one the servants who was charged with caring for and protecting the house.

As to the accusation that Jephthah was just a rough man living among rough men and so he would not have been bothered by human sacrifice, we point out that Jephthah was very upset that his daughter was the first to meet him; and besides, his life seems to parallel the life of David when David had to take to the woods when his society rejected him, and David did not become ungodly just because he was rejected, lived in the land of the unbelieving Philistines, and was accompanied by a band of malcontents.

Also, Jephthah fulfilled his vow; he “did to her according to the vow that he had vowed” (Judg. 11:39). But there are a couple things about that phrase that are very revealing. For one thing, if “burnt offering” meant an actual human sacrifice to Yahweh (Judg. 11:31), that would mean the girl would have had to have been sacrificed by the Levitical priests at the Tabernacle, which they would have never agreed to. So, Jephthah would have then had to sacrifice her on some other altar and the priests would not have been Levites. But if that were the case, it would not have been a sacrifice to Yahweh at all. If Jephthah had been a crafty, manipulative person, and had burned his daughter as a human sacrifice on some unholy altar somewhere in the Transjordan with either non-Levitical priests or with himself acting as a priest, his sacrifice would not have qualified as being a sacrifice to Yahweh.

Furthermore, the very way the phrase is written, that Jephthah “did to her according to the vow that he had vowed,” seems somewhat supportive of the act, not the condemnation of it that we would expect if he had performed a human sacrifice. That sacrifice would have been a huge sin, and the book of Judges is not easy on people’s sin. For example, the sin of the people is pointed out over and over (cf. Judg. 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1), and when Gideon, a judge and hero, sinned and made an idol, the text points out the sin and says “it became a snare” to him and Israel (Judg. 8:27). It seems that if Jephthah had really performed a human sacrifice, which would have been the first human sacrifice in the history of Israel, there would have been some kind of condemnation of it rather than the text simply telling us that he did what he vowed to do.

We also can see that Jephthah did not burn his daughter to death when we study the verses about her. Jephthah’s daughter saw the importance of Jephthah keeping his vow, but she asked for two months so she could “weep over my virginity” before being given to Yahweh (Judg. 11:37). That point alone should have told commentators that she was not going to be put to death. If she was going to die in two months, it does not seem reasonable that she would want to be with her friends and weep about dying as a virgin. She would have wept over dying.

Furthermore, the phrase in Judges 11:39, “and she knew no man” would be superfluous; of course she did not have sex if she was killed! The point was that she was dedicated to Yahweh, and so she never married, which is why she wanted two months to weep over her future life as a virgin never to be married and bear children.

Also, we can understand why she would want to go to the mountains for two months (Judg. 11:37). It would take some time for a young woman to adjust to the fact that instead of being a wife and mother, she would be a virgin her whole life. She needed some time to get used to her future and work through her emotions, and it would be proper to do that alone with friends, not in town where everyone could hear, which would make it seem that she was dishonoring her father’s vow. Furthermore, it would have dishonored both her father and her God if she showed up at the Tabernacle without having worked through the many emotions she would have been feeling. She needed to show up ready to serve. The tears she would shed would explain why she wanted to get away from people and go to the mountains for two months (Judg. 11:37).

Furthermore, after Jephthah’s daughter was given to Yahweh, it became a custom for the women of Israel to go to the Tabernacle four days a year to “recount” or “retell” the story of the experience of Jephthah’s daughter, which would have been done with her present (Judg. 11:40). Since Jephthah’s daughter was alive and serving at the Tabernacle, she would have had great wisdom and encouragement that she could have given the women who came to see her and talk with her. The word translated “recount” is the rare Hebrew word *tanah* (#08567 תָּנַה), and it means “recount,” “rehearse,”[[21]](#footnote-27533) “recount,”[[22]](#footnote-29129) It also occurs in Judges 5:11, where it is also translated “recount.” Many English translations, assuming that Jephthah’s daughter was dead, translate *tanah* as “lament,” but that translation is based upon an assumption and is incorrect. There would be no need to mourn her death yearly, and especially for four days, and there certainly would be no need to take four days to retell the story if the girl’s death were due to a rash vow made by a hard man.

Jephthah made a vow to God without taking into account every possible outcome, but kept his vow even though it cost him dearly. Many people find themselves in that situation when unexpected things happen. Psalm 15 says the kind of person who can live on God’s holy mountain is a person “who keeps an oath even when it hurts, and does not change *his mind*;” (Ps. 15:4). Jephthah was such a person.

Jdg 11:33

**“and as far as Abel-keramim.”** This area from Aroer to Abel-keramim is known as the Medaba plateau because Medaba is the major town on the plateau.

Jdg 11:34

**“came out to meet him.”** The verb is feminine, whereas in Judges 11:31 Jephthah used masculine verbs.

**“she was his only child.”** So Jephthah had no designs on starting a dynasty. At least a daughter could have provided an heir, and that was not to be for Jephthah.

Jdg 11:35

**“Alas, my daughter!”** What a jolt to Jephthah’s daughter this must have been! She was so excited to see her father and greet him with music and dancing, only to hear that she was a cause of trouble and sorrow for him because of what she did. Life is so fragile and fickle; it can change in an instant.

**“brought, yes, brought.”** The Hebrew text uses the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

Jdg 11:37

**“virginity.”** The word is plural in Hebrew, referring to an abstract idea, not a historical fact. Gesenius refers to this as a plural of the abstract of quality.[[23]](#footnote-22385)

Jdg 11:39

**“And it became a custom in Israel.”** This is one of the places where the verse break is clearly in the wrong place. The final phrase of Judges 11:39 should be the first phrase of Judges 11:40.

Jdg 11:40

**“retell.”** The Hebrew can mean to retell,[[24]](#footnote-31073) recount, rehearse.

**Judges Chapter 12**

Jdg 12:1

**“And the men of Ephraim.”** This is like Judges 8:1. The men of Ephraim were prickly and jealous, but they often wait until the real fight is over to make their complaint.

**“Zaphon.”** The location is unknown; it also occurs in Joshua 13:27. It is in the Transjordan.

**“We will burn your house over you with fire.”** Jephthah has received a serious threat here in Judges 12:1, and one that is totally unwarranted, but it should serve as an important lesson for those people who want to serve God. Jephthah had just fought off the Ammonites, a serious enemy “from outside the camp,” outside the people of Israel (Judg. 11:32-33). One would think that the people of Israel would be thankful and would want to show their appreciation. But no, an unidentified voice “called together” the people of the tribe of Ephraim to attack Jephthah for the “crime” of not having them participate in the war. But that isn’t even the truth of the situation. We learn from the next verse that Jephthah had called Ephraim, but they did not come to fight when they were called.

What likely happened in this situation was some tribal elders got upset that Ammon had been beaten in war, and they felt dishonored that they had not been part of the victory. Their feelings were entirely unjustified, but jealousy and envy move people to do very evil things, and this is an example of that.

The “camp of God,” which today is the Christian Church, has many people who are not truly godly, but instead are full of jealousy, pride, envy, and strife, and yet somehow rise to powerful positions in the Church. Too often the people of God who are moving powerfully for Him get attacked by those people in the Church, when we would expect the Church to applaud the work of godly people. In this situation, Jephthah can be a great example for us. He fought the enemy outside the camp, the Ammonites, then as the situation arose, he fought the enemy inside the camp, the tribe of Ephraim, and won that battle also.

Although we can be certain that fighting with fellow Israelites was not something that Jephthah wanted to do, it needed to be done and he did it. The record is very factual. There is no hint that Jephthah gloated as he killed his fellow Israelites, and similarly, there is no hint of him being depressed or feeling guilty about it. It was a distasteful task that had to be done and he did it.

Powerful Church leaders need to be aware that what happened to Jephthah was not rare or unusual. The Adversary has people both inside and outside God’s “camp,” and the wise leader is mentally prepared to deal with both, and move forward with the things of God, rather than be discouraged and give up the good work of the Lord.

Jdg 12:3

**“and crossed over against the children of Ammon.”** This is not crossed over the Jordan but simply to move from one place to another.

Jdg 12:4

**“in the midst of.”** That is, “in the territory of.”

Jdg 12:5

**“took the fords of the Jordan.”** A good military strategy. The army of Ephraim had been scattered, and individual soldiers were trying to get home, which meant they had to cross the Jordan River from east to west. Jephthah’s army captured the fords and killed the enemy as they tried to get back to Ephraim, which would keep them from regathering and mounting a counter-attack.

Jdg 12:6

**“42,000.”** This number is too large, and the Hebrew could mean 42 fighting units. Perhaps around 420 men or such as that.

Jdg 12:7

**“was buried in *one of* the cities in Gilead.”** The LXX has “in his city in Gilead,” but that may not be as likely. Four different readings have been recorded for this difficult line, for how can Jephthah be buried in “cities.”[[25]](#footnote-21479) However, it has been suggested that “buried” may refer to burial ceremonies held in different cities in his honor.

Jdg 12:8

**“Bethlehem.”** Almost certainly the Bethlehem in Zebulun (Josh. 19:15).

Jdg 12:12

**“Elon...Aijalon.”** In Hebrew his name, Elon, and “Aijalon” are the same, there is only a vowel that is different.

Jdg 12:13

**“Abdon.”** The text does not give the tribe that Abdon was from, but from where he was buried we can assume he is from Ephraim.

**Judges Chapter 13**

Jdg 13:1

**“The children of Israel again did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh.”** The story of Samson begins, like so many other records in Judges, with the failure of the Israelites to obey God and the consequence of that disobedience. Samson is given more text in Judges than any other judge—he gets four chapters (13-16). Gideon gets a lot, but not nearly as much as the Samson record.

Samson was also the first judge who died before Israel’s oppressors were defeated. All the judges who lived before him defeated Israel’s oppressors before they died, but Samson died when he knocked down the Temple he was in and it fell and killed him. Even though the rulers of the Philistines died too (Judg. 16:30), the Philistine oppression of Israel continued as we see in the book of Samuel.

There are lessons that we can learn from Samson.

* Sometimes we have to go it alone with God; we don’t have friends or supporters. It isn’t the best but it is doable.
* Samson had a sense of humor. It helped, but he overdid it to his own hurt. Realize when a strength becomes a weakness.

**“and Yahweh gave them into the hand of the Philistines 40 years.** What we would expect shortly after this statement would be a statement such as, “and the people of Israel cried out to Yahweh for help.” In the previous oppressions that is what had happened (cf. Judg. 3:9 (Othniel); Judg. 3:15 (Ehud); Judg. 4:3 (Deborah); Judg. 6:6 (Gideon); and Judg. 10:10 (Jephthah)). It is possible that the text simply does not mention it (perhaps because the judge, Samson, did not end the oppression), or it is possible that Israel was so beaten down that they had no hope for Yahweh’s help.[[26]](#footnote-26131) What we can learn from this is that Yahweh is always trying to help His people, and can and does act sometimes even if they do not ask for it.

Jdg 13:2

**“family.”** The family of the Danites is the tribe of Dan.

**“his wife was barren and had not given birth.”** The point is stated twice, apparently for emphasis.

Jdg 13:3

**“And the angel of Yahweh appeared to the woman.”** The Bible does not tell us where the woman was when the angel appeared to her and Manoah was not there, but the natural assumption would be that she was somewhere around the house and Manoah was out working some distance away. Manoah apparently could not see or hear the angel. The next time the angel appeared to Manoah’s wife the text specifies that she was out in the field.

**“you will conceive and will give birth to a son.”** There are many parallels between Samson and Jesus Christ. For example:

* There was a divine prophecy of both of their births.
* An angel announced to both mothers that they would get pregnant.
* Samson’s name is related to “sun,” and Jesus was the “Sun of Righteousness” (Mal. 4:2).
* Samson began to deliver God’s people from their enemy (Judg. 13:5). Jesus Christ started the process, and will finish it in the future.
* God began to stir Samson up against the enemy (Judg. 13:25); at the beginning of Christ’s ministry, God drove him into the wilderness where he met with the Devil.
* The people did not understand Samson’s actions (Judg. 14:2-3); Jesus’ family did not understand his actions (Mark 3:21).
* Both Jesus and Samson died in about the same basically cruciform position, legs down and with one arm out to the right and the other to the left (Judg. 16:29).

Jdg 13:4

**“Do not drink wine or beer.”** This would have been part of a Nazirite vow, but Samson’s mother was not a Nazirite. This command may be to emphasize the holiness of the child, or it may be because a pregnant woman drinking alcohol can affect the child, or it may well be both.

**“and do not eat any unclean thing.”** Ordinarily it would seem to be unnecessary for the angel to say this, since we would naturally assume that Manoah and his wife would have been Jews who were obedient to the Levitical laws. However, in extenuating circumstances they might eat things that were unclean, for example, if there was a scarcity of food or if they did not have ready access to a good source for the specific laws of Leviticus, such as if there was no teaching priest within a reasonable distance. It is highly unlikely that Manoah would have owned his own copy of the Torah.

Jdg 13:5

**“he will begin to save Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.”** This is a very important statement, because from before Samson was even born it was known that he would not complete the deliverance of Israel from the Philistine oppression. Samson would BEGIN to save Israel. This is also a sad statement, because it indicates that Samson’s life would end and the Philistines oppression would not have ended. It does not indicate how Samson’s life would end, but we might assume that because he was a special child who would begin to save Israel from the Philistines that he might die a violent death in a conflict with the Philistines, which is in fact what happened. In any case, Samson’s mother realized that the angel was telling her about Samson’s death, and in relating what the angel said to her, she reported to Manoah that “the child will be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death” (Judg. 13:7).

Jdg 13:6

**“an angel of God.”** This is the same construction in the Hebrew text as the phrase “a man of God” earlier in the sentence. Manoah’s wife would not have thought in terms of “the” angel of God, but rather in terms of one of many of God’s angels, thus, “an angel of God.” It is also possible that because the woman did not know it was an angel yet, that she spoke of how awe-inspiring a man of God walking by the power of God, such as Elijah, looked. Unfortunately, we do not have enough information to know exactly what she meant by the statement.

Jdg 13:8

**“and teach us what we should do for the child.”** This request makes perfect sense. The “man of God” (the angel) had told Manoah’s wife what to do, but had not spoken of what the couple should do for their son, so it would be natural for Manoah to want to know if there were special instructions for him just as there had been instructions for his wife.

Jdg 13:9

**“and the angel of God came again to the woman.”** The natural expectation after Manoah’s prayer for the man of God to return is that the angel would have returned to Manoah or to the couple when they were together. Statements like this, and like the one in Judges 13:11, that “Manoah arose and went after his wife,” instead of the wife following her husband, and the statement in Judges 13:24, that the mother named the child, seem to indicate the primacy of the wife in the Samson record, although no specific reason is given for that. Furthermore, as Samson grows up, it is “his father and his mother” who are active in raising him, something that is especially noteworthy in a culture in which as boys grew up they followed their father much more closely, almost always going to work with him and learning the family trade from him. But what we see in the text is “his father and his mother” in Judges 14:2, 3, and 14:4, ostensibly until Samson is older and more on his own. However, the father is the one involved in the marriage negotiation (Judg. 14:3), which would have been normal in that culture. It is possible, as Barry Webb suggests, that Samson’s active “father” is God, who blessed and guided Samson as he grew up (Judg. 13:24-25).[[27]](#footnote-13933)

Jdg 13:11

**“Are you the man who spoke to the woman?”** This statement was not a slight to Manoah’s wife in any way, but a common way of speaking in the culture. Similarly, it was not a slight to Mary when Jesus addressed her as “woman,” (John 2:4).

**“I am.”** The Hebrew text has just the pronoun, “I,” but it is commonly used as the personal identifier, meaning “I am,” or “I am he,” or “I am the one.”

Jdg 13:15

**“Please let us detain you.”** This kind of hospitality was normal for the culture of the ancient Near East.

Jdg 13:18

**“Why do you ask about my name, since it is wonderful?”** To understand both Manoah’s question and the angel’s answer, you have to understand the customs about names in biblical culture. Knowing someone’s name was very important for several reasons.

First, a person’s name revealed something about his character. Thus Jacob was “heel snatcher.” Esau was “hairy” and Edom was “red.” Elijah was “My God is Yahweh.” Jesus was “Yahweh saves.” Abraham was “father of a multitude,” and so forth. Not every name had significance, but many did. Also, knowing a person’s name was believed to give people some amount of power over the person (we experience the same thing when someone shouts our name and we stop what we are doing and look, or if spoken to in the first person by a stranger we get suspicious and ask, “Do you know me?”). It is also why Jesus has a name that no one knows but Jesus and God (Rev. 19:12). It was also why when a person had power over someone else, he changed the person’s name (Gen. 17:5, 15; 41:45; 2 Sam. 12:25; 2 Kings 23:34; Dan. 1:7). The angel would not tell Manoah his name, commenting only that it was “wonderful.” The Hebrew word (in the feminine form) is used in Psalm 139:6 to describe the knowledge of God, and that points us in the direction of thinking that the meaning of the word is related to something like “beyond understanding.”[[28]](#footnote-22453) It is also quite possible that the angel’s name was in a language that Manoah did not know and could not comprehend the nature or meaning of, and it also could have expressed qualities about the angel that Manoah had no business knowing. In any case, the angel did not give his name to Manoah.

Jdg 13:19

**“on the rock.”** This “rock” became an altar (Judg. 13:20).

**“and he did a wonderful thing.”** The “he” is ambiguous, and that ambiguity is in the Hebrew text. The Hebrew verb is masculine singular, but it could refer to Yahweh or the angel, who was acting as Yahweh’s messenger and agent. It is likely that we are meant to understand that the angel did wondrously, but was acting under Yahweh’s direction and wielding Yahweh’s power, and thus the native Hebrew reader would simply understand that the “he” was the angel as the agent and Yahweh as the one directing the angel. It is hard to make the English clear when the Hebrew is not clear without making the English say something that the Hebrew text does not say. For example, if we replace the “he” with “the angel,” as some versions do, we miss that the text likely includes Yahweh along with the angel.

Jdg 13:22

**“We are going to die, yes, die, because we have seen God.”** There was an ancient belief in the ancient Near-East that if a person saw God he would die (cf. Gen. 32:30).

**“die, yes, die.”** The Hebrew text has the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis (see commentary on Gen. 2:16).

Jdg 13:24

**“the woman bore a son and named him.”** That Samson’s mother would name him is contrary to the culture, in which the father usually named the child, especially a son. But it follows the general trend of the record, in which Samson’s mother is given the primary role in the family (see commentary on Judg. 13:9).

**“Samson.”** The Hebrew word is related to the word “sun.” Things had been dark for Israel, now perhaps the sun would come out and Israel would be delivered from the Philistines.

Jdg 13:25

**“stir him up.”** The Hebrew word can refer to “troubling” someone, disturbing them, pushing them, or stirring them up. Many times God works via His spirit to trouble or bother someone in order to get them moving to do his work. In this case, the Bible does not say exactly how God worked via His spirit to stir Samson up, only that He did.

Many scholars write about this as if Samson had no idea that he was being moved and troubled by Yahweh. But there is no reason to think that. Although it can sometimes be easy for a person to miss when God, via His gift of holy spirit, is working in them, there are very many occasions where there is no doubt. We disagree with commentators like Daniel Block, who writes, “With brilliant irony the narrator describes [Samson as] a free spirit, a rebel driven by selfish interests, doing whatever he pleases without any respect for his parents and with no respect for the claims of God on his life, but in the process he ends up doing the will of God.”[[29]](#footnote-15012)

In contrast to that opinion, we assert that there is no genuine evidence that Samson was driven by selfish interests when he risked his life over and over trying to do the will of God, with little or no support from his fellow Israelites, who were too weak and cowardly (and steeped in idolatry) to challenge their oppressors, the Philistines. Furthermore, we assert that it is wrong to say Samson had no respect for his parents or God. It is more correct to say that his parents may have had less respect for God than they should have had because they willingly accepted Philistine rule over their lives (Judg. 14:4). Three-thousand Israelites were even happy to turn Samson over to the Philistines (Judg. 15:11-13), when it took only 300 men under the leadership of Gideon to defeat an army of 135,000 Midianites (Judg. 7:8-25). Why didn’t those 3,000 Israelite men join Samson and attack the Philistines? What was God (or Samson!) supposed to do in that situation? Samson seems to be the only person at that time that did respect God enough to try to free Israel from the Philistine rule. Did Samson have faults? Surely, but faults don’t disqualify a person from serving God. King David certainly had his faults, and we don’t doubt that David often knew when the hand of God was upon him. For example, it would be wrong to assume that David did not know that God was guiding him when he was writing the Psalms he is so famous for. Samson made mistakes, but it wasn’t like he had a lot of strong and godly people he could turn to for advice and support. He pretty much lived and fought alone, and whether or not we agree with his sexual activity, in every case they resulted in victories for God (in contrast to David and Solomon, whose sexual activities weakened Israel). Samson’s eventual death in the temple of Dagon not only killed him, but all five rulers of the Philistine nation, and that created confusion and a power vacuum among the Philistines that allowed the Israelites the space to anoint a king, Saul. Saul then continued the battle against the Philistines that Samson had begun, and David continued the fight after Saul. Although the Philistines are occasionally mentioned after David, their national threat was basically finished during the reign of David.

**“Mahaneh-dan.”** The Hebrew means “the camp of Dan,” but here it seems to refer to an actual place, not just a general statement.

**“between Zorah and Eshtaol.”** It is worth noting and appropriate that the place where God first began to really work in Samson was the place where this hero of the Faith was buried (Judg. 16:31).

**Judges Chapter 14**

Jdg 14:1

**“And Samson went.”** The original text had no chapter or verse breaks, and this sentence follows immediately after the line that God was stirring Samson, impelling him, troubling him (see commentary on Judg. 13:25). If Samson wanted a wife, why would he go to the Philistines to find one? The answer is that it was due to the stirring of the Lord inside him, and this fits with Judges 14:4. The phrase “went down” is geographically accurate, because Timnah is downhill from where Samson lived.

**“down to Timnah.”** The village of this Timnah (there is another one in the territory of Judah) is in the Valley of Sorek, just over 5 miles west of Zorah, the hometown of Samson. Timnah is about halfway between the Philistine town of Ekron and Zorah.

**“and saw a woman in Timnah.”** At this point in the record of Samson, there are three quite parallel records that take a lot of text. In the two longer records, the first and third of the records, Samson sees a woman, gets involved with the woman, is betrayed by the woman, and then ends up killing a large number of Philistines. In the second and shortest record (Judg. 16:1-3), Samson sees a prostitute in Gaza, avoids an ambush, and ends up destroying the defenses of a Philistine capital city by destroying its gate complex.

In the first of the records, Judges 14:1-15:20, Samson sees a woman in Timnath (the woman is never named in the record), then marries her, then is betrayed by her when she reveals his riddle to the Philistines, and then he ends up killing lots of Philistines when they kill his wife and her family. In the third record (Judg. 16:4-31), Samson falls in love with a Philistine woman named Delilah in the Valley of Sorek, then became so involved with her that he “told her all his heart” (Judg. 16:18), then she betrays him to the Philistines, then Samson ends up killing many Philistines and also kills himself in the process.

Jdg 14:4

**“But his father and his mother did not know that this was from Yahweh.”** Although Samson’s parents did not know that what Samson wanted was from Yahweh, it seems that Samson would have. After all, Yahweh was moving in him and he certainly recognized that. Things like the strength to tear a lion apart with his bare hands certainly did not come from Samson’s natural ability.

**“he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines.”** This phrase cannot be overemphasized, and it frames Samson’s actions throughout his life. He did lots of things that seemed strange, but a common theme through all of them is that he was seeking an occasion against the Philistines.

Jdg 14:5

**“and his father and his mother.”** It is apparent from the record that they did not travel together.

**“and came to the vineyards of Timnah.”** Timnah was an ancient city that, unlike many other cities, was built in a valley and not on the top of a hill. The soil of the valley was well suited for vineyards.

**“a young lion *came* roaring toward him.”** The odds of this event happening “by chance” are slim. We know that the spiritual battle rages between God and the Devil, between good and evil, and that the Devil is always trying to thwart what God is doing. The Devil would have known that God was working in Samson, and so he would have wanted to kill Samson before his mission against the Philistines even got started. Thankfully, Samson was prepared to fight and God empowered him for the battle—a battle he handily won. Then God turned a potential lemon into lemonade: the carcass of the lion became occupied by honey bees. The bees would eventually provide the substance of a riddle that ended up with several stages of slaughter of the Philistines; first, thirty men, then his wife’s family, then a thousand or so Philistine men.

Jdg 14:6

**“the spirit of Yahweh rushed upon him.”** There are times when God energizes His spirit so suddenly and powerfully that there is no doubt what God wants done. This is one of those cases. Some scholars even doubt whether Samson even knew that God was working in him, but all the translators of the REV can say about that is that those scholars have never experienced the powerful working of the spirit in a person. When God moves that powerfully in a person, they do not doubt that it is God and not some kind of natural impulse.

**“he tore it apart as one would tear apart a young goat.”** Samson may have been a strong young man, but he was not that strong. This exploit required God’s strength flowing through the man, Samson.

Jdg 14:7

**“she was right in Samson’s eyes.”** This is idiomatic for the fact that she was pleasing to him.

Jdg 14:8

**“After a while.”** The Hebrew is an idiom, “from days,” and it means after a while (cf. Judg. 11:4).

**“remains.”** The Hebrew uses a word with the root of “fall.” It can refer to a ruin or an overthrow. The lion was fallen; Samson saw the ruins of it, the remains were there. And honey was in the carcass. With the fall of Israel’s enemies, there would be sweetness for Israel.

**“there was a swarm of bees in the carcass of the lion, and honey.”** This was not just by chance. Yahweh was behind it. God knew Samson’s wit, and He quite possibly inspired Samson to use the lion and honey incident in His continued war against the Philistines. So this is an example of the invisible hand of God working to bring His purposes to pass.

Jdg 14:9

**“And he scooped it out into his hands.”** The Bible does not give us any details about how Samson got the honey from the carcass of the lion. It is clear that there are many details that are not supplied, and as readers, we just get the “big picture.” For one thing, bees usually defend their hives quite fiercely. A good way to calm the bees (or drive them away) is to start a smoky fire near the hive and let the smoke drift over the hive; beekeepers have been using smokers for many years. It is unlikely that Samson just simply stuck his hand into the hive and got some honey. People have been stung to death that way. It is more likely that he took the time to build a fire that would give him access to the honey.

It is also unlikely that he scraped his hand along the carcass of the lion—directly touching the carcass—to dislodge the honeycomb and get the honey. That would have been unnecessary. He could have simply scooped through the honeycombs and they would have broken off. Also, it seems he would have taken the honey to his parents in the honeycombs. Out of the comb, honey is very runny, especially in the heat of the day in Israel. Although Samson could have had some kind of pot or jar, that seems unlikely, so the only way to get the honey from the hive to his parents without it all dripping to the ground would be if he kept it intact in the comb.

**“he did not tell them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion.”** The Bible does not tell us why Samson did not tell his parents that the honey came from the carcass of a lion. It might be that he was already formulating his idea of making a riddle about it, and there may have been other reasons as well, but in any case, the Bible does not say why he did not tell his parents. In any case, it came in very handy during his wedding feast, because Samson used the fact that he had not told his mother or father about it to show that just because he did not tell his wife about it did not mean he did not love her. He loved his parents and did not tell them.

Most scholars believe the honey was unclean because it came from the carcass of a dead animal, and that was why he did not tell his parents. While it is likely that if Samson thought that his parents believed the honey was unclean then he probably would not have told them, there is reason to doubt that the honey was unclean. Bees are unclean insects (Lev. 11:20; Deut. 14:19), and they are constantly touching the honey. So if the unclean bees do not make the honey unclean even though they directly touch it, then it is likely that the carcass of the lion would not make the honey unclean either, especially since the carcass would not have directly touched the honey, but only the base of some honeycombs.

Jdg 14:10

**“banquet.”** The Hebrew word can mean “drinking bout,” and it generally refers to a meal with wine. This would have been a huge meal with lots of wine and likely beer as well.

Jdg 14:11

**“they brought 30 companions.”** It is unclear whether 30 companions at a wedding was a common Philistine custom, or whether because Samson was an untrusted Israelite that the Philistines considered him some kind of danger to them and wanted protection from him.

Jdg 14:12

**“tell you a riddle.”** The Hebrew is “riddle you a riddle,” using “riddle” as a noun and verb. Samson had a good sense of humor, and that may be why it occurred to him to turn the lion and honey incident into a riddle (see commentary on Judg. 15:4).

**“tell, yes, tell.”** The Hebrew text uses the figure polyptoton and uses the verb “tell” in two different verbal aspects.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Genesis 2:16.]

**“30 linen garments and 30 changes of clothing.”** The linen garments and “changes of clothing” made up a full set of clothes. The linen garments were the equivalent of underwear, and the “changes of clothing” were the outer garments. Both the inner and outer garments were commonly worn. At the crucifixion of Jesus, the soldiers divided Jesus’ outer garment among them but cast lots for his inner tunic, equivalent to the “linen garments” (John 19:23).

This is a very high wager, and Samson obviously made it on purpose as part of his mission to “seek an occasion against the Philistines.” It was common for many people to own just one outer garment, so to wager for 30 was a high-stakes game. Samson was not stupid, so we can assume that Samson made that wager and played that game knowing that he would win either way. If the Philistines could not guess the riddle, he would make a considerable amount of money. If they did guess the riddle, he would attack some unsuspecting Philistines and pay his debt with their clothes. It seems less likely that Samson thought the Philistines would threaten his wife and her family, but given the amount of the wager it seems he may have thought that through as well.

Jdg 14:13

**“Tell us your riddle, that we may hear it.”** The Philistines accepted the challenge to solve Samson’s riddle. It may be they thought that their collective minds could figure it out, but it is also almost certainly the case that if they did not accept the challenge it would be the equivalent of admitting that the Israelites were smarter than they were or better than they were, and they were ruling over Israel (Judg. 14:4). In the honor-shame society of the time, it would have been shameful and therefore unacceptable to turn down the challenge. So the Philistines were basically forced by their situation and the culture of the times to accept Samson’s challenge.

Jdg 14:15

**“fourth.”** Although the Masoretic Hebrew text reads, “seventh,” that creates a contradiction in the text with such verses as Judges 14:17. The Septuagint and some Aramaic texts read “fourth,” and there is every reason to believe that was the original reading of the Hebrew. There is only a difference of one letter between the Hebrew word for “fourth” and “seventh,” and that could have been made by an accidental scribal error.

**“we will burn you and your father’s house with fire.”** The intensity of the Philistines’ demand and threat show the value of 30 complete sets of clothing including the undergarment and the outer garment. It was significant enough an expense that the Philistines charged the woman and her family with colluding with Samson to take their belongings and thus enrich themselves.

**“Have you all called us.”** The verb is plural in Hebrew, thus meaning, “Have you all called us?” Because the sentence starts with the Philistines speaking to Samson’s wife, we would naturally assume that the “you” in the last phrase was singular, referring to just the wife. But it is plural, and indicates that at this point, the Philistine leaders thought that the Timnite woman had sided with the Israelites against them and that “you all” (she, Samson, and her family) had plotted together to take their property, and so they thought killing the Timnite and her family as national enemies was justified.

Jdg 14:16

**“hate.”** The word “hate” in the Bible does not always have the meaning it has in English, an intense feeling of animosity, anger, and hostility toward a person, group, or object. In Hebrew and Greek, the word “hate” has a large range of meanings, from actual “hate” to simply loving something less than something else, neglecting or ignoring something, or being disgusted by something. “Hate” can also mean “to ignore, to have nothing to do with; or to have a lack of love and kindly sentiment toward someone or something.” Especially in the context of “love” and “hate,” “hate” means you like something else better than the thing you “hate” (you ignore, you neglect). Samson’s wife was saying that Samson loved other things more than she, and was neglecting her.

[For more on the large semantic range of “hate” and its use in the Bible, see commentary on Prov. 1:22, “hate.”]

**“to the children of my people.”** The fact that Samson’s wife referred to the Philistines as “my people” reveals to us where her allegiance was, and thus it should not be unexpected that she told Samson’s secret to “her people.”

**“and have not told it to me.”** This is a battle of secrets. Samson has a secret, and it is the answer to his riddle. But Samson’s wife also had a secret, which is that she is really Samson’s enemy and secretly plans to betray him. Thus her words, that you, Samson, “do not love me” are hollow, because the truth is that it is she who does not love him. He loves her and tells her his secret; she hates him and betrays him to his enemies.

**“I have not told it to my father or my mother, and should I tell you?”** Samson denies the claim that he does not love his wife and points out that he has not told his parents, and he loves them just as much as he loves his wife.

Jdg 14:18

**“plowed with my heifer.”** This refers to the common custom of plowing with a goad, a sharpened stick that was used in training and directing the animal pulling the plow. The goad comes up several times in Scripture (Judg. 3:31; 1 Sam. 13:21; Eccl. 12:11; Acts 26:14). The word “heifer,” referring to a young female cow, was a term used of women, like a woman might be called a “chick” (or a “bird” in England). Cows were valuable and watched over, and the word “cow” is used of women in Amos 4:1. Thus, in essence, Samson was saying, “If you have not threatened my young woman with pain, you would not have found out my riddle.”

Some scholars assert that “plowed with my heifer” refers to having sex with Samson’s wife, but that is almost certainly not the case here.

Jdg 14:19

**“the spirit of Yahweh rushed upon him.”** It had done this in Judges 14:6 when the lion attacked him.

**“and he went down to Ashkelon.”** The geographical reference is accurate. Ashkelon was about 25 miles away to the southwest toward the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, and thus it was indeed “down.” Furthermore, the 25 miles was far enough away that it would have taken some time for news of 30 dead men stripped naked to get back to Timnah. It seems certain that over time the Philistines figured out who killed the 30 men. There is no indication in the text as to how Samson killed the men, but it does not seem that there was blood all over the clothing or that the clothes had knife cuts. Samson may well have strangled the men, or broken their necks. No matter how he killed the men, the clothing would have been distinctly Philistine, and the Philistines likely suspected where it came from and later confirmed that fact.

**“And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father’s house.”** Ordinarily and according to common custom, we would have expected Samson’s wife to return to Samson’s home with him. However, it seems apparent that Samson was so upset and angry about being betrayed by his wife that he left for home without her (and her parents may not have let her go in those circumstances anyway). Samson needed some time to calm down—but he was still married to her, something that becomes important in the next verses.

Jdg 14:20

**“But Samson’s wife was given to his companion.”** This was done without Samson’s knowledge or agreement. While we can understand why this could have happened, it was a breach of protocol that no one went to Samson’s house to find out what his wishes were. Frankly, the Philistine family and the town were probably glad that Samson was gone, and likely hoped he would stay gone.

**Judges Chapter 15**

Jdg 15:1

**“in the time of wheat harvest.”** This is typically June. It may be in mid to late May, but the harvest would not be over until June.

**“with a young goat.”** Samson brings a friendship gift with the obvious intention of making a good impression on his “wife,” with little knowledge that she is not his wife anymore. She was now married to someone else.

**“inner room.”** In a regular house, this would just be an inner room. In a palace, it would be a bedroom, a specific room for sleeping.

Jdg 15:2

**“I said to myself, I said.”** The Hebrew almost seems awkward, but it is an awkward moment. Samson’s betrothed had been given away without his knowledge, and the father does not know what to say except to stumble through and try to explain that he did his best to think through the situation.

**“hated, yes, hated.”** The father tries to convey the intensity of the hatred Samson felt for his bride by using the figure of speech polyptoton, repeating the verb using different inflections. The woman’s father reasonably thought that if Samson hated her so intensely he would not come back for her, and he tries what ordinarily could have been a workable solution; give Samson the woman’s younger sister. That failed, likely not so much because it was not reasonable, but because Samson did not want to marry a Philistine woman because he loved her but because he was seeking an occasion against the Philistines.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

**“Isn’t her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please take her instead.”** This shows the complete control that a father had over his family in that culture. The father does not consider the feelings of his daughter at all. He is apparently completely caught off guard by Samson’s showing up and is not taking time to think through the ramifications of having Samson as a son-in-law. His daughter would likely be very unhappy and the Philistines, and almost certainly his village of Timnah, would be incensed. He could well be ostracised or worse.

Jdg 15:3

**“Samson said to them.”** It seems that the woman’s father did not meet with Samson alone, but that other Philistines were with him. However, there are ancient texts that say, “Samson said to himself,” and that is reasonable and possible. It is actually unlikely that he would publically announce his intentions to “harm” the Philistines.

**“This time I will be blameless.”** The only other time that Samson attacked the Philistines was when he killed men to take their garments (Judg. 14:19), and it may be that Samson recognized that the Philistines he killed had not done anything against him that deserved death. However, “this time” he thinks he is justified in the “harm” he plans to do.

Jdg 15:4

**“So Samson went and caught 300 jackals.”** Samson apparently had a good sense of humor, which no doubt served him well in staving off some of the loneliness that surely accompanied his life. Here we see it in full bloom for the first time. If all Samson wanted to do was burn some of the fields and trees of the Philistines, that would have been a relatively easy task. Light some torches and run through the fields, vineyards, and orchards and throw the torches out here and there on a windy night. But that would not have been funny. In contrast, and in spite of the large amount of work it took, tying the jackals up tail to tail with torches, and letting them loose in different places around Timnah would have been a strange (and funny) sight to see. All the yelping and howling and growling; the zig-zag pattern of the jackals as they tried to escape the flames and each other; and the confused cries of anyone who might try to stop the damage without getting badly bitten would have been a most amusing sight to see.

We see Samson’s humor pop up over and over again in the record of his life. For example, when people asked him how he could be subdued, rather than simply saying he would not tell them, he kept everyone off balance by looking and sounding sincere while he was actually lying to everyone, and then making a mockery of them when the bonds did not work.

**“jackals.”** Jackals were common in Israel, but even so, it would have taken Samson a while to catch all of them and it would have been no small feat to tie them tail to tail and transport them to the grain fields of the Philistines. Although many English translations read “foxes,” that is almost certainly not the correct animal. The Hebrew word is the same for both animals, but foxes are shy, solitary animals, and catching 300 of them would have been very difficult, whereas jackals are pack animals and Samson would have taken much less time to capture packs of jackals.

Jdg 15:5

**“the stacked grain and the standing grain.”** This was the time of the wheat harvest (Judg. 15:1), so the grain was partially harvested. Some grain was already in stacks waiting to be threshed, and there was still standing grain in the fields that had not been cut yet. Vineyards and olive trees take a very long time to develop, and so the damage Samson did by his jackal antic was both extensive and devastating to the local economy around Timnath.

Jdg 15:6

**“Then the Philistines said, “Who has done this?”** Although the damage that Samson did was limited in scope, it was devastating, and it also revealed a weakness in the Philistine nation. If Samson could do this in one city and one area, he could do it in others. So it was “the Philistines” who asked, “Who did this,” and we can see that they were not locals because the answer given to them, that Samson was the son-in-law of “the Timnite” would have only made sense if the ones asking the question and getting the answer were not from Timnah. The people of Timnah would not have called Samson’s wife’s father “the Timnite,” because they were Timnites themselves.

**“burned her and her father with fire.”** The Philistines killed the Timnite and his whole family. To the Philistines, the Timnite and his family were a problem. There had already been a problem in Ashkelon when Samson killed 30 Philistines to have their clothes (Judg. 14:19), now the Timnites’ dealings with Samson had cost them that year’s wheat harvest as well as damaged vineyard and olive groves. So the Philistines killed the household of the Timnite. Although the accepted Masoretic text just reads, “father,” the Septuagint, Syriac, and a number of Hebrew manuscripts read “father’s house,” meaning the whole household, and that makes sense because the Philistines would not just execute the woman and her father but would get rid of the entire troublemaking family.[[30]](#footnote-20503)

**“So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire.”** The Philistines were in no mood to tease out all the details of why Samson had attacked a Philistine area, they had had enough trouble with Samson that was somehow related to this family, so they got rid of the problem by simply killing the family. In biblical times families were usually so closely knit that they were expected to act jointly or at least defend the honor of the family if it were wronged, and sometimes those blood feuds last for generations. Thus the cultural way to remove a problem in a family was to remove the whole family, as we see here. Why the Philistines chose to burn the family to death is not clear, but they had threatened it before (Judg. 14:15).

Jdg 15:7

**“surely I will be avenged of you.”** In true Eastern fashion, Samson saw the killing of his wife and her family as just cause for a blood feud. Even though his father-in-law told him that his wife had been given to another man, there is no indication he accepted that as moral or legal. It seems that to him, if the Philistines killed his wife and her family, then he was justified in avenging himself and her family.

Jdg 15:8

**“leg on thigh.”** This is an idiomatic phrase that occurs only here and has not been found in other ancient literature either, so the exact meaning is unknown. However, the sense has to be one of total slaughter.

**“cave.”** The word “cave” is not technically correct, but this is a case where the English has no word that exactly reproduces the Hebrew. The Hebrew refers to a cut, crack, or cranny in rock or a rocky place that has overhanging rock over it for shelter. Thus it is more like a cave than a “cleft” or “crack,” which has no overhanging shelter.

**“Etam.”** The exact location is unknown, however, the assessment in the *IVP Bible Background Commentary* seems correct. “There is a town near Bethlehem named Etam (2 Chron. 11:6), but it is too far east to be involved here, and Samson is not in a town. The most common identification is with Araq Isma’in in the vicinity of Samson’s hometown, Zorah, on the slopes of the Sorek Valley.”[[31]](#footnote-11509)

Jdg 15:9

**“Lehi.”** The Hebrew word “lehi” means “jaw” or “jawbone.” The name points toward the conflict and crisis. Samson would use a jawbone to defeat the enemy. The place was only named “Lehi” after Samson defeated the Philistines with a jawbone, so we do not know the name of the place, or even if it had a name, before this epic battle between Samson and the Philistine army (cf. Judg. 15:17). “Ramath-lehi” can be roughly translated as the “lifting up of the jawbone.”

Jdg 15:10

**“Why have you come up against us?”** The Israelites were ignorant of the escapades of their most capable man, and wondered why there was conflict with the enemy. This is a sad commentary on God’s people who are often ignorant of what God is doing among them. Sadly, this spiritual ignorance and lethargy are still abundant today. Many Christians think “God is in control” and so don’t think there is a real battle between Good and Evil and God and the Devil in the world today, and they don’t realize the very important part they play in fighting with and for God and His army. Prayer is a weapon; speaking the Word of God is a weapon, speaking up against evil is a weapon, and all of these weapons are part of our “wrestling” against evil. But many Christians abandon their posts. They don’t pray, they don’t share their Christian Faith with others, and they don’t read or understand the Bible enough to speak like Jesus did and say, “It is written,” and correctly apply the Word of God to a given situation.

Jdg 15:11

**“Then 3,000 men of Judah.”** What a sad day for God and for Israel when 3,000 men, ten times the number that Gideon had to fight the Midianites, go together to capture Samson, their best fighter, and hand him over to the enemy. So the army of Israel, 3,000 men, marches against Samson when they ought to turn west and march with Samson against the Philistines.

**“the Philistines are rulers over us.”** What blindness! Yahweh is the ruler of Israel, but the people of Israel have forgotten that.

**“What then is this that you have done to us?”** Basically, the Israelites are saying, “What have you done to us? You are upsetting our peace.” There is peace, perhaps, but it comes at a great price, the price of oppression. It is said that if you give up liberty to get safety, you get neither liberty nor safety. God told the Israelites to drive out the enemy, but they had forgotten that.

Jdg 15:12

**“We have come down to bind you *and* to give you into the hand of the Philistines.”** The Israelites were willing to betray Samson and hand him over to the Philistines, who most certainly would have put Samson to death, rather than stand with Samson and Yahweh and fight the Philistines. Sadly, it often happens to godly men and women that they are betrayed by their own family or clan. It happened to Jeremiah when he spoke against the idolatry in Judah (Jer. 11:21), and Jesus said it would happen to his followers (Matt. 10:21; Luke 21:16).

Jdg 15:13

**“bind, yes, bind.”** The text uses the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

Jdg 15:14

**“shouted.”** The Hebrew word can mean just shout or cry out, but it often refers to a war cry, and that is its likely meaning here. Samson had killed many Philistines and they were hungry for revenge.

**“the spirit of Yahweh rushed upon him.”** The spirit from Yahweh powerfully worked in him, and Samson would have recognized it.

**“flax that has been burned with fire.”** Lamp wicks were often made with flax, and when it has been burned it is very fragile; a good comparison would be our candle wicks after they have been burned, they are very fragile and take no effort to break. Samson would have recognized that this was the work of Yahweh and that he was being helped by Yahweh.

Jdg 15:15

**“fresh jawbone of a donkey.”** The jawbone is the strongest bone in the body since it has to have the strength to stand up to the constant pounding of chewing. This was a “fresh jawbone,” so the animal would have recently died. That meant the bone was not dry and weak, but still strong, and likely had the donkey’s teeth still in it, which could cut. In fact, there is no reason to believe that the jawbone was not still in the corpse of the donkey. It is very unlikely that it was clean and white and half buried in the sandy dirt as many paintings show. It could easily have been mostly cleaned of flesh by birds and animals, but still have some flesh on it and still be attached by ligaments to the rest of the donkey skeleton.

**“and struck down 1,000 men with it.”** We should assume that 1,000 is an estimate, not an exact number. This war is a great example of cooperation between God and man. Samson needed God to empower him, but God needed Samson to engage in the fight and keep fighting. It would have been easy for Samson to look at the huge number of people coming at him and give up in despair, but he didn’t. He fought his best and trusted God to empower him as long as there were enemy men to defeat, and God honored that valor and continued to empower Samson until the enemies were defeated.

Jdg 15:16

**“Then Samson said.”** There is no one to hear what he is saying, so once again we see Samson using his humor to sustain himself, composing dark poetry about his exploit. Although he does not give God any credit in his short poem, he is very aware of God’s presence and calls out to God for help when he needs it (Judg. 15:18).

**“heaps on heaps.”** More literally, “a heap, heaps,” but the word “donkey” and the word “heap” are homonyms, and spelled the same in the ancient Hebrew (before vowel pointing). So the verse can be “a donkey, *two* donkeys.”[[32]](#footnote-21273)

Jdg 15:17

**“Ramath-lehi.”** Quite literally, “Jawbone Height” or more idiomatically, “Jawbone Hill.”

Jdg 15:18

**“called on Yahweh.”** In his hour of need, Samson calls on Yahweh. He likely had before but without it being noted in the text.

**“by the hand of your servant.”** Samson, like many other great men and women of the Bible, recognizes that he is not a “self-made” man, but a servant of God and constantly helped by Him.

Jdg 15:19

**“hollow place.”** The Hebrew word translated as “hollow place” refers to a circular depression in the ground. God apparently split the bottom of it and water filled it and flowed from it.

**“spirit.”** In this case, “spirit” refers to both his physical energy and his attitude.

[For more on the meanings of “spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Jdg 15:20

**“And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines 20 years.”** This is an amazing statement—and basically repeated in Judges 16:31—given the fact that there is no record of the people of Israel ever looking to Samson as a leader or coming to him for judgments. In this statement, we see how God values people and His “judges,” His spiritual leaders. Samson had the spirit of God upon him, and did his best to rid Israel of the Philistines. Also, unlike some of the other judges (e.g., Gideon) there is no hint he ever wandered from the worship of Yahweh. In contrast, “The children of Israel...did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh” (Judg. 13:1). That evil would have included idolatry and many other kinds of evil as well. What Israel did was so evil that “Yahweh gave them into the hand of the Philistines 40 years.” So, while Israel turned to idols, Samson worked to deliver Israel from Philistine oppression. No wonder God referred to Samson as the “judge” for his time.

The phrase, “in the days of the Philistines” shows that even though God had given the land of Israel to the children of Israel, they were not the top dog at this time. These were the “days of the Philistines,” when the Philistines were the controlling power in the coast and much of central Israel.

**Judges Chapter 16**

Jdg 16:1

**“And Samson went to Gaza.”** Judges 15 ends with the statement that Samson judged Israel, and as God’s man and God’s judge, he continued his war against the Philistines. Gaza was one of the five capital cities of the Philistines (Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath, and Gaza), and was the furthest south of all five. The Philistine nation was ruled by a council of five “lords” with each of the five capital cities contributing one lord to the ruling council. The people of Ekron—the northernmost of the five capital cities—had already heard plenty about Samson because Ekron was only about six or so miles down the Valley of Sorek from Timnah, where Samson had done a lot of damage, and only 10 or so miles from Zorah, where Samson lived and approximately where Samson had killed 1,000 men. But there is evidence that the leaders of the Philistine nation kept in touch with one another (e.g., 1 Sam. 4:1-11), and thus it is most likely that all Philistia had heard about Samson. Thus we see that Samson was well-known even in Gaza (Judg. 16:2). But that did not keep Samson from continuing God’s war with the Philistines and God’s desire to rid the Promised Land of pagan invaders.

By going to the capital city of Gaza, which was over 40 miles if he took the roads, which we can assume he did, Samson put the entire Philistine nation on notice that God would not make peace with them even if the idolatrous and cowardly Israelites would make peace. It would be naïve to think that Samson did not realize that by going to Gaza he was risking his life. He was strengthened by God, but he was not immortal. Some commentators say the text does not give us a reason that Samson went to Gaza. We disagree. Samson’s life had been dedicated to fighting against the Philistines and he continued that fight by going to Gaza. He certainly did not go there just to find a prostitute. There was no need for him to travel over 40 miles from home to a Philistine capital city just to find a prostitute. He could have found one locally. No, this was about God’s war with the Philistines. Furthermore, as we see as the record develops, he carried away the main gate of the city, leaving the city defenseless. This should have been a sign to the Israelites that God would help them win battles against the Philistines, but they were blind to the work of God that was happening in their midst. (This kind of blindness is quite common. For example, the religious leaders were blind to what Jesus was doing even though it was obvious to many of the common people).

**“saw a prostitute.”** Once again, Samson gets involved with a Philistine woman and ends up hurting the Philistines, showing the world that with God’s help, Israel could defeat the Philistines. But the Israelites were not listening.

[For more on Samson and the cycles of destruction that begin with him being with a Philistine woman, see commentary on Judg. 14:1]

**“and went into her.”** An idiom for sexual intercourse; the Hebrew is more literally “he went to her,” but it can also be that he went “into” her. In this case, there is a double meaning. Samson went into her house and then into her physically.

Jdg 16:2

**“The Gazites *were told*, “Samson is here!”** By this time the Philistines knew who Samson was and knew that he was an enemy. Samson had fought the Philistines and killed many of them and had a reputation among them. Judges 16:2 testifies to the fact that the Philistine cities, especially the five capital cities, had good communication between them. It is possible that Samson simply entered the city and “saw” a prostitute and knew her profession from the way she was dressed (cf. Gen. 38:14-15) and she or her friends recognized him, but it is also possible that he asked around and the person or some of the persons that he asked recognized him (if he was asking about a prostitute he was obviously not a local) and then told the leadership of Gaza about him.

**“They surrounded *the house*.”** The Hebrew text simply has the verb “they surrounded,” without supplying what they surrounded, but it seems clear that they did not surround their gate. The Philistines knew Samson was in the house with the prostitute, so they surrounded the house and also waited in ambush for him in the gate. They did not want to let Samson get away. Some English versions supply “the house” or “the place” (e.g., AMP, CJB, CSB, ESV, LSB, NSAB, NCV2005, NJB, NIV, RSV). One of the miracles of the Samson story is how Samson avoided this trap. He lay only until midnight and then crept out, and apparently between the darkness and the fact that the Philistines did not expect him until morning and so likely dozed off, Samson got away. However, there is some evidence that the verb translated “surrounded,” can in some contexts mean simply to gather. So it is possible that the Philistines simply “gathered” and then went to wait in the gate of the city.

Jdg 16:3

**“and took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts, and pulled them up, bar and all.”** In taking away the city gates, Samson leaves the city defenseless against its enemies. God was signaling to Israel that He would give them victory over the Philistines if anyone would bother to attack them, but no Israelite was listening.

The Bible wants us to know just how defenseless the Philistines were, so it goes into great detail about how the gate was dismantled and carried away. The gates would have been huge and heavy, and estimating their weight at a ton or more is not overly excessive. The gates of a city—especially a capital city—had to be extremely strong because they were always the main point of attack by any enemy.

Samson took the gates, but not just the gates. He pulled up the two side posts that anchored the gates. It would have taken an incredibly huge amount of strength to dislodge the two side posts and lift them. And he carried away the bar that held the gates closed. Uprooting all this and carrying it away was God’s work and God’s energy. If Samson had just wanted to leave Gaza, all he had to do was leave; walk away. So this action of Samson’s was not about getting away, it was God showing how defenseless the Philistines were against Him if the Israelites would only fight for the Promised Land like God commanded them to. And God showed the Israelites how defenseless the Philistines were. Samson did not just tear down the gates, he carried them away. In fact, he carried them close to Hebron, some 40 miles (64 km) to the east.

**“the hill that faces Hebron.”** That is, a hill that is west of Hebron. The implication in the text is that this hill was very close to Hebron. Why Hebron? At over 3,000 feet above sea level, Hebron was one of the highest, if not the very highest, city in all Israel, and it was famous. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their wives were buried there. At this time in history, before David conquered Jerusalem, Hebron was a very important city, it could even be argued that it was the most important city in Israel. Not too many years after Samson, David would use Hebron as his first capital city of the Kingdom of Israel. Furthermore, Hebron was on the “Highway of the Patriarchs,” a well-traveled north-south trade route, so it would soon occur that much of Israel would hear about the gates of Gath being taken. But Israel was not paying attention to what God was doing among them. God (and Samson) were saying, “Look how vulnerable the Philistines are!” But Israel was not listening.

Jdg 16:4

**“after this he loved a woman.”** Once again, Samson gets involved with a Philistine woman and ends up hurting the Philistines, showing the world that with God’s help, Israel could defeat the Philistines. But the Israelites were not listening.

[For more on Samson and the cycles of destruction that begin with him being with a Philistine woman, see commentary on Judg. 14:1]

**“Delilah.”** Different meanings have been suggested for the name Delilah, but scholars have not reached any conclusion about it. However, one of the possible meanings of “Delilah” is “languishing” (“pining away,” “wasting away”). It was common for God to give people names that were related to the events they were involved with, thus, for example, “Job” basically means, “the attacked one,” and “Abraham” means “Father of a multitude.” Methuselah basically means, “When he dies it will come,” and he died the year of Noah’s Flood, likely even in the Flood. Given that, and given what happened to Samson, that “Delilah” would mean “wasting away” would fit the narrative because that is exactly what happened to Samson in his relationship with her.

Jdg 16:5

**“see where his great strength lies.”** Samson could have killed 30 men and taken their clothing with his own strength. He could possibly have even killed 1,000 men with his own strength. But he could not have pulled up the gates of Gaza and carried them almost 40 miles by his own strength. The Philistines knew that Samson was being supernaturally empowered, but how, and how could he be defeated? The Philistines were willing to pay a huge amount of money to find that out.

**“and we will each give you 1,100 *shekels* of silver.”** What we learn here is the corrupting power of money. In this case, Delilah was a Philistine and may not have had any real commitment to Samson at all. She likely would have betrayed Samson for far less money than she was offered. But the huge amount of money the Philistines offered her to betray Samson assured them of her cooperation. We see this all the time in the world around us when people take various kinds of bribes to do things they know are not moral or lawful. The godly person must know that the rewards for staying godly will be great on Judgment Day and that no bribe here on earth, no matter how large, is worth breaking God’s laws, even just moral ones.

The total amount of silver being offered to Delilah is 5,500 shekels. The word “shekels” is not in the text, but it can be safely assumed that it was shekels. There were five “lords” of the Philistines, one from each of the five capital cities of Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath, and Gaza, and so the 1,100 shekels times five is 5,500. This is a huge amount.

By comparison, Abraham paid only 400 shekels for the land and cave where he buried Sarah (Gen. 23:15, 19); David only paid 50 shekels for the land where the Temple was built (2 Sam. 24:24), Jeremiah bought property for 17 shekels (Jer. 32:9). For Delilah, 5,500 shekels of silver was far too much money to turn down; she was not that invested in Samson.

Jdg 16:6

**“Please tell me where your great strength lies.”** Delilah knows that Samson has a secret, and by asking Samson to reveal it to her she is asking him to prove his love for her by trusting her with his secret. What Delilah is doing here is similar to what his Timnite wife did to him earlier (Judg. 14:16).

Jdg 16:7

**“If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings.”** The intestines of some animals were squeezed out and dried to make bowstrings, the strings of instruments, etc. Here Samson says if he were tied with bowstrings that had not yet been dried, so they would be very flexible and would shrink tighter when they dried, that he would be weak. Samson is lying to Delilah, toying with her, but it is a dangerous game and one that we know eventually leads to his capture and death. It is unwise to try to toy with the Devil.

The text does not say why Samson toyed with Delilah this way, but a possible reason is that he had drawn strength from his sense of humor before, such as when he used the jackals to burn up the Philistine crops. It is likely that here again he is having fun and drawing strength from that. However, once it became clear that Delilah was trying to have him captured, he should have left her. His unwillingness to do that was no doubt in part due to the fact that he had fought a lonely war for some 20 years now, and he was tired of being alone; he did not want to give in to Delilah’s demand, but neither did he want to give her up.

Jdg 16:9

**“just as a string of flax is broken when it smells fire.”** This is an idiomatic phrase, using the figures of speech personification and hyperbole. The “string of flax” is a reference to a lamp wick—lamp wicks were commonly made of flax. The statement is that when the lamp wick “smelled” fire, that is, when the fire got close to it, it weakened and was easily broken. The personification is giving the wick the ability to smell, which of course it does not have, and the hyperbole is that it is not actually when the fire gets close to the wick that it weakens, but only when the fire touches the flax and it catches on fire. However, the statement is effective in communicating how useless the bowstrings were in tying up Samson; he broke them as easily as he would have broken a burnt lamp wick.

Although a large number of English versions read that the flax “touches” the fire, “touch” is not the actual word in the Hebrew text. The *HALOT*[[33]](#footnote-29222) has “smelled” as the definition of the Hebrew word and notes that in Judges 16:9 the wick “has come too close” to the fire, that is, close enough to smell the fire.

Jdg 16:11

**“bind, yes, bind.”** Samson uses the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis, saying the word “bind” with different inflections in an attempt to convince Delilah he was serious.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

Jdg 16:12

**“new ropes.”** The new ropes did not work in Judges 15:13 and they did not work this time either.

**“The ambush was waiting in an inner room.”** This “inner room” was almost certainly the private room for women that no man but the husband in the house would be allowed into. Hiding there would basically assure the Philistines that Samson would not look in that room and see them.

Jdg 16:13

**“Tell me how you can be bound.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “Tell me with what you can be bound.”

**“the seven braids of my head.”** Delilah is being persistent, and Samson is weakening in his resolve, and getting closer to the real source of his strength. He is toying with the Devil and beginning to lose the battle. He was not wise, and it is costing him. Eventually, it will cost him his life.

**“in the web.”** That is, in the web of fabric in the loom.

Jdg 16:16

**“pressed him hard.”** His wife had pressed him to learn his riddle (Judg. 14:17), and now Delilah pressed him to learn the secret of his strength. He gave in both times and both times ended up being hard on him and then hard on the Philistines.

**“his soul.”** Here the “soul” is used for himself with an emphasis on his mental activities; his thoughts and attitude.

[For more on “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Uses of ‘Soul.’”]

**“was exasperated to death.”** “Death” is exactly where Samson’s exasperation led. There is a very important lesson here for believers. Very few people are able to withstand the pressure of constant exposure to ungodliness or to constant nagging. It makes living life so horrible that even death is preferable. Even a strong man like Elijah got so worn down that “he requested that he might die, and said, ‘It is enough. Now, O Yahweh, take my life.’” (1 Kings 19:4).

When a Christian is in a situation that constantly makes them miserable, they need to take steps—drastic steps if necessary—to free themselves from the situation.

Jdg 16:18

**“she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, “Come up this once.”** The Philistines had tired of the cat-and-mouse game that Samson and Delilah had been playing and apparently thought that Delilah would never succeed in finding out the secret of Samson’s strength, so they had left. Now Delilah, realizing that Samson has given in and finally told her where his supernatural strength comes from, calls them back.

**“and brought the silver in their hand.”** Delilah, the dispassionate businesswoman, sees the money before she hands Samson over to the Philistines.

Jdg 16:19

**“and she called for a man and he shaved off the seven braids of his head.”** Delilah did not risk waking Samson by moving and trying to cut Samson’s hair by herself but called for a man to do it. A razor-sharp knife would have cut cleanly and silently.

**“she began to humiliate him.”** Delilah now begins the humiliation of Samson, a humiliation that involved being captured by the Philistines, being blinded, being made to grind grain like a woman, and being made a public spectacle in front of the Philistines. Delilah herself may have begun a specific humiliation by mocking him, laughing at him, or something like that, the text does not specifically state what she did.

**“and his strength left him.”** Having broken his covenant with God, Samson is now no longer empowered by God. There is an important lesson here: when people are in the covenant they are blessed with God’s grace, but when they leave it they are usually on their own.

Jdg 16:20

**“that Yahweh had left him.”** Yahweh left Samson in the sense that the spirit from Yahweh was no longer upon him. It had begun to stir him years earlier (Judg. 13:25), and had been with him year after year, but now it was gone. We cannot feel the spirit of God unless it is at work in us, so Samson had no idea that the spirit of God, that he had relied on so often, was now gone.

The teaching in this verse has an important New Testament application. Christians are “born again” and filled with the gift of holy spirit. That gives them the ability to manifest the spirit in the ways listed in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10. Yet many Christians do not realize the power of the New Birth and have no idea they can manifest the spirit, so they do not utilize it to its fullest. A person does not know if they have the gift of holy spirit by somehow “feeling” the spirit, but rather by operating the spirit.

[For more on the New Birth and the gift of holy spirit, see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’” Also see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Jdg 16:21

**“gouged out his eyes.”** The act of blinding Samson would have made him easy to recapture even if his strength came back.

**“brought him down to Gaza.”** A capital city of the Philistines with a huge temple to Dagon.

**“bronze chains.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic: “double bronze.” The idea may be that each arm or leg was cuffed.

**“he had to grind *grain* in the prison.”** This was not the huge mill turned by oxen, as many works of art show; his strength was gone and the Philistines certainly had no interest in making him work in a way that might cause him to regain some confidence in his personal strength. This was the small hand mill that women used to grind the grain for the household. In the ancient biblical world, gender roles were highly segregated. Generally, there was work that only the men did, and work that only the women did. The Philistines humiliated Samson by making him do women’s work.

Jdg 16:22

**“But the hair of his head began to grow again.”** At this point in the story, we do not know the implications of this statement. We can assume that perhaps Samson’s strength will return, but ordinarily just because the hair of a Nazirite begins to grow after they have broken their vow does not reinstate the vow. What certainly can be happening is that the fact that Samson’s hair is regrowing may cause him to refocus on his mission and regain some confidence in who he is and what he can do. That may have led to his resolve to call out to Yahweh one more time and to decide to die with the Philistines.

There are things in life that are inspirational and lead a person to be a better person; a more godly person. It can be a good thing to have inspirational things in your life.

Jdg 16:23

**“Now the lords of the Philistines.”** The “lords of the Philistines” certainly included the five ruling lords, the rulers of Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath, and Gaza. But this was such a momentous event and such a great victory for the Philistines that in this context, the word “lords” may also refer to many of the “under lords,” the important people of the cities that helped rule Philistia. We know that there was a great power vacuum in Philistia after Samson’s death that gave room for Israel to anoint a king, Saul, without much opposition.

**“Dagon.”** Dagon was a chief deity of the Philistines, and he was worshiped throughout the Middle East. It used to be believed that the name “Dagon” came from the Hebrew word *dag*, fish, and it was believed that Dagon was a fish god. Today most scholars believe that Dagon comes from the word *dagan*, the main Hebrew word for grain, and that Dagon was a grain god and worshiped in connection with the grain and a bountiful harvest. “The discovery of a temple of Dagon at the pre-Israelite (14th cent.) site of Ugarit in northern Palestine has made the second of these two possibilities more likely to be the correct one.”[[34]](#footnote-24446) The Bible mentions a couple of temples to Dagon (1 Sam. 5:1-7; 1 Sam. 31:10).

**“god.”** The word “god” here in Judges 16:23 is *elohim* in the Hebrew text, and *elohim* is always plural in form, but the associated verbs are all singular. Furthermore, although elohim is plural, the god Dagon was a singular god. Similarly, Elohim, the God of the Hebrews, is a singular God. The plural form does not make “God” into a plurality of persons whether it refers to Dagon or to Yahweh.

[For more on God not being a plurality of persons, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”

**“has given Samson our enemy into our hand.”** The Philistines were wrong, but their sentiments reveal a couple of things. One certainly is that religious people tend to attribute things to God that are none of His doing, and also, the Philistines did understand that at some level the battle between them and Samson was fought on a spiritual level.

Jdg 16:25

**“and he provided amusement for them.”** What the amusement was is mercifully left out of the text. It obviously involved some form of torture or humiliation.

Jdg 16:26

**“the boy who held him by the hand.”** The once mighty Samson now was led by the hand by a boy due to his being blind.

**“that support the house.”** More literally, “on which the house is established,” but that is not as clear in English.

**“that I may lean on them.”** Samson acts as if he needs the pillars for support, but that was likely not the case.

Jdg 16:27

**“Now the house was full of men and women.”** Here we see the temple of Dagon called a “house,” which was a very common designation for a temple, the “house” of a god.

**“about 3,000 men and women.”** This large number shows us that this was a very large temple.

Jdg 16:28

**“remember me.”** This is the idiomatic sense of “remember” where it means “remember me and help me” (see commentary on Luke 23:42).

**“only this once.”** Samson knew what he wanted to do and was aware that he would die with the Philistines. So he pleads with God to empower him with strength just one more time.

Jdg 16:29

**“the two middle pillars on which the house was supported.”** This is the most complete description of the pillars and lets us know why, when they fell, the whole temple fell.

**“the one with his right hand and the other with his left.”** So Samson died in the same basic position as our Lord Jesus did, with one arm out to the right and the other arm out to the left (see commentary on Judg. 13:3).

Jdg 16:30

**“And Samson said, ‘Let me die with the Philistines!’**” This was not a defeat. Samson’s defeat was when he allowed himself to be so worn down by Delilah that he told her all his heart. This was a cry of victory. Samson was going to die—the Philistines would not have allowed him to live very long. So too, except for those who the Rapture saves from death (1 Cor. 15:51-52), every Christian will die. The real question is not “Will I die?” It is, “How will I die?” Christians should resolve to the best of their ability and circumstances, to die glorifying God in some way.

**“So the dead that he killed at his death were more than those who he killed in his life.”** Samson ended up doing what the angel had told his mother he would do: “he will begin to save Israel out of the hand of the Philistines” (Judg. 13:5). Samson killed so many of the rulers and leaders of the Philistines that it created a power vacuum in Philistia that lasted for years, and in that time Israel had time to anoint a king and begin to transform from a conglomeration of separate tribes into a nation. King David would make that nation the most powerful one in the Middle East during his lifetime.

Jdg 16:31

**“Then his brothers and all the house of his father came down and took him.”** Finally Samson’s family shows up. But from God’s perspective, it is a little too little and a little too late. Samson is dead and his leadership is gone. How much could they have done if they had supported him while he was alive? We will never know. They never understood the man or his mission. Similarly, Jesus’ brothers did not believe in him until after he was raised from the dead (John 7:5).

**“and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol.”** It is appropriate that Samson was buried in the same place where Yahweh began to powerfully work in him (Judg. 13:25).

**“in the burial site of Manoah his father.”** This seems to indicate that Samson’s family at least honored some of what Samson had done and did not consider him to be an outcast.

**“And he had judged Israel 20 years.”** Judges 16:31 is basically the same as Judges 15:20, but the grammar is slightly different, hence the slightly different translation (see commentary on Judg. 15:20).

**Judges Chapter 17**

Jdg 17:3

**“a carved image and a cast *metal* image.”** The scholars are divided as to whether there were two images (idols), or whether the text is a form of hendiadys (two nouns meaning one thing) and there was just one idol that was made of metal and cast and then shaped, but Judges 18:18 seems to clearly indicate there were two idols.

[See Word Study: “Hendiadys.”]

Jdg 17:5

**“A house of God.”** That is, a temple. The Hebrew could read “a house of gods,” but it is very unlikely that Micah thought of himself as an idolater, worshiping pagan gods even if his temple had more than one god. The context indicates that he thought he was worshiping Yahweh.

**“teraphim.”** The word teraphim is plural and refers to household gods. The number, identity, size, and purpose of the household gods varied from person to person and from region to region, although the Bible shows that at least sometimes they were involved in divination and thus attempting to determine the will of God (or the gods). We have no knowledge of the number of teraphim that Micah had (see commentary on Gen. 31:19).

Jdg 17:6

**“In those days there was no king in Israel, every man did what was right in his own eyes.”** This sentence occurs in Judges 17:6 and 21:25, thus near the beginning and also the very last sentence of Judges, thus setting apart the last five chapters from the rest of Judges. Also, the statement that there was no king in Israel occurs in Judges 18:1 and 19:1, and thus that fourfold repetition of the fact that there was no king placed at the end of the book of Judges (but not the end chronologically) is a portent of the fact that very soon the people will demand and get a king.

Jdg 17:7

**“Who was a Levite.”** Bethlehem was not a Levitical city, so why the Levite was there is not described.

Jdg 17:10

“**father**.” Here used as “mentor” and “guide.”

[For more information on the uses of “father” in the Bible, see commentary on Gen. 4:20. For information on the disciples of a Rabbi being called his “sons,” see commentary on Matt. 12:27. For information on the disciples of a Rabbi being called “orphans” if the Rabbi died or left the area, see commentary on John 14:18, “orphans.”]

Jdg 17:12

**“In the house of Micah.”** That is, he became part of Micah’s extended household.

**Judges Chapter 18**

Jdg 18:1

**“In those days there was no king in Israel.”** This statement occurs in Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, and 21:25, thus it appears near the beginning and also the very last sentence of Judges, thus setting apart the last five chapters from the rest of Judges (see commentary on Judg. 17:6).

**“their inheritance had not fallen to them.”** Joshua had given the Danites an inheritance, but they could not manage to dispossess the Amorite population from their territory. Instead of doing what it took to take their territory from the native Canaanite population, they left the area and went north and conquered Laish. There were, however, some cities in the area Joshua assigned to Dan that continued to be inhabited by Danites. Zorah, where Samson was from, was one of those cities, and Samson was a Danite. More about Dan is in Joshua 19:40-48 and Judges 1:34. So the inheritance had “fallen” to them in the sense the Danites had been given it, but it had not “fallen” to them in the sense that they had conquered and controlled it.

Jdg 18:2

**“to spy out the land and to explore it.”** This sounds like a good idea, but the better idea would have been to believe God’s original allotment to the tribe of Dan was the will of God, and they needed to fight for that instead of fighting and conquering the inhabitants of Laish and renaming it “Dan.”

Jdg 18:3

**“at the house.”** There would have been more than one “house” or living quarters at the “house” of Micah.

**“they recognized the voice of the young man the Levite.”** This is an amazing coincidence. But how would these five warriors from Dan recognize the voice of the Levite? As we learn from Judges 18:30, this young Levite was none other than the grandson of Moses, the genealogy being Moses, Gershom, then Jonathan, this young priest. When we examine the chronology, we can see how the men would have known this priest.

Moses fled from Egypt and went to Midian, where he married Zipporah, who bore Gershom (Exod. 2:22). It is most likely that Zipporah did not bear Gershom for a long time, because it seems he was still young when Moses went back into Egypt (Exod. 4:24-26). Even if Gershom was very young at that time, he would have spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness with the rest of the Israelites, and during that time he married, which we know because he had a son, Jonathan. The fact that Jonathan was a young man in this record in Judges 18 means that he had been born late in the 40 years of wilderness wanderings. But even if he had been born in the thirtieth year of the wanderings, he would have been ten when Israel crossed the Jordan and 17 by the time the wars of Israel’s conquest of the Promised Land were over, and then a little older by the time the Danites had settled in the inheritance given to them by God but had become dissatisfied with it and decided to move. Also, although the text refers to him as a young man, any age less than 30 would have been considered young for a priest.

During those final years in the wilderness, and during the wars of conquest, there were many times that the men of Israel gathered together with Joshua to ask the counsel of Yahweh, and no doubt as the son of Moses, Gershom would have been there with his son Jonathan. Also, these five warriors that came from Dan were valiant men, obviously seasoned warriors, who would have been with Moses and Israel in the camp in the wilderness in the last years of the wilderness wanderings and then with Joshua through the years of war. That means that they would have seen and heard this young man quite a few times, first in the wilderness and then with Joshua, and so now, in the house of Micah, they recognized his voice. His appearance was likely changed somewhat due to his age and now having a full beard, but his voice would not have changed.

Jdg 18:6

**“*Acceptable* before Yahweh is your way on which you are going,”** The Hebrew is “Before Yahweh,” and the text can have the meaning of Yahweh being ahead of the people and/or Yahweh being present with the people, and thus making their endeavor successful.

We should note that what the priest said is wrong. Yahweh had assigned an allotment to Dan, and they, by their inaction and lack of trust in Yahweh’s guidance, rejected it. Now they went to the far north of the allotted territory of Israel and as a result, were the first to be attacked by every army that came through. Furthermore, the roots of their new location were founded in idolatry. They started with a priest who set up idols instead of establishing the pure worship of Yahweh (Judg. 18:31).

Jdg 18:7

**“Then the five men departed and came to Laish.”** The Danites moved from the territory allotted to them by Joshua in west-central Israel, to the far north of Israel. They could not move just slightly north, or east, or south because those areas were inhabited by other tribes of Israel. They could have moved south, but that would have almost certainly involved a war with Egypt. So, far to the north seemed logical. Also, it likely helped their situation somewhat that they, as Danites, moved next to the tribal area of Naphtali, and Dan and Naphtali were the two full brothers who were born of Jacob and his wife Rachel’s slave, Bilhah (Gen. 30:1-8). That meant that there would have been less tension between Dan and Naphtali, than if Dan had moved next to another tribe, and Naphtali might have even been inclined to provide some help and support to Dan.

**“lacking nothing that is in the earth and possessing wealth.”** Other versions take the Hebrew text in a different direction. For example, the JPS has, “for there was none in the land, possessing authority, that might put them to shame in any thing.”

**“with anyone.”** Some Hebrew manuscripts read “Aram” instead of “Adam,” making the text say that the people of Laish had no dealings with the Syrians to the north.

Jdg 18:8

**“What do you *think*?”** The Hebrew uses an idiom: “What are you?”

Jdg 18:9

**“And they said, “Arise, and let’s go up against them.”** It would have been nice if the Danites had this much fervor in conquering the land God originally gave them.

**“Do you stand still?”** This can be a question or statement, depending on the intonation. Also, the word “still” can also be “silent,” such as “you are silent.” This may also indicate there were some Danites that were uncomfortable leaving their God-given inheritance.

Jdg 18:10

**“the land is wide.”** The Hebrew idiom is “wide of hands,” implying as wide as outstretched hands.

**“for God has given it into your hand.”** This was inaccurate. God would not give them new land that He had not given them via Joshua while not giving the land he originally gave them via Joshua. People who try to convince others to act often lie or bend the truth of the situation.

Jdg 18:11

**“600 men of the family of the Danites.”** Not all the Danites moved. For example, the family of Samson stayed. (The Samson record predates this move of the Danites.)

Jdg 18:12

**“Mahaneh-dan.”** See Judges 13:25.

**“it is west of Kiriath-jearim.”** The Hebrew text is “behind Kiriath-jearim,” but it means “west of.”

Jdg 18:13

**“they passed from there to the hill country of Ephraim.”** So the Danites are moving north through Judah and on into Ephraim.

Jdg 18:14

**“in these houses.”** The “house of Micah” consisted of houses for his family, “his house” (cf. Judg. 18:3).

**“teraphim.”** The word teraphim is plural and refers to household gods. The number, identity, size, and purpose of the household gods varied from person to person and from region to region, although the Bible shows that at least sometimes they were involved in divination and thus attempting to determine the will of God (or the gods).

[For more on teraphim, see commentary on Gen. 31:19.]

**“a carved image and a cast *metal* image.”** See the commentary on Judges 17:3.

Jdg 18:15

**“and greeted him.”** The Hebrew text is, “asking him about peace,” which is idiomatic still today and is a standard greeting in a similar fashion to the English, “How do you do,” although no one is actually asking about “how” or what the person is “doing.”

Jdg 18:16

**“stood by the entrance of the gate.”** This was likely a “gate” to some kind of outer enclosure around the houses. Although it is unlikely it was very strongly fortified, it would have at least kept animals in to keep them from being stolen (cf. Judg. 18:17).

Jdg 18:18

**“engraved image, the ephod.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “the engraved image of the ephod,” suggesting that those two objects are somehow associated.

Jdg 18:19

“**father**.” Here used as “mentor” and “guide.” See commentary on Judges 17:10. Even today in some Christian denominations the priest is called a “father.”

Jdg 18:21

**“goods”** More literally, “heavy stuff,” but the “heavy” might refer to valuables as well as physical weight. The LXX refers to glorious things, which might indicate valuables as well.

Jdg 18:23

**“the Danites.”** The Hebrew is just “they,” but having “they” in the English could be confusing.

**“that you have gathered yourselves together *to fight*.”** The idea of the gathering together was to fight.

Jdg 18:25

**“angry men.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “men bitter of soul.”

Jdg 18:27

**“and struck them with the mouth of the sword.”** The Danites could conquer a city with 600 men, but they could not conquer the land that God had given them.

Jdg 18:29

**“Dan their father, who was born to Israel.”** That is, Dan their ancestor who was born to Israel (Jacob).

Jdg 18:30

**“Moses.”** The Hebrew scribes purposely changed the text from “Moses” to “Manasseh” to protect the reputation of Moses. It was embarrassing to them that the grandson of Moses would be an idolatrous priest. However, the scribes noted the change, which is how modern scholars know about it and many modern Bibles change “Manasseh” back to “Moses” like the REV does. A person can do their best to be godly, but each person decides for themselves whether they will obey God or not.

[For more on Jonathan being the grandson of Moses, see commentary on Judg. 18:3.]

**“Jonathan...he and his sons were priests.”** So Jonathan the young priest got married and had sons who followed in his footsteps.

**“the day of the captivity of the land.”** This could well refer to the time when the Philistines overran and controlled the land. The verse says nothing about the Israelites being exiled in the days of Assyria, although that is a common belief and may be true. This verse refers to the “land” being captured (or “uncovered”). There was a significant Philistine presence in the Promised Land in the days of Saul.

Jdg 18:31

**“the house of God.”** This refers to the Tent of Meeting (the Tabernacle). Solomon’s Temple was not built for many years to come.

**Judges Chapter 19**

Jdg 19:1

**“there was no king in Israel.”** This statement occurs in Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, and 21:25, thus it appears near the beginning and also the very last sentence of Judges, thus setting apart the last five chapters from the rest of Judges (see commentary on Judg. 17:6).

Jdg 19:2

**“was unfaithful to him.”** It is possible, but less likely, that this could be translated “got angry with him” (deriving the Hebrew root for “to be angry, to hate” (see [NET text note](https://classic.net.bible.org/verse.php?book=Jdg&chapter=19&verse=2&tab=commentaries)). The text does not give enough information to know exactly what happened between them.

**“a period of four months.”** The Hebrew text is idiomatic: “days: four months.”

Jdg 19:3

**“speak to her heart.”** An idiom meaning, “to speak tenderly” (cf. Isa. 40:1).

**“he rejoiced at meeting him.”** That the girl’s father would rejoice at meeting the man suggests some culpability on the part of the woman.

Jdg 19:5

**“Strengthen your heart.”** The Hebrew word translated “strengthen” can be related to strength, or even comfort (KJV); and the usage of “heart” is idiomatic. “Fortify yourself” (NRSV).

Jdg 19:7

**“pressed him.”** This is the same word for “pressed” as in the Lot record (Gen. 19:3, 9).

Jdg 19:10

**“opposite Jebus.”** The ancient road from Bethlehem to Jerusalem and north passed on the west side of Jerusalem. The walk from Bethlehem to Jerusalem was about seven miles, or likely under two hours, so by now, it would have been late evening.

Jdg 19:11

**“the servant said to his lord.”** The word “lord” is a grammatical plural, “lords,” but referring to the servant’s master or lord. This is the idiom, the plural of majesty.[[35]](#footnote-11065)

Jdg 19:12

**“We will not turn aside into the foreign city.”** This Levite is apparently stuck on doing some things right, but does not mind giving his concubine to strangers to be raped.

Jdg 19:14

**“Gibeah.”** Many years later, King Saul came from Gibeah (1 Sam. 10:26). This fact has caused some scholars to say that this record in Judges 19-21 was invented and written later to try to discredit Saul because he was from Gibeah where the people had been so evil, but that is not the case.

**“which belongs to Benjamin.”** The town of Gibeah was in the tribal area of Benjamin.

Jdg 19:16

**“from his work, from the field.”** In the ancient Near East, and still in many places, people build houses close together for protection and support. That is the case here, and the old man had been outside the village working but was now coming back to town in the evening.

**“and the man was from the hill country of Ephraim.”** So this old man and the Levite were both from the tribal area of Ephraim.

Jdg 19:20

**“only do not spend the night in the square.”** The old man may have said this simply due to hospitality, but it is also likely that he knew the character of the people in the city and wanted to protect the men. This seems very similar to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:1-3).

Jdg 19:22

**“sons of Belial.”** This is a designation of sons of the Devil.

[For more on sons of Belial, see commentary on 1 Sam. 2:12. For more on the unforgivable sin and children of the Devil, see commentary on Matt.12:31.]

**“owner of the house.”** The word “owner” is “Baal,” here meaning owner, master.

**“know.”** The word “know” is the common idiomatic word used for sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse gives the most intimate and personal “knowledge” of the other, so “know” was used throughout the biblical world as an idiom for sexual intercourse (cf. Gen. 4:1, 17, 25; 24:16; Matt. 1:25), which even included rape and homosexual intercourse (Gen. 19:5; Judg. 19:25).

Jdg 19:24

**“whatever is good in your eyes.”** Here, this is a problem. The Judges period was a time when every man did that which was right in his own eyes, but here we see that that kind of thinking and behavior can lead to very evil and ungodly acts.

**“Abuse them.”** The Hebrew word has more the meaning of “humble” or “humiliate,” not “rape,” so the man is understating what he knows would happen to the girl if the crowd gets ahold of her, and indeed they did rape her, in fact, raped her to death. There is a stronger word that means “rape” in Hebrew (cf. Isa. 13:16; Zech. 14:2), but the man did not use that word.

Jdg 19:25

**“made her go out.”** The Hebrew is that he caused her to go out. The versions handle this differently: “made her go out” (ESV); “pushed her out” (E. Fox). In any case, the old man did not want to go outside of the house because the crowd actually wanted the man, not the girl, so “brought her out,” as many versions have, is not correct. The man pushed the girl out of the house to the mob.

Jdg 19:26

**“her lord.”** This is a grammatical plural, “lords,” a plural of emphasis.

**“until it was light.”** This is not the full light of the sun, but very light, not just dim light.

Jdg 19:28

**“but there was no answer.”** A beautiful euphemism in the midst of this harsh and terribly tragic story. The woman had been raped to death.

Jdg 19:29

**“And he came into his house.”** Since he was from Ephraim, he likely arrived at his home later that day, even if it was much later. Also, it was the custom to bury (or do something with) the dead body that same day.

**“laid hold.”** This same Hebrew word is translated seized in Judges 19:25 when the old man seized the woman and pushed her out the door.

**“limb by limb.”** An idiomatic translation. The Hebrew is more literally, “by her bones,” but it means cut her limbs into distinct parts.

Jdg 19:30

**“Consider it.”** In Hebrew the “it” is feminine, so although “it” is the primary meaning, the phrase could also include, “Consider her.”

**Judges Chapter 20**

Jdg 20:2

**“cornerstones.”** Figurative language for the leaders of the people (cf. 1 Sam. 14:38).

Jdg 20:5

**“the men of Gibeah.”** The word for “men” is “baal,” and so it could be “leaders, lords, notables, landowners,” or it could just refer to men, which is most likely the case here.

**“abused.”** See commentary on Judges 19:24.

Jdg 20:7

**“here.”** The man is asking for advice and action “here and now.”

Jdg 20:9

**“by lot.”** That is, by allowing the High Priest to use his breastplate and draw the Urim or Thummim out of it and thus make decisions. The land of Israel was divided by lot in Joshua. This shows that the people were drawing God into the situation and allowing Him to make battle choices.

Jdg 20:10

**“ten men of 100 throughout all the tribes of Israel.”** Non-combatant jobs were vital to the success of the mission, but since those jobs involved much less danger, the people in those jobs were assigned by lot.

**“come to Gibeah of Benjamin.”** This could have the meaning, “come against Gibeah,” as many versions have, or the Hebrew text reads “Geba,” and not Gibeah. Although most commentators think that in this context Geba means Gibeah, the town of Geba was only three miles away (or even a little less) and this verse could be talking about using Geba as a supply town.

Jdg 20:12

**“through all the tribe of Benjamin.”** This would have taken some effort.

Jdg 20:13

**“sons of Belial.”** This is a designation of sons of the Devil.

[For more on sons of Belial, see commentary on 1 Sam. 2:12. For more on the unforgivable sin and children of the Devil, see commentary on Matt. 12:31.]

Jdg 20:18

**“went up to Bethel.”** The Tabernacle was at Bethel at that time (Judg. 20:26-27).

**“Who is to go up first.”** That is, who is to be at the front of the battle.”

Jdg 20:23

**“Should I.”** Israel considers itself as one.

**“Go up against him.”** The Hebrew is singular, “him,” a collective singular for the tribe of Benjamin.

Jdg 20:26

**“the army.”** The Hebrew text is just “the people,” but in this context, the people being referred to are the army of Israel (cf. Judg. 20:31).

**“went up and came to Bethel, and wept.”** Even though God told Israel to go against Benjamin, they were unsuccessful twice. The fact that Israel wept, and sat, and fasted, and offered offerings indicates that Israel had some sin in their camp, too, and that prevented them from having a quick, decisive victory.

**“and sat there before Yahweh.”** The people sat before whatever represented Yahweh, in this case, the ark of the covenant (Judg. 20:27), and therefore the Tabernacle was there at Bethel at that time.

Jdg 20:27

**“the ark of the covenant of God.”** So at this time the ark was at Bethel. It likely came from Shiloh (Josh. 18:1).

Jdg 20:28

**“Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron.”** Phinehas was alive when Israel was still in the wilderness, so this record has to be quite early on in the history of Israel in the Promised Land, during the judgeship of Othniel at the latest.

**“stood before it in those days.”** This phrase shows that at this time Phinehas was the High Priest. The office of the High Priest went from Aaron, to his son Eleazar, to his son Phinehas.

**“Should I.”** Here, Phinehas the High Priest represents the people of Israel.

Jdg 20:32

**“to the highways.”** There was more open country around the main roads.

Jdg 20:33

**“all the men of Israel rose up out of their place.”** This was the main body of the Israelite army.

**“Maareh-geba.”** The name means “Cave of Geba,” and it might be a cave.

Jdg 20:34

**“evil.”** Not moral evil, but “evil” in the sense of something bad happening; we might say “disaster.”

**“the *Benjamites*.”** The text is literally “they,” but that is confusing in English.

Jdg 20:36

**“So the children of Benjamin saw that they were struck.”** This sentence would have been better placed as the closing sentence in Judges 20:35.

Jdg 20:37

**“the ambushers spread out and struck the whole city.”** Upon entering the city, knowing that the fighting men had left, the ambushers spread out and went throughout the whole city killing the people there.

**“the mouth of the sword.”** Used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

Jdg 20:40

**“the whole city was going up *in smoke* to the heavens.”** The Hebrew text is literally that the whole city, “went up to heaven” (or “the heavens,” or “the sky”).

Jdg 20:42

**“the way of the wilderness.”** That is, the road to and through the wilderness toward the east.

**“but the battle overtook them.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “but the battle stuck to them.” The Israelites were not letting the Benjamites escape the battle but were chasing them down. The NAB has that the battle “kept pace” with them.

**“and those who were from the cities they destroyed in each *city*.”** The Hebrew text can be read as “they destroyed in the midst of it.” The Hebrew text seems to be saying that the battle overtook the Benjamites who had come out of the city to fight, and then the Israelite army killed the rest of the Benjamites in the cities of Benjamin. E. Fox (The Schocken Bible) has, “whoever was from the town, they [the Israelites] brought him to ruin in its midst.” This explains how the tribe of Benjamin was reduced to only 600 men; the women and children had been killed. The Benjamite tribal allotment was small, and so there were not that many cities in Benjamin. Joshua 18:21-28 lists some 26.

Jdg 20:43

**“Nohah.”** There is scholarly debate about Nohah because it means “resting place.” So, some versions take “Nohah” as the name of a small town, such as the ESV: “Surrounding the Benjaminites, they pursued them and trod them down from Nohah as far as opposite Gibeah on the east.” However, some versions take *nohah* as “resting place,” such as the JPS: “They inclosed the Benjamites round about, and chased them, and overtook them at their resting-place, as far as over against Gibeah toward the sunrising.” The majority of the translations have Nohah as the name of a town, although a translation like the JPS may be correct. There is no way to tell for certain at this time. Perhaps in the future archaeologists will unearth something that helps us interpret this text. Versions such as the NASB take a different view and say that Israel pursued the Benjamites “without rest,” but although that translation would make sense, the word “without” has to be added to the text and there does not seem to be sufficient reason to make that addition to the Hebrew text.

**“Gibeah.”** The Hebrew text reads “Gibeah,” and if this is the case, then the Israelites chased the Benjamites to the east from Gibeah. But some scholars feel that “Gibeah” should actually be “Geba,” which is to the east of Gibeah. The NET text note says, “Gibeah cannot be correct here, since the Benjaminites retreated from there toward the desert and Rimmon (see v. 45). A slight emendation yields the reading ‘Geba.’” Evertt Fox (The Schocken Bible) also has “Geba” instead of “Gibeah.” One reason some people prefer Geba to Gibeah is that if the Benjamites were fleeing to the Rock of Rimmon, Geba is right on the way there. But Gibeah could be correct, and if so, then the verse would be saying something like the Israelites chased them “from Gibeah toward the sunrise,” that is, the battle moved eastward from Gibeah.

The Benjamites stopped at the Rock of Rimmon, which is northeast of Gibeah (Judg. 21:45).

Jdg 20:45

**“they gleaned of them.”** This is a powerful metaphor, portraying the stragglers among the Benjamites as grain or fruit that had escaped being harvested when the main crop was harvested. These Benjamites had escaped death in the main battle between Israel and Benjamin, but as they ran away on the road, they were “gleaned” (killed) by the Israelites who were making sure all the crop was harvested, that is, making sure all the Benjamite army was killed.

Jdg 20:48

**“the mouth of the sword.”** Used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

**“they sent up in fire.”** Burning an idolatrous city was according to the command of Deuteronomy 13:12-18. So the Israelites were keeping some parts of the Torah, but not other parts. Sadly, this is typical of many believers.

**Judges Chapter 21**

Jdg 21:10

**“the mouth of the sword.”** Used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

Jdg 21:11

**“devoted to destruction.”** For more on things “devoted” to Yahweh and devoted to destruction, see commentary on Joshua 6:17.

Jdg 21:12

**“which is in the land of Canaan.”** Of course Shiloh was in the land of Canaan! So this statement is giving us more than a simple fact, it is pointing to the fact that the Israelites are not behaving like God’s people but behaving like pagans and are abandoning morals for the sake of expediency. In Judges 21:5, the oath was that anyone who did not help out the cause of Israel would be put to death. But now they need virgins for the men of Benjamin (and they would not have needed those virgins if they had not, for some unexplained reason, decided to kill every last Benjamite in Benjamin). So for expediency’s sake, the Israelites now abandon their oath and kill all the people of Jabesh-gilead except for the young women. Many of the details of exactly what happened are left out of the record. The inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead killed everyone except the “young women” who were virgins. But how did the Israelite warriors discover who exactly had had sex? And what age qualified a “young woman?” Girls were often married by age 12, so were the female babies killed up to perhaps age eight? The text is vague, and the whole venture disgusting. The Devil moved in people on both sides of the war and ruined lives on both sides. This whole record, Judges 19-21, shows the importance of having godly leaders.

Jdg 21:15

**“made a breach in the tribes of Israel.”** Here God is speaking metaphorically of Israel being a wall, and now there is a breach in it.

Jdg 21:19

**“a feast of Yahweh from year to year.”** This could be Sukkoth, (the Feast of Tabernacles), or it could be another feast the locals invented for some reason. If this is a grape harvest festival, the time is late summer or early fall.

**“which is on the north of Bethel.”** It seems unusual that the text would have to describe where Shiloh was. The Tabernacle was first set up there (Josh. 18:1). It seems as if the worship of Yahweh had been neglected to the point that some people did not even know where Shiloh was. This is the kind of verse that helps archaeologists and historians locate the ancient cities. Shiloh was on the Road of the Patriarchs (just to the east of the road).

**“Lebonah.”** A well-known site on the Road of the Patriarchs, known because when traveling from south to north there starts a sharp decline in elevation.

Jdg 21:21

**“Shiloh...Benjamin.”** The town of Shiloh was in Ephraim, north of the tribe of Benjamin. Israel’s plan for Benjamin was that they leave the tribal area of Benjamin and go north to Shiloh in Ephraim, kidnap young girls and then hurry back to Benjamin.

Jdg 21:22

**“Be gracious to them, because.”** This sentence is very difficult in the Hebrew text, and scholars differ on how to translate it, which is why the English versions differ so much in their translations.

**“in the battle.”** That is, in the battle at Jabesh-gilead when wives were acquired for only 400 of the 600 men.

Jdg 21:23

**“whom they carried off.”** The Hebrew verb translated “carried off” is a strong word in Hebrew. It suggests that the women did not go willingly. The NRSV has “abducted.” E. Fox (The Schocken Bible), has “kidnapped.” The tribe of Benjamin grew in numbers, and although there were now no “purebred” Benjamites, where both the man and woman descended from Benjamin, some notable people did come from Benjamin, among them King Saul and the apostle Paul.

Jdg 21:24

**“from there.”** This may have been at Shiloh, where the elders of Israel had to explain themselves to the fathers and brothers of the kidnapped girls.

Jdg 21:25

**“In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.”** This sentence occurs in Judges 17:6 and 21:25, thus near the beginning and also the very last sentence of Judges, thus setting apart the last five chapters from the rest of Judges (see commentary on Judg. 17:6).

1. Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* [NAC], 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-11452)
2. Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* [NAC], 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-13520)
3. See Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* [NAC], 168; Barry Webb, *The Book of Judges* [NICOT], 174; George F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* [ICC], 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-24617)
4. Fox, *The Schocken Bible*, Vol. 2, *The Early Prophets*. [↑](#footnote-ref-16854)
5. Cf. Gaebelein, *Expositor’s Commentary: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 &amp; 2 Samuel*, 3:405. [↑](#footnote-ref-30765)
6. Jack Sasson, *Judges 1-12* [AB], 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-20234)
7. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 306. [↑](#footnote-ref-16799)
8. Barbara M. Bowen, *Strange Scriptures that Perplex the Western Mind*, 102-03. [↑](#footnote-ref-13670)
9. *Eastern Manners and Customs Described and Illustrated*, 19-20, author unknown. [↑](#footnote-ref-17414)
10. Trent C. Butler, *Judges* [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-28280)
11. Trent C. Butler, *Judges* [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-19490)
12. Cf. Gordon Wenham, *Genesis* [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-14634)
13. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT* *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. [↑](#footnote-ref-32738)
14. James Jordan, *Judges: God’s War Against Humanism*, 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-31876)
15. R. Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A translation with commentary*. [↑](#footnote-ref-10226)
16. Everett Fox, *The Schocken Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23363)
17. Bullinger, *The Companion Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-18051)
18. J. V. McGee, *Thru the Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-28467)
19. Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 385-86. [↑](#footnote-ref-22892)
20. Bullinger, *Companion Bible*, 343. [↑](#footnote-ref-29863)
21. *TWOT*; BDB *Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-27533)
22. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT* *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-29129)
23. Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 396. [↑](#footnote-ref-22385)
24. E. Fox, *The Schocken Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-31073)
25. Cf. Trent Butler, *Judges* [WBC], 297. [↑](#footnote-ref-21479)
26. Barry Webb, *The Book of Judges* [NICOT], 350. [↑](#footnote-ref-26131)
27. Barry Webb, The Book of Judges, NICOT, p. 355 [↑](#footnote-ref-13933)
28. Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* [NAC], 413. [↑](#footnote-ref-22453)
29. Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* [NAC], 426-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-15012)
30. Cf. Barry Webb, *The Book of Judges* [NICOT]. [↑](#footnote-ref-20503)
31. John Walton, Victor Matthews, and Mark Chavalas, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 268. [↑](#footnote-ref-11509)
32. Cf. Fox, *Schocken Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-21273)
33. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-29222)
34. Barry Web, *The Book of Judges* [NICOT], 409. [↑](#footnote-ref-24446)
35. Cf. Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 396. [↑](#footnote-ref-11065)