

# Judges

<sup>1</sup> After Joshua died, the Israelites asked the Lord, “Which tribe from among us should go first and attack the Canaanites?”

<sup>2</sup> “Judah is to go first,” the Lord replied. “I have handed the land over to them.”

<sup>3</sup> The men of Judah said to their relatives of the tribe of Simeon, “Come with us to the land that has been allotted to us, and fight together with us against the Canaanites. Then we’ll do the same for you and your allotted land.”\* So the tribe of Simeon joined with them.

<sup>4</sup> The men of Judah attacked the Canaanites and Perizzites, and the Lord handed them over in defeat. They killed ten thousand of the enemy at the town of Bezek. <sup>5</sup> There they confronted Adoni-bezek† and fought with him, defeating the Canaanites and Perizzites. <sup>6</sup> Adoni-bezek ran away, but they chased after him and captured him, and then cut off his thumbs and big toes.

<sup>7</sup> Adoni-bezek said, “I had seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off picking up leftovers from under my table. Now God has paid me back in the same way what I did to them.” They took him to Jerusalem where he died.

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\* **1:3** The allocations of land were next to each other. † **1:5** Meaning “the lord of Bezek.”

<sup>8</sup> The men of Judah attacked Jerusalem and conquered it.<sup>†</sup> They killed the inhabitants with the sword and burned the town down. <sup>9</sup> After this the men of Judah went to fight against the Canaanites living in the hill country, in the Negev, and in the foothills of the lowlands. <sup>10</sup> They attacked the Canaanites who lived Hebron (previously known as Kiriath Arba) and defeated Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi.

<sup>11</sup> From there they went on to attack the people living in Debir (previously known as Kiriath Sepher). <sup>12</sup> Caleb announced, “I will give my daughter Acsah in marriage to whoever attacks and captures Kiriath Sepher.” <sup>13</sup> Othniel, son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, was the one captured it, so he gave him his daughter Acsah in marriage.

<sup>14</sup> When Acsah came to Othniel, she encouraged him<sup>§</sup> to ask her father for a field. As she got off her donkey, Caleb asked her, “What do you want?”

<sup>15</sup> “Please give me a blessing,”\* she replied. “You gave me land that's like the desert, so please give me springs of water as well.” So Caleb gave her the upper and lower springs.

<sup>16</sup> The descendants of Moses' father-in-law, the Kenite, went with the people of Judah from the

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<sup>†</sup> **1:8** Clearly this was not a permanent conquest since David had to take Jerusalem several centuries later. **§ 1:14** Hebrew text. Some versions of the Septuagint read. “He encouraged her.”

\* **1:15** “Blessing”: this refers to the custom of the father of the bride giving his daughter a special blessing on the occasion of her marriage.

city of palms to the wilderness of Judah in the Negev near Arad where they settled among the people.

<sup>17</sup> Then Judah joined Simeon and defeated the Canaanites living in Zephath. They completely destroyed the town, so they named it Hormah.† <sup>18</sup> Judah also captured the towns of Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron, each with its surrounding territory.

<sup>19</sup> The Lord was with Judah, and they took over the hill country, but they could not drive out the people living on the plain because they had iron chariots.

<sup>20</sup> As Moses had stipulated, Hebron was given to Caleb, who drove out from it the descendants of three sons of Anak. <sup>21</sup> However, Benjamin could not drive out the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so the Jebusites live among the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this very day.‡

<sup>22</sup> The descendants of Joseph§ went and attacked the town of Bethel, and the Lord was with them. <sup>23</sup> They sent spies to investigate Bethel, which was previously known as Luz. <sup>24</sup> The spies saw a man leaving the town and told him, “Please show us how to get into town, and we will treat you well.”

<sup>25</sup> The man showed them the way into the town, and they killed all the inhabitants except

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† **1:17** “Hormah”: meaning “devoted to destruction.” ‡ **1:21** See also Joshua 15:63 where Judah was similarly unable to take Jerusalem. § **1:22** Meaning the tribe of Ephraim and the half tribe of Manasseh.

the man and his family, whom they let go. <sup>26</sup> The man moved to the country of the Hittites, and built a town there and called it Luz, which is its name to this day.

<sup>27</sup> However, Manasseh didn't drive out the people living in the towns of Beth Shan, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, Megiddo and their surrounding villages because the Canaanites insisted on living in the land. <sup>28</sup> When the Israelites grew stronger, they made the Canaanites do forced labor, but they never completely drove them out.

<sup>29</sup> Ephraim didn't drive out the Canaanites living in the town of Gezer, so the Canaanites went on living there among them.

<sup>30</sup> Zebulun didn't drive out the people living in the towns of Kitron and Nahalol, so the Canaanites went on living there among them. However, the Canaanites were made to do forced labor for the people of Zebulun.

<sup>31</sup> Asher didn't drive out the people living in the towns of Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik, and Rehob, <sup>32</sup> so the people of Asher went on living there among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land because they hadn't driven them out.

<sup>33</sup> Naphtali didn't drive out the people living in the towns of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath. So the people of Asher went on living there among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land because they hadn't driven them out. However, the people of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath were made to do forced labor for the people of Naphtali.

<sup>34</sup> The Amorites pushed the people of Dan back into the hill country—they did not let them come down into the lowlands. <sup>35</sup> The Amorites insisted on remaining in Mount Heres, Aijalon, and Shaalbim, but when the tribes of Joseph grew stronger, the Amorites were made to do forced labor. <sup>36</sup> The border with the Amorites ran from Scorpion Pass through Sela and on up from there.

## 2

<sup>1</sup> The angel of the Lord went from Gilgal to Bokim and told the people, “I led you out of the land of Egypt and brought you to this land that I promised to your forefathers, and I said I would never break the agreement I made with you. <sup>2</sup> I also told you not to make any agreements with the people living in the land and to tear down their altars. But you refused to obey what I said. Why did you do this? <sup>3</sup> I also warned you, ‘I will not drive them out before you, and they will be snares for you, and their gods will be traps for you.’ ”\*

<sup>4</sup> After the angel of the Lord had explained this to all the Israelites, the people wept out loud. <sup>5</sup> That’s why they named the place Bokim,† and they presented sacrifices there to the Lord.

<sup>6</sup> After Joshua had dismissed the people, the Israelites went to take possession of the land, each to their allotted land. <sup>7</sup> The people continued to worship the Lord throughout Joshua’s

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\* **2:3** See Numbers 33:55; Joshua 23:13 † **2:5** “Bokim” means “weeping.”

life, and throughout the lifetimes of the elders who outlived him, those who had seen all the wonderful things that the Lord had done for Israel.

<sup>8</sup> Joshua, son of Nun, servant of the Lord, died at the age of one hundred and ten. <sup>9</sup> They buried him in Timnath-heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash, the land he had been allocated.

<sup>10</sup> Once that generation had passed away, the generation that followed did not know the Lord, or what he had done for Israel. <sup>11</sup> The Israelites did what was evil in the Lord's sight, and they worshiped the Baals.† <sup>12</sup> They deserted the Lord, the God of their forefathers, who had led them out of Egypt. They followed other gods, bowing down in worship to the gods of the peoples around them, making the Lord angry. <sup>13</sup> They deserted the Lord and worshiped Baal and Ashtaroth idols. <sup>14</sup> Because the Lord was angry with Israel he handed them over to invaders who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies all around—enemies they could no longer resist. <sup>15</sup> Whenever Israel went into battle, the Lord fought against them and defeated them, just as he had warned them and as he had vowed he would do. They were in a great deal of trouble.

<sup>16</sup> Then the Lord provided them with judges,§ who saved them from their invaders. <sup>17</sup> But even so, they refused to listen to their judges, and prostituted themselves by following other

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† **2:11** “Baals”: pagan gods. § **2:16** “Judges”: or “leaders.”

gods, bowing down in worship to them. They quickly abandoned the way their forefathers had followed, and they did not obey the Lord's commandments as their forefathers had.

<sup>18</sup> When the Lord provided Israel with judges over Israel, he was with each judge and saved the people from their enemies during that judge's lifetime, because the Lord felt sorry for his people, who groaned under their oppressors and persecutors. <sup>19</sup> But when the judge died, the people relapsed, and did worse things even than their forefathers, following other gods and worshiping them. They refused to give up what they were doing and held to their stubborn ways.

<sup>20</sup> As a result the Lord became angry with Israel and he told them, "Because this nation has broken the agreement I ordered their forefathers to obey, and has not paid attention to what I said, <sup>21</sup> from now on I won't drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. <sup>22</sup> This is in order to use them to test Israel to see if they will keep the way of the Lord and follow it as their forefathers did." <sup>23</sup> This is the reason why the Lord allowed those nations to remain, and didn't immediately drive them out by handing them over to Joshua.

### 3

<sup>1</sup> The following are the nations the Lord left and used to test all those Israelites who had not known what it was like to be part of any of the wars in Canaan. <sup>2</sup> (He did so to teach warfare to the later generations of Israel, particularly to

those who had not previously experienced it.)<sup>3</sup> They are: the five rulers of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites living in the mountains of Lebanon from Mount Baal-hermon to Lebo-hamath.<sup>4</sup> They were left there to be a test for the Israelites, to find out whether the Israelites would keep the Lord's commandments which he had given their forefathers through Moses.<sup>5</sup> They lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.<sup>6</sup> The Israelites intermarried with them, marrying their daughters, giving their own daughters to their sons, and worshiped their gods.

<sup>7</sup> The Israelites did what was evil in the Lord's sight. They ignored the Lord their God and worshiped the images of Baals and Asherahs.<sup>8</sup> The Lord became angry with Israel, so he sold them to Cushan-Rishathaim, king of Aram Naharaim. The Israelites were subject to Cushan-Rishathaim for eight years.

<sup>9</sup> But when the Israelites cried out to the Lord to help them, he provided someone to rescue them, Othniel, son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, and he saved them.<sup>10</sup> The Spirit of the Lord came on him, and he became Israel's judge. He went to war with Cushan-Rishathaim, king of Aram, and the Lord handed the king over to Othniel, who was victorious.<sup>11</sup> As a result, the country was at peace for forty years until Othniel, son of Kenaz, died.

<sup>12</sup> But once again the Israelites did what was evil in the Lord's sight, and because they did this

the Lord gave power to Eglon, king of Moab, to conquer Israel. <sup>13</sup> Eglon had the Ammonites and the Amalekite join him, and then attacked and defeated Israel, taking possession of the City of Palms.\* <sup>14</sup> The Israelites were subject to Eglon, king of Moab, for eighteen years.

<sup>15</sup> Again the Israelites cried out to the Lord to help them, and he provided someone to rescue them, Ehud, son of Gera the Benjamite, a left-handed man. The Israelites sent him to pay the tribute to Eglon, king of Moab. <sup>16</sup> Ehud had made for himself a cubit long double-edged sword, and he strapped it to his right thigh under his clothes. <sup>17</sup> He came and presented the tribute to Eglon, king of Moab, who was a very fat man.

<sup>18</sup> Then after delivering the tribute he sent home those who had helped carry it. <sup>19</sup> But when he reached the stone idols near Gilgal, he turned back. He went to see Eglon, and told him, “Your Majesty, I have a secret message for you.” The king told his attendants, “Silence!” and they all left.

<sup>20</sup> Ehud then went over to where Eglon was sitting alone in his cool upstairs room, and told him, “I have a message from God for you.” As the king got up from his seat, <sup>21</sup> Ehud grabbed his sword with his left hand from his right thigh and drove it into Eglon's belly. <sup>22</sup> The handle went in with the blade and the fat closed over it. So Ehud didn't pull the sword out, and the king defecated.

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\* **3:13** “City of Palms”: Jericho.

<sup>23</sup> Then Ehud closed and locked the doors, and escaped through the toilet.<sup>†</sup> <sup>24</sup> After he had left, the servants came and saw that the doors of the room were locked. “He must be using the toilet,” they concluded. <sup>25</sup> So they waited until they couldn't stand it any more, and since he still hadn't opened the doors of the room, they went and found the key and opened the doors. There was their lord, lying dead on the floor.

<sup>26</sup> While the servants delayed acting, Ehud escaped, passing the stone idols and on to Seirah. <sup>27</sup> When he got there, he blew a trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites joined him. They went down from the hills, with Ehud leading them. <sup>28</sup> He told them, “Follow me, for the Lord has handed Moab, your enemy, over to you.” So they followed him down and took control of the fords of the Jordan leading to Moab. They didn't let anyone cross. <sup>29</sup> Then they attacked the Moabites and killed around 10,000 of their best and strongest fighting men. Not a single one escaped. <sup>30</sup> Moab was conquered that day and made subject to Israel, and the country was at peace for eighty years.

<sup>31</sup> After Ehud was Shamgar, son of Anath, who killed six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad. He also rescued Israel.

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<sup>†</sup> **3:23** “Toilet”: The meaning of the word is uncertain, some believe it means “porch,” however it appears that Ehud managed to get out of the room secretly. Descending through an open latrine seems to be the best conclusion.

## 4

<sup>1</sup> After Ehud died, the Israelites once again did what was evil in the Lord's sight. <sup>2</sup> So the Lord sold them to Jabin, king of Canaan, who ruled from Hazor. His army commander was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. <sup>3</sup> The Israelites cried out to the Lord to help them, for Sisera had nine hundred iron chariots and he cruelly mistreated them for twenty years.

<sup>4</sup> Deborah, wife of Lappidoth, was a prophet, and she was leading Israel as a judge at that time. <sup>5</sup> She would sit under Deborah's Palm between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites would go to her for her decisions.\* <sup>6</sup> She sent for Barak, son of Abinoam, from the town of Kedesh in Naphtali and told him, "The Lord, the God of Israel, orders you: 'Go to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun, and lead them there. <sup>7</sup> I will bring Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River, and hand him over to you.'"

<sup>8</sup> Barak replied, "If you come with me, I'll go; but if you don't come with me, I won't go."

<sup>9</sup> "I'll definitely go with you," Deborah answered, "but if you're going to take that route then you won't receive any respect, because the Lord will give Sisera into the hands of a

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\* **4:5** Though Deborah is called a "judge," her role is far more than that of a magistrate. The decisions she made were of national importance, more than the mere settling of legal disputes. In this case, "judging" would have the meaning of "governing."

woman.” Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. <sup>10</sup> Barak called up the armies of Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men assembled under his command. Deborah was also there with him.

<sup>11</sup> (Heber the Kenite had separated from the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses, and had set up his tent at the large tree in Zaananim, which is near Kedesh.)

<sup>12</sup> Sisera heard that Barak, son of Abinoam, had gone to Mount Tabor, <sup>13</sup> so he summoned all his nine hundred iron chariots and all his men to come from Harosheth-hagoyim to the Kishon River.

<sup>14</sup> Then Deborah told Barak, “Get going! Today the Lord has handed Sisera to you. Didn't the Lord march out ahead of you?” So Barak went down from Mount Tabor, accompanied by ten thousand men. <sup>15</sup> When Barak attacked, the Lord threw Sisera and all his chariots and warriors into a confused panic. Sisera jumped down from his chariot and ran away. <sup>16</sup> Barak chased after the chariots and troops all the way to Harosheth-hagoyim. The whole of Sisera's army was killed—not a single man survived.

<sup>17</sup> In the meantime Sisera had run away to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was a peace treaty between Jabin, king of Hazor, and the family of Heber the Kenite. <sup>18</sup> Jael went to meet Sisera and told him, “Come on in, my lord, come in with me. Don't be afraid.” So he went into her tent, and she covered him with a thick blanket.

<sup>19</sup> “Please give me a bit of water to drink, because I'm thirsty,” Sisera asked her. So she opened a skin of milk, let him have a drink, and then covered him up again.

<sup>20</sup> “Stand guard at the tent door,” he told her. “If anybody comes and asks you, ‘Is there is anyone here?’ just say no.”

<sup>21</sup> But Jael, Heber's wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and crept quietly over to him where he lay fast asleep and exhausted. She drove the tent peg through his temple and into the ground, and he died.

<sup>22</sup> So when Barak came past, hunting for Sisera, Jael went out to meet him, and said, “Come here, and I'll show you the man you're looking for.” He went in with her, and there lay Sisera, dead, with the tent peg through his temple.

<sup>23</sup> That day God defeated Jabin, king of Canaan, in the presence of the Israelites. <sup>24</sup> From then on Israel grew ever more powerful until the destroyed Jabin, king of Hazor.

## 5

<sup>1</sup> That day Deborah and Barak, son of Abinoam, sang this song:

<sup>2</sup> “Israel's leaders took charge, and the people were totally committed. Praise the Lord!

<sup>3</sup> Listen, kings! Pay attention, rulers! I, yes I, will sing to the Lord; I will praise the Lord, the God of Israel, in song.

<sup>4</sup> Lord, when you set off from Seir, when you marched from the land of Edom, the earth shook,

rain fell from the skies, the clouds poured down water.

<sup>5</sup> The mountains melted in the presence of the Lord, the God of Sinai, in the presence of the Lord, the God of Israel.

<sup>6</sup> In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, people didn't use the main highways and stayed on winding paths.

<sup>7</sup> Village life in Israel was abandoned\* until I, Deborah, came on the scene as a mother in Israel.

<sup>8</sup> When the people chose new gods,† then war arrived at their gates. Not even a shield or spear could be found among forty thousand warriors in Israel.

<sup>9</sup> My thoughts are with the Israelite commanders and those people who volunteered. Praise the Lord!

<sup>10</sup> You people riding white donkeys, sitting on comfortable blankets, traveling down the road, notice

<sup>11</sup> what people are talking about as they gather at the watering holes. They describe the Lord's just acts and those of his warriors in Israel. Then the people of the Lord went to the town gates.

<sup>12</sup> 'Wake up, Deborah, wake up! Wake up, wake up, sing a song! Get up, Barak! Capture your prisoners, son of Abinoam.'

<sup>13</sup> The survivors‡ went to attack the nobles, the people of the Lord went to attack the powerful.

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\* **5:7** Presumably people moved to fortified towns for protection. † **5:8** Or "When God chose new leaders." ‡ **5:13** "Survivors": referring to the "remnant" of Israel. The "nobles" and the "powerful" refer to the Canaanite overlords.

14 Some came from Ephraim, a land that used to belong to the Amalekites; the tribe of Benjamin followed you with its men. Commanders came Makir; from Zebulun came those who carry a military officer's staff.

15 The leaders of Issachar supported Deborah and Barak; they raced into the valley following Barak. But the tribe of Reuben was very undecided.

16 Why did you stay at home in the sheepfolds, listening to shepherds whistling for their flocks? The tribe of Reuben really couldn't decide what to do.

17 Gilead remained on the other side of Jordan. Dan stayed with his ships. Asher sat still on the seacoast, not moving from his ports.

18 The people of Zebulun risked their lives; as did Naphtali on the high battlefields.

19 Kings came and fought, the Canaanite kings fought at Taanach near the waters of Megiddo, but they didn't get any silver plunder.§

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

21 The Kishon River swept them away—the old river turned into a raging torrent!\* I bravely march on!

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§ 5:19 They did not receive the plunder they hoped for from joining the battle against the Israelites. \* 5:21 The involvement of the stars of heaven and the rainstorm that caused the river to flood are significant since the Canaanite gods were associated with weather and the stars, showing to those involved the supremacy of the Lord over such “gods.”

<sup>22</sup> Then the horses' hooves flailed loudly, his stallions stampeded.

<sup>23</sup> 'Curse Meroz,'<sup>†</sup> says the angel of the Lord. 'Totally curse those who live there, for they refused to come help the Lord, to help the Lord against the powerful enemies.'

<sup>24</sup> Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite is to be praised the most among women. She deserves praise above all other women who live in tents.

<sup>25</sup> He asked for water, and she gave him milk. In a bowl fit for nobles she brought him buttermilk.

<sup>26</sup> With one hand she picked up the tent peg, and with her right hand she held a workman's hammer. She hit Sisera and smashed his skull; she shattered and pierced his temple.

<sup>27</sup> At her feet he collapsed, he fell, he lay motionless. At her feet he collapsed, he fell; where he collapsed, there he fell, his life plundered from him.<sup>‡</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Sisera's mother looked out from the window. Through the latticed window she cried out, 'Why is his chariot taking so long to come? Why is the sound of his chariot arriving so delayed?'

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<sup>†</sup> **5:23** "Meroz": the place is not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. It is thought it may refer to Israelites who had become so "Canaanized" that they refused to help their fellow countrymen. <sup>‡</sup> **5:27** While there is much repetition in this verse, it is retained in translation for its dramatic effect. The last word in the Hebrew text means "plundered" or "looted" is also retained in translation rather than simply saying he was dead, since his life was taken from him in a similar way to a soldier plundering a victim's home.

<sup>29</sup> The wisest of her ladies tells her, and she repeats the same words to herself,

<sup>30</sup> “They’re busy dividing up the plunder and assigning a girl<sup>§</sup> or two for each man. There’ll be colorful clothes for Sisera as plunder; beautifully embroidered colorful clothes as plunder; double-embroidered clothing reaching to the neck as plunder.”\*

<sup>31</sup> May all your enemies die like this, Lord, but may those who love you shine like the sun in all its brilliance!” The land was at peace for forty years.

## 6

<sup>1</sup> The Israelites did what was evil in the Lord’s sight. So the Lord handed them over to the Midianites for seven years. <sup>2</sup> The Midianite oppression was so great that because of them the Israelites made themselves hiding places in mountains, caves, and fortifications. <sup>3</sup> Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites, and other peoples from the east would come and attack them. <sup>4</sup> They would set up their camps and destroy the country’s crops as far away as Gaza. They didn’t leave anything to eat in the whole of Israel, and they

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§ **5:30** “A girl”: literally, “a womb,” a dismissive term for a woman. \*

**5:30** The repetition is again significant: The word “plunder” is used three times—Sisera’s mother is imagined thinking about all the wonderful plunder she will receive. However, it is Sisera who has been “plundered” (the word used there often means simply destroyed, but may include looting and plundering), and of course Sisera’s mother will be bitterly disappointed.

took for themselves all the sheep, cattle, and donkeys. <sup>5</sup> They arrived in huge numbers with their livestock and tents like swarms of locusts, with so many camels they couldn't be counted. They invaded the land to completely devastate it. <sup>6</sup> The Israelites were made desperately poor by the Midianites and they called out to the Lord for help.

<sup>7</sup> When the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help because of the Midianites, <sup>8</sup> the Lord sent the Israelites a prophet. He told them, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I brought you out of Egypt; I led you out from the place\* where you were slaves. <sup>9</sup> I saved you from the power of the Egyptians and from everyone who oppressed you. I expelled them before you and gave their land to you. <sup>10</sup> I warned you: I am the Lord your God. You must not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you're now living.' But you didn't listen to me."

<sup>11</sup> The angel of the Lord came and sat under the oak tree in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite. His son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress there to hide it from the Midianites. <sup>12</sup> The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "The Lord is with you, great man of courage!"

<sup>13</sup> "Excuse me, my lord, but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?" Gideon replied. "Where are all his wonderful miracles that our forefathers reminded us about when they said, 'Wasn't it the Lord who led us out of

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\* **6:8** Literally, "house."

Egypt?’ But now the Lord has given up on us and has handed us over to the Midianites.”

14 The Lord turned to him and said, “Go in the strength that you have and save Israel from the Midianites. Aren't I the one sending you?”

15 “Excuse me, my lord, but how can I save Israel?” Gideon replied. “My family is the least important of the tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least important person of that family!”

16 “I will be with you,” the Lord told him. “You will defeat the Midianites as if they were just one man.”

17 “Please, Lord, if you think well of me, give me a sign that it's really you telling me this,” Gideon asked. 18 “Don't leave until I come back and present my offering to you.”

“I will remain here until you return,” he replied.

19 Gideon went and cooked a young goat, and baked some unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. He put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot. He carried them out and presented them to the angel under the oak tree.

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

21 The angel of the Lord held out the staff he was holding and touched the meat and unleavened bread with the tip. Fire flamed from the rock and burned up the meat and unleavened bread. Then the angel vanished.

<sup>22</sup> When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the Lord, he cried out, “Oh no, Lord God! I've seen the angel of the Lord face to face!”

<sup>23</sup> But the Lord told him, “Peace! Don't worry, you're not going to die.”

<sup>24</sup> So Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and called it “The Lord is Peace.” It's still there today, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

<sup>25</sup> That night the Lord told Gideon, “Take your father's bull and a second bull seven years old, and tear down your father's altar of Baal, and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. <sup>26</sup> Then build an altar to the Lord your God in the proper way on hilltop. Using the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down as firewood, take the second bull and present it as a burnt offering.”

<sup>27</sup> Gideon accompanied by ten of his servants did what the Lord had told him. However, because he was afraid of his family and the people of the town, he did it during the night rather than in the day.

<sup>28</sup> Early in the morning when the people of the town got up, they saw that the altar of Baal had been torn down and the Asherah pole beside it had been cut down, with the second bull sacrificed on the altar that had just been built.

<sup>29</sup> They asked one another, “Who did this?” They made inquiries and they were told, “Gideon, son of Joash, did it.”

<sup>30</sup> “Hand over your son,” the people of the town ordered Joash. “He must die, because he has torn down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it.”

<sup>31</sup> Joash replied to all those confronting him, “Are you arguing on Baal's behalf? Do you have to save him? Anyone who argues for him will be put to death by morning! If he is a god let him fight for himself against those who tore down his altar.”

<sup>32</sup> That day Gideon was called Jerub-baal, which means “Let Baal fight with him,” because he had torn down his altar.

<sup>33</sup> All the Midianites, Amalekites, and other peoples of the East gathered together and crossed over the Jordan. They camped in the Valley of Jezreel. <sup>34</sup> The Spirit of the Lord came<sup>†</sup> on Gideon, and he blew the trumpet, calling Abiezrites to join him. <sup>35</sup> He sent messengers through the whole territory of Manasseh, calling them to join him, and also to Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so they also came and joined the others.

<sup>36</sup> Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel through me as you promised, <sup>37</sup> then look—I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If the fleece is wet with dew but the ground is dry, then I will know that you are going to save Israel through me as you promised.”

<sup>38</sup> That's what happened. When Gideon got up early the next morning, he pressed on the fleece and squeezed out the dew, enough water to fill a bowl.

<sup>39</sup> Then Gideon said to God, “Please don't get cross with me. Just let me make one more request. Let me do one more test with the fleece.

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<sup>†</sup> **6:34** Literally, “clothed.”

This time let the fleece be dry and the whole ground covered with dew.”

<sup>40</sup> That night God did exactly that. The fleece alone was dry and the whole ground was covered with dew.

## 7

<sup>1</sup> Jerub-baal (Gideon) and those who were with him got up early and went and camped by the Harod spring. The Midianite camp was to the north in the valley near the Moreh hill.

<sup>2</sup> The Lord told Gideon, “There are too many soldiers with you for me to hand over the Midianites to them, otherwise Israel will brag to me, saying, ‘I saved myself by my own strength.’”

<sup>3</sup> So tell the soldiers, ‘Anyone who is worried or afraid can leave Mount Gilead and go back home.’” Twenty-two thousand of them went back home, but ten thousand stayed.

<sup>4</sup> Then the Lord told Gideon, “There are still too many soldiers. Take them down to the water and I will reduce\* them for you. Whoever I tell you, ‘He shall go with you,’ he shall go. But anyone that I say, ‘He shall not go with you,’ he shall not go.”

<sup>5</sup> Gideon took the soldiers down to the water. The Lord told Gideon, “Set to one side those who lap the water with their tongues, like a dog does, and on the other side those who kneel down to drink.” <sup>6</sup> Three hundred lapped water from their hands to their mouths. All the rest knelt down to drink the water.

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\* **7:4** Or “test,” “sift,” “purge.”

<sup>7</sup> The Lord told Gideon, “With these three hundred men that I have chosen I will save you and hand over the Midianites to you. Let all the rest of the soldiers go home.”

<sup>8</sup> The three hundred took over the supplies and trumpets of the others. Gideon sent all the rest home, but held onto the three hundred men.

The Midianite camp was below him in the valley. <sup>9</sup> That night the Lord spoke to Gideon, “Get up, go down and attack the camp, for I have handed it over to you. <sup>10</sup> But if you are afraid to go down, go with your servant Purah to the camp. <sup>11</sup> You’ll hear what they’re talking about and then you’ll have the courage to attack the camp.” So he took his servant Purah with him and went to the edge of the camp where armed men were on guard.

<sup>12</sup> The Midianites, Amalekites, and all the peoples of the East filled the valley like a swarm of locusts, and as for their camels, they were as uncountable as the sand on the seashore. <sup>13</sup> Just as Gideon arrived, a man was telling his friend about a dream he’d had. He was saying, “I had this dream. I dreamed I saw a round loaf of barley bread come rolling into the Midianite camp. It hit a tent, knocking it upside-down, flat on the ground!”

<sup>14</sup> “This can only represent the victory by the sword of Gideon, son of Joash, a man of Israel,” his friend answered. “God has handed over to him the Midianites and everyone else camped here.”

15 When Gideon heard the dream and what it meant, he bowed in thanks to God.<sup>†</sup> He went back to the Israelite camp and announced, “On your feet! For the Lord has handed over the Midianite camp to you!”

16 He divided the three hundred men into three companies. He handed them all trumpets, and empty jars with torches inside them. 17 “Watch me and follow my example,” he told them. “So when I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly what I do. 18 Immediately I and those with me blow the trumpets, then you blow your trumpets from all around the camp, and shout, ‘For the Lord and for Gideon!’ ”

19 Gideon and the hundred men who with him arrived at the edge of the camp around midnight,<sup>‡</sup> after the guards were changed. They blew their trumpets and smashed the jars they were holding. 20 All three companies blew their trumpets and smashed their jars. They held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands, and they shouted, “A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!”

21 Each man stood in his place encircling the camp, and all the enemy soldiers ran around shouting—then they fled. 22 When they blew the three hundred trumpets, the Lord made all the men in the camp attack one other with their swords. The enemy army fled to Beth-shittah near Zererah, all the way to the border of Abel

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<sup>†</sup> 7:15 “In thanks to God”: implied. The Hebrew simply says, “he bowed.” <sup>‡</sup> 7:19 Literally, “the beginning of the middle watch.”

Meholah near Tabbath. <sup>23</sup> The Israelite soldiers were summoned from Naphtali, Asher, and all of Manasseh, and they chased after the Midianites. <sup>24</sup> Gideon sent messengers through all the hill country of Ephraim saying, “Come and attack the Midianites, and take control of the Jordan fords ahead of them as far as Beth-barah.” So all the men of Ephraim were summoned, and they took control of the Jordan fords as far as Beth-barah. <sup>25</sup> They also captured Oreb and Zeeb, two of the Midianite commanders. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb at the winepress of Zeeb. They continued chasing down the Midianites and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb back to Gideon who was on the other side of the Jordan.

## 8

<sup>1</sup> Then the men of Ephraim asked Gideon, “Why have you treated us like this? Why didn't you call us when you went to attack the Midianite?” They argued furiously with him.

<sup>2</sup> “Now what have I achieved in comparison to you?” Gideon replied. “Even Ephraim's left-over grapes are better than Abiezer's whole grape harvest! <sup>3</sup> God handed over to you Oreb and Zeeb, the two Midianite commanders. What have I managed to achieve in comparison to you?” When he told them this their animosity towards him died down.

<sup>4</sup> Then Gideon crossed the Jordan with his three hundred men. Even though they were exhausted they continued the chase. <sup>5</sup> When they got to Succoth, Gideon asked the people there,

“Please provide some bread to the men with me because they’re worn out—I’m pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the Midianite kings.”

<sup>6</sup> But the Succoth town leaders replied, “Why should we give your army bread when you haven’t even captured Zebah and Zalmunna yet?”

<sup>7</sup> “In that case, once the Lord has handed Zebah and Zalmunna over to me, I’ll return and thrash you with thorns and briars from the desert!” Gideon replied.

<sup>8</sup> He left and went to Penuel and asked them the same thing, but the people of Penuel answered the same way as the people of Succoth.

<sup>9</sup> So he told them, “When I return victorious, I’ll demolish this tower!”

<sup>10</sup> Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with their armies of around fifteen thousand men. These were all who remained of the armies of the people of the East—one hundred and twenty thousand swordsmen had already been killed.

<sup>11</sup> Gideon took the caravan route to the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and he attacked their army, catching them offguard. <sup>12</sup> Zebah and Zalmunna ran away, but he chased after the two Midianite kings and captured them, defeating the whole of their terrified army.

<sup>13</sup> Then Gideon, son of Joash, returned from the battle through the Heres Pass. <sup>14</sup> There he captured a young man from Succoth and questioned him. The man wrote down for him the names of the seventy-seven leaders and elders of Succoth. <sup>15</sup> Gideon went and said to the Sukkoth town leaders, “Here are Zebah and

Zalmunna, the ones you taunted me about when you said, ‘Why should we give your exhausted army bread when you haven’t even captured Zebah and Zalmunna yet?’ ” <sup>16</sup> So he took the town elders of Succoth and taught them a lesson using thorns and briers from the desert. <sup>17</sup> He also demolished the tower of Peniel and killed the men of the town.

<sup>18</sup> Then Gideon asked Zebah and Zalmunna, “What were they like, the men you killed at Tabor?”

“They looked like you,” they answered. “Each of them had the stature of a prince.”

<sup>19</sup> “Those were my brothers, my mother’s sons,” Gideon burst out. “As the Lord lives, if you had let them live, I wouldn’t kill you!”

<sup>20</sup> He told Jether, his oldest son, “Go on, kill them!” But the boy refused to draw his sword, because he was young and afraid.

<sup>21</sup> Zebah and Zalmunna said to Gideon, “Come on, you do it! Show yourself a man and kill us!” So Gideon went over and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and he took the crescent-shaped ornaments\* from the necks of their camels.

<sup>22</sup> Then the Israelites said to Gideon, “You must become our ruler, you, your son, and your grandson;† because you’ve saved us from the Midianites.”

<sup>23</sup> “I won’t be your ruler, and my son won’t either,” Gideon replied. “The Lord will be your ruler.”

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\* **8:21** Probably made of gold and indicated that the camels belonged to the kings. † **8:22** Suggesting a hereditary kingship.

<sup>24</sup> Then Gideon said, “I have a request to ask of you: that each of you give me an earring from your plunder.” (Their enemies were Ishmaelites and wore gold earrings.)

<sup>25</sup> “We’ll happily give them to you,” they replied. They spread out a cloak, and each of them threw on it earrings from their plunder.

<sup>26</sup> The weight of the earrings he’d asked for was 1,700 shekels, not including the ornaments, the pendants, and the purple garments worn by the Midianite kings or the chains that were round their camels’ necks.

<sup>27</sup> From the gold Gideon made an ephod,<sup>‡</sup> which he placed in his hometown of Ophrah. All Israel prostituted themselves there by worshiping it as an idol,<sup>§</sup> and it became a trap to Gideon and his family.

<sup>28</sup> This is how the Midianites was subjugated before the Israelites and did not gain power again. So the land was at peace for forty years during the lifetime of Gideon. <sup>29</sup> Jerub-baal,

son of Joash, went home, living his own house.

<sup>30</sup> Gideon had seventy sons, all his own, because he had many wives. <sup>31</sup> His concubine, who lived

in Shechem, also had a son. He named him

Abimelech. <sup>32</sup> Gideon, son of Joash, died at a good old age and was buried in the tomb of his father

Joash, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. <sup>33</sup> But as soon as Gideon died, the Israelites went back to

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<sup>‡</sup> **8:27** The breastplate worn by the high priest. This action by Gideon suggests that he thought a center of worship should be established in Ophrah. <sup>§</sup> **8:27** “By worshiping it as an idol”: supplied for clarity.

prostituting themselves, worshiping before the Baals. They made Baal-berith their god. <sup>34</sup> They forgot about the Lord their God, who had saved them from all their enemies that surrounded them. <sup>35</sup> They did not show any respect to the family of Jerub-baal (Gideon) for all the good he had done for Israel.

## 9

<sup>1</sup> Abimelech, son of Jerub-baal, went to his mother's brothers at Shechem and told them and all his mother's relatives, <sup>2</sup> "Please ask all the leaders of Shechem, 'What's best for you? That seventy men, all of them Jerub-baal's sons, rule over you—or just one man?' Remember I'm your own flesh and blood!"

<sup>3</sup> His mother's brothers shared his proposal with all the leaders of Shechem, and they decided to follow Abimelech, because they said, "He is our relative." <sup>4</sup> They gave him seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-berith. Abimelech used the money to hire some arrogant troublemakers as his gang. <sup>5</sup> He went to his father's house in Ophrah, and on one stone killed his seventy half-brothers, the sons of Jerub-baal. But Jotham, Jerub-baal's youngest son, escaped by going into hiding.

<sup>6</sup> Then the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo all assembled by the oak at the pillar in Shechem and made Abimelech their king.

<sup>7</sup> When Jotham got to hear this, he went up to the top of Mount Gerizim, and shouted in a loud voice: "Listen to me, leaders of Shechem, and God may to listen to you!"

<sup>8</sup> Once upon a time the trees were determined to anoint a king to rule over them. They said to the olive tree, 'You shall be our king.' <sup>9</sup> But the olive tree replied, 'Should I stop giving my rich oil that benefits both gods and men just to go and sway to and fro over the trees?' <sup>10</sup> Then the trees asked the fig tree, 'You come and be our king.' <sup>11</sup> But the fig tree replied, 'Should I stop giving my good sweet fruit just to go and sway to and fro over the trees?' <sup>12</sup> Then the trees asked the grape vine, 'You come and be our king.' <sup>13</sup> But the grape vine replied, 'Should I stop giving my wine that makes both gods and men happy just to go and sway to and fro over the trees?' <sup>14</sup> Then all the trees asked the thorn bush, 'You come and be our king.' <sup>15</sup> The thorn bush replied to the trees, 'If you're really sincere about anointing me as your king, come and find shelter in my shade. But if not, may fire flame out of the thorn bush and burn up the cedars of Lebanon!'

<sup>16</sup> Have you acted sincerely and honestly by making Abimelech your king? Have you been acted honorably to Jerub-baal and his family? Have you respected him for all that he accomplished? <sup>17</sup> Don't forget how my father fought for you and risked his own life to save you from the Midianites!

<sup>18</sup> But you have rebelled against my father's family today. You have killed his seventy sons on one stone and have made Abimelech, the son of his slave woman, king over the leaders of Shechem simply because he's related to you. <sup>19</sup> Have you acted sincerely and honestly toward

Jerub-baal and his family today? If so, may you be happy with Abimelech, and may he be happy with too! <sup>20</sup> But if you haven't, then may fire flame out from Abimelech, and may it burn up the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo, and may fire flame out from the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo and burn up Abimelech!" <sup>21</sup> Then Jotham escaped and ran away. He went to Beer and stayed there because of the threat of Abimelech his brother.

<sup>22</sup> Abimelech ruled over Israel for three years.

<sup>23</sup> Then God sent an evil spirit to cause trouble between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem. The leaders of Shechem betrayed Abimelech.

<sup>24</sup> This happened because of the murder of the seventy sons of Jerub-baal and that responsibility for their blood be placed on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the leaders of Shechem, who provided the means to kill his brothers.

<sup>25</sup> The leaders of Shechem sent men to the hill passes to lie in wait and attack Abimelech, and, in the meantime, they robbed everyone who passed by on the road. Abimelech found out what was happening.

<sup>26</sup> Gaal, son of Ebed, had moved to Shechem with his relatives, and he gained the loyalty of the leaders of Shechem. <sup>27</sup> At harvest time they went out into the countryside and gathered the grapes from their vineyards and trod them. They celebrated by having a festival in the temple of their god, where they ate and drank, and cursed Abimelech.

28 “Who is this Abimelech?” asked Gaal, son of Ebed. “And who is Shechem, that we should have to serve him? Isn't he the son of Jerubbaal, while Zebul is actually the one in charge? You should serve the family of Hamor, the father of Shechem. Why should we have to serve Abimelech? 29 If I was the one in charge of you people, I would dispose of Abimelech! I would tell him, ‘Get your army together, and come and fight!’ ”

30 When Zebul, the governor of the city, got to hear what Gaal was saying, he became very angry. 31 He secretly sent messengers to Abimelech to tell him, “Look, Gaal, son of Ebed, and his relatives have arrived in Shechem, and they are stirring up the town to rebel against you. 32 So come at night with your army and hide in the countryside. 33 In the morning as soon as the sun comes up, go and attack the town. When Gaal and his men come out to fight you, you can do whatever you want to them.”

34 Abimelech left at night along with his army, and they separated into four companies that lay in wait near Shechem. 35 When Gaal, son of Ebed, went out and stood at the town's entrance gate, Abimelech and his army came out from where they had been hiding. 36 Gaal saw the army approaching and said to Zebul, “Look! Some people are coming down from the hilltops!”

“That's just shadows made by the hills that look like men,” Zebul replied.

<sup>37</sup> “No really, people are coming down from the high ground,” Gaal repeated. “Plus, there's another company coming down the road that passes the diviners' oak tree.”

<sup>38</sup> “Where's your big mouth now? You're the one who said, ‘Who is this Abimelech, that we should have to serve him?’” Zebul told him. “Aren't these the people you detested? Go on then—go and fight with them!”

<sup>39</sup> So Gaal led the leaders of Shechem out of the town and fought with Abimelech. <sup>40</sup> Abimelech attacked, and chased him and his men as they ran away, killing many of them as they tried to get back to the town gate. <sup>41</sup> Abimelech went back to Arumah while Zebul expelled Gaal and his relatives from Shechem.

<sup>42</sup> The following day the people of Shechem went out to the fields, and Abimelech was informed about it. <sup>43</sup> He divided his army into three companies and had them lay in ambush in the fields. When he saw the people coming out of the city, he attacked and killed them. <sup>44</sup> Abimelech and his company raced to occupy the town's entrance gate, while the two companies raced to attack everyone in the fields and kill them. <sup>45</sup> The battle for the town lasted all day but eventually Abimelech captured it. He killed the people, demolished the town, and scattered salt over the ground.\*

<sup>46</sup> When all the leaders of the tower of Shechem realized what had happened, they took

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\* **9:45** To prevent anything from growing.

refuge in the strongroom of the temple of Elberith. <sup>47</sup> When Abimelech found out that all the leaders in the tower of Shechem had gathered there, <sup>48</sup> he and all the men with him went up Mount Zalmon. Abimelech grabbed hold of an ax and cut a branch from the trees. He lifted it onto his shoulder, and told his men, "Quick! You saw what I did. Do the same!" <sup>49</sup> Each of them cut down a branch and followed Abimelech. They placed the branches against the strongroom and set it on fire. So all the people who lived in the tower of Shechem died, around one thousand men and women.

<sup>50</sup> Then Abimelech went to attack Thebez and captured it. <sup>51</sup> But there was a strong tower inside the city. All the men and women and the town leaders ran there and barricaded themselves in, and then went up to the roof of the tower. <sup>52</sup> Abimelech went up to the tower to attack it. But as he came close to the tower's entrance to set it on fire, <sup>53</sup> a woman dropped millstone down on Abimelech's head and cracked his skull open.

<sup>54</sup> He quickly called the young man who carried his weapons, and ordered him, "Draw your sword and kill me, so they won't say about me that a woman killed him." So the young man drove his sword through him, and he died. <sup>55</sup> When the Israelites saw that Abimelech was dead, they all left and went home.

<sup>56</sup> This is how God paid back Abimelech's crime against his father of murdering his seventy brothers. <sup>57</sup> He also repaid the people of

Shechem for their evil, and the curse of Jotham, son of Jerub-baal, came down upon them.

## 10

<sup>1</sup> After Abimelech's time, Tola, son of Puah, son of Dodo, from the tribe of Issachar, came on the scene to save Israel. He lived in the town of Shamir, in the hill country of Ephraim. <sup>2</sup> He led Israel as a judge\* for twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried in Shamir.

<sup>3</sup> After Tola came Jair from Gilead, who led Israel as a judge for twenty-two years. <sup>4</sup> He had thirty sons who rode thirty donkeys. They had thirty towns in the land of Gilead, which to this day are called the Towns of Jair. <sup>5</sup> Jair died and he was buried in Kamon.

<sup>6</sup> Once again the Israelites did what was evil in the Lord's sight. They worshiped the Baals and the Ashtoreths, as well as the gods of Aram, Sidon, and Moab, and the gods of the Ammonites and Philistines. They rejected the Lord and did not worship him. <sup>7</sup> So the Lord became angry with Israel, and he sold them to the Philistines and the Ammonites. <sup>8</sup> That year and for eighteen more years they harassed and oppressed the Israelites, all the Israelites that lived on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead, the land of the Amorites. <sup>9</sup> The Ammonites also crossed the Jordan to attack Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim, causing terrible trouble for Israel.

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\* **10:2** See note on 4:5.

<sup>10</sup> The Israelites cried out to the Lord for help, saying, “We have sinned against you, rejecting our God and worshiping the Baals.”

<sup>11</sup> The Lord replied to the Israelites, “Didn't I save you from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, <sup>12</sup> the Sidonians, the Amalekites, and the Maonites? When they attacked you, and you cried out to me for help, didn't I save you from them? <sup>13</sup> But you have rejected me and worshiped other gods, so I won't save you again. <sup>14</sup> Go and cry out for help to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you in your time of trouble.”

<sup>15</sup> The Israelites said to the Lord, “We have sinned! Treat us in whatever way you think you should, only please save us now!” <sup>16</sup> So they got rid of the foreign gods they had and worshiped the Lord. And the Lord couldn't stand Israel's misery any longer.

<sup>17</sup> The Ammonite armies had been called up and were camped in Gilead. The Israelites assembled and camped at Mizpah. <sup>18</sup> The commanders of the people of Gilead agreed among themselves, “Whoever leads the attack on the Ammonites will become ruler over everyone who lives in Gilead.”

## 11

<sup>1</sup> Jephthah of Gilead was a strong fighter. He was the son of a prostitute, and his father was Gilead. <sup>2</sup> Gilead's wife gave him sons, who when they grew up, drove Jephthah away, telling

him, “You won't inherit anything from our father because you are another woman's son.”\*

<sup>3</sup> Jephthah ran away from his brothers and went to live in the land of Tob. A gang of trouble-makers joined him and he led them out on raids.†

<sup>4</sup> Later on, the Ammonites were at war with Israel. <sup>5</sup> As the Ammonites were attacking Israel, the elders of Gilead came to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. <sup>6</sup> “Come and be our army commander,” they asked Jephthah, “so we can fight the Ammonites.”

<sup>7</sup> “Weren't you the ones who hated me and drove me from my father's house?” Jephthah asked them, “Why are you coming to me now you're in trouble?”

<sup>8</sup> “Yes, that's why we've turned to you now,”‡ the elders of Gilead replied. “Come with us and fight the Ammonites, and you will be the leader of all the people of Gilead.”

<sup>9</sup> “So if I go back with you and fight the Ammonites, and the Lord makes me victorious, then I'll be your leader?” Jephthah asked the elders of Gilead.

<sup>10</sup> “The Lord will be a witness between us,” they replied. “We'll do whatever you say.”

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\* **11:2** “Another woman's son”: this is what the Hebrew says, however it probably has the meaning of “the son of a prostitute.” This is certainly how the Septuagint translators understood it. † **11:3** The Hebrew simply says, “they went out with him,” however the context indicates they were a band of mercenaries. ‡ **11:8** It's unclear whether the elders are responding to Jephthah's first or second question. Both are possible as responses.

<sup>11</sup> So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him their leader and army commander. And Jephthah repeated all his conditions before the Lord at Mizpah.

<sup>12</sup> Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites to ask him, “What have you got against me that you want to attack my land?”

<sup>13</sup> The king of the Ammonites replied to Jephthah's messengers, “Israel seized my land when they came from Egypt. It extended from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River, and across to the Jordan River. So give it back and there'll be no fighting.”

<sup>14</sup> Jephthah sent messengers back to the king of the Ammonites <sup>15</sup> to tell him, “This is Jephthah's reply: The Israelites did not take any land from Moab or from the Ammonites. <sup>16</sup> When they left Egypt, the Israelites went through the desert to the Red Sea and arrived at Kadesh. <sup>17</sup> They sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, ‘Please let us pass through your country,’ but the king of Edom refused to listen. They also sent the same request to the king of Moab, and he refused too. So they remained at Kadesh.

<sup>18</sup> Eventually the Israelites traveled through the desert, avoiding the lands of Edom and Moab. They arrived on the east side of the land of Moab and camped on the other side of the Arnon River. But they did not enter Moab territory, for the Arnon River was its border.

<sup>19</sup> Then the Israelites sent messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites, who ruled from Heshbon, and asked him, ‘Please let us pass through your

land to our own country.’ <sup>20</sup> But Sihon didn't trust the Israelites to pass through his territory. So he assembled his army, set up camp at Jahaz, and attacked the Israelites. <sup>21</sup> However, the Lord, the God of Israel, handed over Sihon and all his people to the Israelites, who defeated them. So the Israelites took over all the land inhabited by the Amorites. <sup>22</sup> They occupied all the territory of the Amorites from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River, and from the desert to the Jordan River.

<sup>23</sup> It was the Lord, the God of Israel, who drove out the Amorites before his people Israel, so why should you take it over? <sup>24</sup> Why don't you keep whatever your god Chemosh gave you, and we'll keep whatever the Lord our God has given us? <sup>25</sup> Do you think you're so much better than Balak, son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever quarrel with Israel or attack them?

<sup>26</sup> Israelites have been living in Heshbon, Aroer, their villages, and in all the towns along the banks of the Arnon River for three hundred years. Why didn't you take them back during that time? <sup>27</sup> I have not sinned against you, but you have done me wrong by going to war against me. Let the Lord, the Judge, decide today between the Israelites and the Ammonites.”

<sup>28</sup> But the king of Ammon didn't pay any attention to what Jephthah had to say.

<sup>29</sup> Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jephthah. He passed through Gilead and Manasseh, then on through Mizpah of Gilead. From there he advanced to attack the Ammonites. <sup>30</sup> Jephthah made a solemn promise to the Lord, saying, “If

you make me victorious over the Ammonites, <sup>31</sup> I will dedicate to the Lord whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me on my safe return from the battle. I will present it as a burnt offering.”

<sup>32</sup> Jephthah advanced to attack the Ammonites, and the Lord gave him the victory over them.

<sup>33</sup> He soundly defeated them, capturing twenty cities from Aroer to the area around Minnith, up as far as Abel-keramim. This is how the Ammonites were conquered by the Israelites.

<sup>34</sup> When Jephthah arrived home in Mizpah, there came his daughter out to meet him, with tambourines and dancing! She was his only child—he had no son or daughter apart from her.

<sup>35</sup> The moment he saw her, he ripped his clothes in agony and cried out, “Oh no, my daughter! You have crushed me completely! You have destroyed me, for I made a solemn promise to the Lord and I can't go back on it.”

<sup>36</sup> She replied, “Father, you have made a solemn promise to the Lord. Do to me what you promised, for the Lord brought vengeance your enemies, the Ammonites.”

<sup>37</sup> Then she went on to say to him, “Just let me do this: let me walk through the hills for two months with my friends and grieve the fact that I'll never marry.”

<sup>38</sup> “You can go,” he told her. He sent her away for two months, and she and her friends went into the hills and cried because she would never marry. <sup>39</sup> When the two months were over, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he

had promised, and she was a virgin. This is the origin of the custom in Israel <sup>40</sup> that every year the young women of Israel leave for four days to weep in commemoration of the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

## 12

<sup>1</sup> Then the Ephraimites were called up and crossed the Jordan to Zaphon. They said to Jephthah, “Why did you go and fight the Ammonites without summoning us to go with you? We’re going to burn your house down with you inside it!”

<sup>2</sup> “I was a man with a great fight on my hands,” Jephthah replied. “I and my people were fighting the Ammonites. When I called on you for help, you didn’t come and help save me from them.

<sup>3</sup> When I realized that you weren’t going to help, I took my life in my hands and went to fight the Ammonites, and the Lord made me victorious over them. So why have you come here today to attack me?”

<sup>4</sup> Jephthah summoned all of the men of Gilead and fought against the Ephraimites. The men of Gilead killed them because the Ephraimites taunted them, saying, “You Gileadites are nothing more than escapees living among Ephraim and Manasseh.”

<sup>5</sup> The Gileadites took control of the fords over the Jordan River that led to Ephraim’s territory, and when an Ephraimite escapee\* from the

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\* **12:5** The word is the same as used to taunt the Gileadites in the previous verse. Now the Ephraimites are the “escapees.”

battle would come and ask, "Let me cross over," the Gileadites would question him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he answered, "No," <sup>6</sup> they would tell him, "Say Shibboleth." If he was from Ephraim he would say "Sibboleth" because he couldn't pronounce it right, and they'd grab him and kill him there at the Jordan fords. A total of 42,000 were killed at that time.

<sup>7</sup> Jephthah led Israel as judge for six years. Then he died and was buried in one of Gilead's towns.

<sup>8</sup> After Jephthah, Ibzan of Bethlehem led Israel as a judge. <sup>9</sup> He had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He married off his daughters to men of other tribes, and he brought in thirty wives from other tribes to marry his sons. Ibzan led Israel as judge for seven years. <sup>10</sup> Then Ibzan died and was buried in Bethlehem.

<sup>11</sup> After him, Elon the Zebulunite led Israel as judge for ten years. <sup>12</sup> Then he died and was buried at Aijalon in the territory of Zebulun.

<sup>13</sup> After him, Abdon, son of Hillel, from Pirathon, led Israel as judge. <sup>14</sup> He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode seventy donkeys. He led Israel as judge for eight years. <sup>15</sup> Then he died and was buried at Pirathon in the territory of Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites.

## 13

<sup>1</sup> The Israelites continued to do what was evil in the Lord's sight, so the Lord handed them over to the Philistines to rule them for forty years.

<sup>2</sup> At that time there was a man named Manoah. He was from the tribe of Dan and lived in the

town of Zorah. His wife couldn't conceive and had no children.

<sup>3</sup> The Angel of the Lord appeared to her and told her, "It's true that you couldn't conceive, and have no children, but now you're going to become pregnant and give birth to a son." <sup>4</sup> So then please be careful not to drink any wine or other alcoholic drink, and don't eat anything unclean. <sup>5</sup> You're going to become pregnant and have a son whose head a razor must never touch, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from birth. He will start the process of saving Israel from the Philistines."

<sup>6</sup> The woman went and told her husband, "A man of God came to me. He looked like the Angel of God, really frightening. I didn't ask him where he came from, and he didn't tell me his name." <sup>7</sup> But he told me, 'You're going to become pregnant and give birth to a son. You must not drink wine or any other alcoholic drink, and don't eat anything unclean. For the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from birth until the day of his death.'

<sup>8</sup> Then Manoah prayed to the Lord, "Please, Lord, let the man of God you sent us return to us to explain what we're supposed to do with the boy who is to be born."

<sup>9</sup> God responded to Manoah's request, and the Angel of God returned to the woman while she was sitting out in the field. However, her husband Manoah was not with her. <sup>10</sup> So she ran quickly to tell her husband, "Look! The man who appeared to me the other day has come back!"

<sup>11</sup> Manoah got up and went back with his wife, and asked, “Are you the man who spoke to my wife before?”

“Yes I am,” he replied.

<sup>12</sup> So Manoah said, “May your promise come true! What shall be decided\* for the boy, and what is to be his vocation?”

<sup>13</sup> “Make sure your wife is careful to follow everything I told her,” the angel of the Lord replied. <sup>14</sup> “She must not eat anything that comes from the vine or drink wine or any other alcoholic drink. She must not eat anything unclean. Your wife must follow everything I instructed her to do.”

<sup>15</sup> Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, “Please let us keep you here while we prepare a meal of a young goat for you.”

<sup>16</sup> The angel of the Lord replied, “I’ll stay, but I won’t eat your food. However, if you prepare a burnt offering, you can present it to the Lord.” (Manoah didn’t know he was the angel of the Lord.)

<sup>17</sup> Manoah asked the angel of the Lord, “What is your name, so when your promise comes true we may honor you?”

<sup>18</sup> “Why do you ask this?” the angel of the Lord responded. “My name is beyond comprehension.”

<sup>19</sup> Manoah took a young goat and a grain offering and presented them on a rock to the Lord. As Manoah and his wife watched, the

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\* **13:12** The word used here is the same as that used to describe Deborah’s decisions in 4:5.

LORD did something amazing. <sup>20</sup> As the flame from the altar blazed up into the sky, the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame. Manoah and his wife saw what happened and fell with their faces to the ground. <sup>21</sup> The angel of the Lord did not appear to Manoah or his wife again, and Manoah realized that he was the angel of the Lord.

<sup>22</sup> “We’re definitely going to die,” he told his wife, “for we have seen God!”

<sup>23</sup> But his wife replied, “If the Lord had wanted to kill us he wouldn’t have accepted our burnt offering and grain offering. He wouldn’t have shown us all these things, and he wouldn’t have come now and announced this to us.”

<sup>24</sup> She gave birth to a son and named him Samson. The boy grew up, and the Lord blessed him. <sup>25</sup> The Spirit of the Lord began to prompt† him at Mahaneh Dan, a place between Zorah and Eshtaol.

## 14

<sup>1</sup> One day Samson went to Timnah, where a young Philistine woman attracted his attention.

<sup>2</sup> He went back home and told his father and mother, “A Philistine woman in Timnah caught my attention. Now get her for me because I want to marry her.”

<sup>3</sup> But his father and mother replied, “Can’t you find a young woman from our tribe or from our own people? Do you have to go to the heathen\* Philistines to get a wife?”

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† **13:25** Literally, “disturb,” “stir,” or “impel.” \* **14:3** Literally, “uncircumcised.”

But Samson told his father, “Just get her for me, because she's<sup>†</sup> the one I find her attractive.”

<sup>4</sup> (His father and mother didn't realize that this was in the Lord's plans, who was looking for an opportunity to deal with the Philistines; because at that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.)

<sup>5</sup> Samson went to Timnah with his father and mother. When they passed the Timnah vineyards, all of a sudden young lion came roaring out to attack him. <sup>6</sup> The Spirit of the Lord swept over him, and he ripped the lion apart with his bare hands<sup>‡</sup> as easily as ripping apart a young goat. But he didn't tell his father or mother what he'd done. Then he went on his way. <sup>7</sup> When Samson talked with the woman and decided she was right for him.

<sup>8</sup> Later on when Samson returned to marry her, he turned off the road to look for the lion's carcass. Inside the body was a swarm of bees and their honey. <sup>9</sup> He scraped out some of honey into his hands and ate it as he walked. When he got back to his father and mother, he gave some to them and they ate it. But he didn't tell them he'd taken the honey from a lion's carcass.<sup>§</sup>

<sup>10</sup> While his father went to visit the woman, Samson held a drinking party there, because this was the custom among high-class young men.

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<sup>†</sup> **14:3** “She”: this is emphatic in the Hebrew, indicating Samson's determination that this particular woman become his wife. <sup>‡</sup> **14:6** “Bare hands”: literally “but there was nothing in his hand,” in other words, he had no weapon. <sup>§</sup> **14:9** Even just touching anything from a dead body would have made them all ceremonially unclean.

11 When the Philistine people saw him, they arranged for thirty men to accompany him.\*

12 “Let me pose a riddle to you,” Samson said to them. “If you can find its meaning and explain it to me during the seven days of the party, I’ll give you thirty lines cloaks and thirty sets of clothes.

13 But if you can’t explain it to me, you’ll give me thirty lines cloaks and thirty sets of clothes.”

“Fine,” they replied. “Let’s hear your riddle!”

14 “Food came out of the eater, and sweetness came out of the strong,” he said. Three days later they still hadn’t worked it out. 15 On the fourth† day they came to Samson’s wife and told her, “Use your charms to get your husband to explain the riddle and then tell us, or we’ll burn you and all your family to death. Did you bring us here just to rob us?”

16 So Samson’s wife went crying to him, saying, “You really do hate me, don’t you! You don’t love me at all! You have posed a riddle to my people, but haven’t even explained it to me.”

“So?” he replied. “I haven’t even explained it to my father or mother! Why should I explain it to you?”

17 She cried in front of him for the whole time of the party, and eventually on the seventh day he explained it to her because she nagged him so much. Then she explained the meaning of the riddle to the Philistine young men.

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\* **14:11** More likely as “minders” than “attendants,” since it seems the Philistines were rather fearful of what Samson might do. † **14:15** “Fourth”: Septuagint reading. Hebrew “seventh.”

<sup>18</sup> Before the sun set on the seventh day, the men of the town came to Samson and said, “What's sweeter than honey? What's stronger than a lion?”

“If you hadn't used my cow to plough with, you wouldn't have found out the meaning of my riddle,” Samson replied.

<sup>19</sup> The Spirit of the Lord swept over him and he went to Ashkelon, killed thirty of their men, took their clothing, and gave it to those who had explained the riddle. Furiously angry, Samson went back to his father's house. <sup>20</sup> Samson's wife was given to his best man who had accompanied him at the wedding.

## 15

<sup>1</sup> Some time later when the wheat was being harvested, Samson went to pay his wife a visit, taking with him a young goat as a present. “I want to go to my wife in her bedroom,” he said when he arrived,\* but her father would not let him go in.

<sup>2</sup> “I thought you must totally hate her, so I gave her to your best man,” he told Samson. “But her younger sister is even more attractive—why don't you marry her instead?”

<sup>3</sup> “This time I can't be blamed for the trouble I'm going to cause the Philistines,” Samson declared. <sup>4</sup> He went and caught three hundred foxes and tied their tails together, two by two. <sup>5</sup> He attached a torch to each of the tied tails and set them on fire. Then he let them loose in the

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\* **15:1** “When he arrived”: supplied for clarity.

grain fields of the Philistines, setting fire to all the grain, harvested and unharvested, as well as the vineyards and olive groves.

<sup>6</sup> “Who did this?” the Philistines asked. “It was Samson, the son-in-law of the man from Timnah,” they were told. “That man gave Samson's wife to Samson's best man.” So the Philistines went and burned her and her father to death.

<sup>7</sup> Samson told them, “If this is the way you're going to act, then I won't stop until I take my revenge on you!” <sup>8</sup> He attacked them violently,<sup>†</sup> killing them, and then left to go and live in a cave at the rock of Etam.

<sup>9</sup> So the Philistine army came and camped in Judah, drawn up for battle near Lehi. <sup>10</sup> The people of Judah asked, “Why have you invaded us?”

“We've come to capture Samson, to do to him what he's done to us!” they replied.

<sup>11</sup> Three thousand men of Judah went to the cave at the rock of Etam and asked Samson, “Don't you understand that the Philistines rule over us? What do you think you're doing to us?”

“I only did what they did to me,” he replied.

<sup>12</sup> “Well, we've come to take you prisoner and hand you over to the Philistines,” they told him.

“Just swear to me that you're not going to kill me yourselves,” Samson answered.

<sup>13</sup> “No, we won't,” they assured him. “We'll only tie you up and hand you over to the

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<sup>†</sup> **15:8** “He attacked them violently”: literally, “he struck them hip and thigh,” meaning “completely.”

Philistines. We certainly aren't going to kill you!" They tied him using two new ropes and led him up from the rock.

14 When Samson got close to Lehi, the Philistines ran towards him, shouting at him. But the Spirit of the Lord swept over him, and the ropes tying his arms together became as weak as burnt flax, and his hands broke free. 15 He grabbed the fresh<sup>†</sup> jawbone of a donkey, using it to kill a thousand Philistines.

16 Then Samson declared, "With a donkey's jawbone I have piled the dead into heaps. With a donkey's jawbone I have killed a thousand men."

17 After Samson had finished his speech, he threw away the jawbone, and he named the place Hill of the Jawbone. 18 He was now extremely thirsty, and he Samson called out to the Lord, saying, "You have achieved this amazing victory<sup>§</sup> through your servant, but now do I have to die of thirst and be captured by the heathen?"

19 So God split open a rock seam in Lehi, and water came out of it. Samson drank and his strength returned—he felt much better. That's why he named it the Spring of the Caller, and it's still there in Lehi to this very day.

20 Samson led Israel as judge for twenty years during the time of the Philistines.

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<sup>†</sup> **15:15** In other words, the bone was not dry and brittle.

<sup>§</sup> **15:18** Literally, "salvation."

## 16

<sup>1</sup> Samson went to Gaza. There he saw a prostitute and he went to have sex with her that night. <sup>2</sup> The men of Gaza found out Samson was there, so they gathered to spend the night lying in wait for him at the town gates. They kept quiet all night, whispering to one another, “We’ll kill him when it gets light.”

<sup>3</sup> But Samson only stayed until halfway through the night. He grabbed hold of the town gates along with their two posts and ripped them up, along with the lock-bar. Putting them on his shoulders, he carried them to the hill opposite Hebron.\*

<sup>4</sup> Later he fell in love with a woman named Delilah living in the Sorek Valley. <sup>5</sup> The Philistine leaders approached her, saying, “See if you can seduce him and get him to show you the secret of his incredible strength, and find out how we can overpower him and tie him up so he can't do anything. We'll all give you eleven hundred shekels of silver each.”

<sup>6</sup> Delilah went and pleaded with Samson, “Please tell me where your incredible strength comes from, and what can be used to tie you up so you can't do anything.”

<sup>7</sup> “If I'm tied up with seven supple bowstrings that haven't dried out, I'll become just as weak,” Samson told her.

<sup>8</sup> The Philistine leaders brought her seven supple bowstrings that hadn't dried out, and she tied him up with them. <sup>9</sup> Having arranged for

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\* **16:3** Gaza to Hebron is around 40 miles.

men to hide in her bedroom ready to attack him, she shouted out, “Samson, the Philistines are here to get you!” But he snapped the bowstrings like a thread snaps when a flame touches it. So nobody found out where his strength came from.

<sup>10</sup> Later Delilah said to Samson, “You’ve made me look stupid, telling me these lies! So now please tell me what can be used to tie you up.”

<sup>11</sup> “If I’m tied up tight with new ropes that haven’t been used before, I’ll become just as weak as anyone else,” he told her.

<sup>12</sup> So Delilah got some new ropes and tied him up with them. She shouted out, “Samson, the Philistines are here to get you!” As before, men were hiding in her bedroom. But again Samson snapped the ropes from his arms as if they were thin threads.

<sup>13</sup> Delilah said to Samson, “You keep on making me look stupid, telling me these lies! Just tell me what can be used to tie you up!”

“If you were to weave the seven braids of my hair into the web on the loom and tighten it with the pin, I’ll become as weak as anyone else,” he told her. So while he was asleep, Delilah took the seven braids of his head, weaving them into the web, <sup>14</sup> and tightening the pin. She shouted out, “Samson, the Philistines are here to get you!” But Samson woke up and ripped out both the pin and the web from the loom.<sup>†</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Then Delilah complained to Samson, “How can you tell me, ‘I love you,’ when you don’t

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<sup>†</sup> **16:14** The Hebrew of this and the following verse appears damaged. Septuagint reading used.

let me into your confidence?<sup>‡</sup> Three times you've me look stupid, not telling me where your incredible strength comes from!"

<sup>16</sup> She nagged and complained all the time, pestering him until he wanted to die. <sup>17</sup> Eventually Samson confided in her, sharing everything. "My hair has never been cut, because I've been dedicated as a Nazirite to God from my birth. If I'm shaved, my strength will leave me, and I'll become as weak as anyone else."

<sup>18</sup> Delilah realized that he had truly confided in her and shared everything, she sent a message to the Philistine leaders telling them, "Come back once more, because this time he's confided in me and told me everything." So the Philistine leaders returned, bringing with them the money to give to her.

<sup>19</sup> Delilah soothed him sleep on her lap, and then called in someone to shave off the seven braids of hair. She started to torment him but he couldn't do anything for his strength left him.

<sup>20</sup> She shouted out, "Samson, the Philistines are here to get you!"

Samson woke up and thought to himself, "I'll do like before and shake myself free." But he didn't know that the Lord had left him.

<sup>21</sup> The Philistines grabbed him and gouged out his eyes. Then they took him to Gaza where they imprisoned him in bronze chains. He was made to work grinding grain at the mill in the prison.

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<sup>‡</sup> **16:15** "Tell me your private thoughts": literally, "your heart is not with me."

<sup>22</sup> But his hair began to grow back after it had been shaved off.

<sup>23</sup> The Philistine leaders gathered for a great religious festival to sacrifice to their god Dagon and to celebrate, saying, “Our god has handed Samson our enemy over to us!”

<sup>24</sup> When the people saw him, they praised their god, and said, “Our god has handed our enemy over to us, the one who devastated our land and killed so many of us.”

<sup>25</sup> As they began to get drunk, they shouted, “Summon Samson so he can entertain us!” So they summoned Samson from the prison to entertain them, and made him stand between the two main pillars of the building.

<sup>26</sup> Samson said to the servant boy who was leading him by the hand, “Leave me by the pillars on which the temple rests so I can feel them, and lean against them.” <sup>27</sup> The temple was full of people. All the Philistine rulers were there, and on the roof were the ordinary people watching what Samson was doing.

<sup>28</sup> Samson called out to the Lord, “Lord God, please remember me and give me strength. Please God, do this just once more, so that with one act I may pay the Philistines back in revenge for the loss of my two eyes.” <sup>29</sup> Samson reached for the two middle pillars that supported the temple. With his right hand leaning on one pillar and his left hand on the other, <sup>30</sup> Samson shouted, “Let me die with the Philistines!” and he pushed with all his strength. The temple collapsed on the rulers and all the people in it.

So those killed at his death were more than he killed in his life.

<sup>31</sup> Then his brothers and his whole family came and took him back and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He led Israel as judge for twenty years.

## 17

<sup>1</sup> A man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim <sup>2</sup> told his mother, “Those eleven hundred shekels of silver that were stolen from you and that I heard you curse—I’ve got the silver. I was the one who took it.”

Then his mother said, “My son, the Lord bless you!”\*

<sup>3</sup> He gave back to his mother the eleven hundred shekels of silver. His mother announced, “I’m completely dedicating this money to the Lord. I’m handing it over to my son to have an idol carved, an image made with molten silver.† So now I return it to you.”

<sup>4</sup> After he’d returned the silver to his mother she gave two hundred shekels to a silversmith who made it into a carved idol, an image made with molten silver. They were kept in Micah’s house. <sup>5</sup> Micah had built a shrine for the idol. He also made an ephod and some household gods, and ordained one of his sons as his priest. <sup>6</sup> At

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\* **17:2** This may mean that the mother was attempting to neutralize the curse with a blessing since it affected her son, or that she was pleased that he had owned up to the theft. † **17:3** It is unclear whether this refers to two objects or one. See 18:17 which seems to imply two objects, while 18:20 and 18:31 refer to just one.

that time Israel didn't have a king— everyone did what they themselves thought was the right thing to do.†

<sup>7</sup> One young man, a Levite from the tribe of Judah§ had been living in Bethlehem in Judah, <sup>8</sup> left Bethlehem to look for a different place to live. As he traveled through the hill country of Ephraim, he came to Micah's house.

<sup>9</sup> “Where are you from?” Micah asked him.

“I'm a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah,” the man replied. “I'm looking for a place to live.”

<sup>10</sup> “Come and stay here with me. You can be my ‘father’ and priest, and I'll give you ten shekels of silver a year, plus your clothes and food.” So the Levite went inside <sup>11</sup> and agreed to stay with him. The young man became like a son to him. <sup>12</sup> Micah ordained the Levite as his own priest and he lived in Micah's house.

<sup>13</sup> “I'm sure the Lord will bless me now, because I have a Levite as my priest,” Micah concluded.

## 18

<sup>1</sup> At that time Israel didn't have a king. The tribe of Dan was looking for territory where they could live, because up until then they hadn't gained possession of the land granted to them

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† **17:6** This is exactly the opposite of the usual phrase “did what was right in the Lord's sight.” Instead of a commendation, this must be seen as the “democratization of wickedness.” The same expression is used in 21:25. § **17:7** It's not clear how this man could be both from the tribe of Levi and the tribe of Judah, unless his parents were from different tribes.

among the tribes of Israel. <sup>2</sup> So the Danites chose from among them five leading men from Zorah and Eshtaol to scout out the land and explore it.

“Go and explore the land,” they told them. When the men came to the hill country of Ephraim, they arrived at Micah's house where they spent the night. <sup>3</sup> While they were there, they recognized the young Levite's accent, so they went to him and asked him, “So who brought you here, and what are you doing in this place? Why are you here?”

<sup>4</sup> “Micah arranged things for me, and he hired me as his priest,” he told them.

<sup>5</sup> “Please ask the Lord for us so we can find out if our journey will be successful,” they asked him.

<sup>6</sup> “Go in peace,” the priest replied. “The journey you are taking is being observed by the Lord.”\*

<sup>7</sup> The five men left and went to the town of Laish. They observed that the people there lived in safety, and followed the customs of the Sidonians. The people were unsuspecting and confident of their security, at home in a productive land. They didn't have a strong ruler,

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\* **18:6** Note that the priest is not declaring success or otherwise. Literally he says that the journey “is in front of the Lord,” which can mean either that the Lord is leading, or that the Lord is scrutinizing their actions. The quick response by the priest also leads to the suspicion that he did not really spend much time asking the Lord for an answer;

they lived a long way from the Sidonians, and had no other allies to help them.†

<sup>8</sup> The men returned to Zorah and Eshtaol, their relatives asked them, “What did you...?”

<sup>9</sup> “Come on, let's go and attack them!” the men interrupted. “We've surveyed the land, and it's excellent! Aren't you going to do something? Don't put off going there and occupying the land!

<sup>10</sup> When you get there you'll find the people are unsuspecting and the land is extensive. God has given you a place where there's no shortage of anything!”

<sup>11</sup> So six hundred Danite armed men left Zorah and Eshtaol, ready to attack. <sup>12</sup> En route they camped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. That's why the place west of Kiriath-jearim is called the Camp of Dan to this very day. <sup>13</sup> Then they left from there and went into the hill country of Ephraim and came to Micah's house.

<sup>14</sup> Then the five men who had gone to scout out the land of Laish told the other tribesmen, “Do you realize that here in these houses there's an ephod, household gods, and a carved idol, an image made with molten silver? So you know what you should do.” <sup>15</sup> The five men left the road and went to where the young Levite

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† **18:7** “To help them.” Supplied for clarity. The spies would obviously be concerned about who might come to the aid of this town if it was attacked. The distance from Sidon and the lack of apparent alliances gave them encouragement that an attack would be successful. In addition, the lack of a “strong ruler” (literally, “a possessor of restraint”) meant that the town's defense would not be under a powerful military commander.

was living in Micah's home to ask how he was. <sup>16</sup> The six hundred Danite armed men stood at the entrance by the gate. <sup>17</sup> The five men went inside and took the carved idol, the ephod, the household idols, and the image made with molten silver. The priest was standing by the gate with the six hundred armed men.

<sup>18</sup> When the priest saw them taking all the religious objects<sup>‡</sup> from Micah's home, he asked them, "What are you doing?"

<sup>19</sup> "Be quiet! Don't say anything! Come with us, and you can be our 'father' and priest. Wouldn't it be better for you if instead of being a priest for just one man's household that you were the priest of an Israelite tribe and family?"

<sup>20</sup> This seemed like a good idea to the priest and he left with them. Carrying the ephod, the household idols, and the image made with molten silver, he marched with the people all around him. <sup>21</sup> They continued their journey, putting their children, livestock, and possessions ahead of them.

<sup>22</sup> The Danites were already quite a way from Micah's home when men from Micah's village caught up with them, <sup>23</sup> shouting at them. The Danites turned around to face them and asked Micah, "What's the matter with you? Why call out these men to come after us?"

<sup>24</sup> "You stole the gods I made, and my priest too, and then left. What have you left me with? How can you ask me, 'What's the matter with you?' "

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<sup>‡</sup> **18:18** The text repeats the items listed in verse 17.

<sup>25</sup> “Don't complain to us!” Danites replied. “Otherwise some hot-tempered people here might attack you and you and your family will lose your lives!” <sup>26</sup> The Danites carried on their way. Micah saw that they were too strong for him to fight so he turned around and went back home.

<sup>27</sup> So the Danites took with them the idols that Micah had made, as well as his priest. They attacked Laish with its peaceful and unsuspecting people, killed them with swords, and burned down the town. <sup>28</sup> No one could save them because they were a long way from Sidon and had no other allies to help them. The town was in the valley belonging to Beth-rehob. The Danites rebuilt the city and lived there. <sup>29</sup> They renamed the city Dan after their forefather, the son of Israel. Laish was its former name. <sup>30</sup> The Danites erected the carved idol to worship, and Jonathan, son of Gershom, son of Moses, and his sons became priests for the tribe of Dan until the time when the people went into captivity from the land. <sup>31</sup> They worshiped the carved idol that Micah had made the whole time God's Temple<sup>§</sup> was at Shiloh.

## 19

<sup>1</sup> At that time Israel didn't have a king. A Levite who was living in a remote area in the

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<sup>§</sup> **18:31** Though no specific reference is made to a Temple being built at Shiloh, it is believed a more permanent structure was in place there, otherwise the location would have been referred to as the “Tent of Meeting.” The account in the beginning of 1 Samuel supports this view.

hill country of Ephraim married a concubine-wife\* from Bethlehem in Judah. <sup>2</sup> But she was unfaithful† to him and left him to return to her father's house in Bethlehem. She was there for four months.

<sup>3</sup> Then her husband went after her, to talk kindly with her and bring her back home. With him went his servant and two donkeys. She took him to her father's house and when her father met him, he gladly welcomed him. <sup>4</sup> Her father pressed him to stay with them, so he remained for three days, eating, drinking, and sleeping there. <sup>5</sup> On the fourth day he and his concubine got up early in the morning and prepared to leave, but her father said to his son-in-law, "You'll feel better if you have something to eat before you go." <sup>6</sup> So the two men sat down to eat and drink together. The father said to his son-in-law, "Please agree to spend another night here, and you can enjoy yourself!" <sup>7</sup> The man got up to leave, but his father-in-law pressed him to stay, so in the end he spent the night there.

<sup>8</sup> On the fifth day he got up early in the morning to leave. But his father-in-law said, "Eat before you go, then leave later this afternoon." So they had a meal together. <sup>9</sup> When he got up to leave with his concubine and his servant, his father-in-law told him, "Look it's late—it's already evening. Spend the night here. The

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\* **19:1** In other words, a "second-class" wife, not one viewed as having the social status of a true wife. † **19:2** "Unfaithful": literally, "acted as a prostitute." However, some ancient versions have "was angry with him."

day's almost over. Stay here the night and enjoy yourself, then tomorrow you can get up early and be on your way home.”

<sup>10</sup> But the man didn't want to spend another night, so he got up and left. He headed towards the town of Jebus (now called Jerusalem) with his two saddled donkeys and his concubine. <sup>11</sup> As they approached Jebus the day was over, the servant said to his master, “Sir, why don't we stop here at this Jebusite town for the night?”

<sup>12</sup> But his master replied, “No, we're not going to stop in this town where only foreigners live and no Israelites. We'll continue on to Gibeah.”

<sup>13</sup> Then he told his servant, “Come on, let's try and get to Gibeah or Ramah and spend the night somewhere there.” <sup>14</sup> So they carried on and reached Gibeah in the territory of Benjamin just as the sun was setting. <sup>15</sup> They stopped in Gibeah to spend the night, and sat down in the town's main square, but no one invited them to come and stay.

<sup>16</sup> But later that evening an old man came by, returning from working in the fields. He was from the hill country of Ephraim, but was now living in Gibeah in the territory of Benjamin.

<sup>17</sup> He looked over and noticed the traveler in the square and asked, “Where are you going and where have you come from?”

<sup>18</sup> “We've come from Bethlehem in Judah and we're going to a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim,” the man replied. “I'm from there and I went to Bethlehem, and now I'm going to the

Lord's Temple.<sup>†</sup> No one here has invited me to stay. <sup>19</sup> There's straw and food for our donkeys, and we your servants have bread and wine—enough for me, the woman, and my servant. We have all we need.”

<sup>20</sup> “You are welcome to stay with me,” the man replied. “I can let you have everything you need. Just don't spend the night here in the square.”

<sup>21</sup> He took him home and fed the donkeys. The travelers washed their feet and then started to eat and drink.

<sup>22</sup> While they were enjoying themselves, some depraved men from the town came and surrounded the house, and banged on the door, shouting to the old man who owned the house, “Bring out the man who came to stay in your house so we can have sex with him.”

<sup>23</sup> The man who owned the house went outside and told them, “My brothers, don't act in such an evil way! This man is a guest in my house. Don't do something so disgusting! <sup>24</sup> Look, here's my virgin daughter and the man's concubine. Let me bring them out and you can rape them and do whatever you want to them. But don't do something so disgusting to this man.”

<sup>25</sup> But the men refused to listen, so the man grabbed his concubine and threw her outside to them. They raped her and abused her all night until the morning, and only discarded her at dawn. <sup>26</sup> As night turned into day she returned to the house where her master was staying and collapsed in front of the door as it got light.

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<sup>†</sup> **19:18** “To the Lord's Temple”: the Septuagint reads, “to my house.”

<sup>27</sup> Her master got up in the morning and opened the door of the house. He went out to continue his journey and there was his concubine, stretched out in the doorway of the house, with her hands holding onto the doorstep.

<sup>28</sup> “Get up, let's go,” he told her, but there was no answer. Then the man lifted her onto his donkey and went home. <sup>29</sup> When he got home he took a knife, and holding onto his concubine, cut her up, limb by limb, into twelve pieces, and sent these pieces of her to every part of Israel. <sup>30</sup> Everyone who saw her§ said, “Nothing like this has ever been seen before, from the time the Israelites left Egypt up until now. You should think about what happened to her! Decide what to do! Speak up!”

## 20

<sup>1</sup> All the Israelites from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, went and gathered at Mizpah before the Lord. The assembly was united in purpose. <sup>2</sup> The leaders of all the people of every Israelite tribe took their assigned positions in the assembled army of God's people, four hundred thousand soldiers armed with swords. <sup>3</sup> The tribe of Benjamin found out that the Israelites had assembled at Mizpah. The Israelites asked, “Tell us, how could such an evil act have happened?”

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§ **19:30** “Her”: most translations use “it,” but the Hebrew literally says, “All the ones seeing said...” Clearly it was the dismembered body parts of the concubine that are being referred to here, and so the feminine pronoun makes the most sense.

<sup>4</sup> The Levite, the husband of the woman who had been murdered, explained, “I and my concubine came to spend the night at the town of Gibeah in the territory of Benjamin. <sup>5</sup> The leaders of Gibeah came to attack me at night. They surrounded the house, intending to kill me.\* They raped my concubine and she died. <sup>6</sup> I took my concubine and cut her into pieces, and I sent these pieces of her to every part of the country that had been given to Israel, because those men had done something shameful and disgusting in Israel. <sup>7</sup> So all of you Israelites have to decide here and now what you're going to do about it!”

<sup>8</sup> Everyone stood up and unitedly declared, “None of us are going home to our tents! None of us are going home to our houses! <sup>9</sup> This is what we're going to do to Gilboah: we will attack it with our forces chosen by lot. <sup>10</sup> We'll take ten men from a hundred from all the Israelite tribes, then a hundred from a thousand, then a thousand from ten thousand, to arrange food for the army, so when the troops reach Gibeah in Benjamin, they can pay them back for all these disgusting things they've done in Israel.”

<sup>11</sup> All the men of Israel were in agreement and gathered to attack the town. <sup>12</sup> The Israelite tribes also sent men throughout the territory of Benjamin, asking the people, “What are you doing about this terrible evil that has taken place

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\* **20:5** It's interesting that the Levite glosses over the intended homosexual rape and instead states that this was a case of attempted murder.

among you? <sup>13</sup> Hand over these wicked men so we can execute them and get rid of this evil from Israel!” But the Benjamites refused to listen to what their fellow Israelites had to say. <sup>14</sup> They left their towns and assembled at Gibeah to go and fight the other Israelites. <sup>15</sup> That day a total of twenty-six thousand men armed with swords were called up from the towns of Benjamin, in addition to the seven hundred seasoned warriors from Gibeah. <sup>16</sup> Making up part of this army were seven hundred experienced soldiers who used their left hands. All of them could fire a slingshot and not miss by even a hair's breadth. <sup>17</sup> The Israelite army (excluding Benjamin) numbered four hundred thousand seasoned warriors, all armed with swords.

<sup>18</sup> The Israelites went to Bethel and asked God, “Which ones of us should be the first to go and fight the Benjamites?”

“Judah is to go first,” the Lord replied. <sup>19</sup> The next morning the Israelites left and set up their camp near Gibeah. <sup>20</sup> Then they marched out for battle with the army of Benjamin, taking up their positions to attack Gibeah. <sup>21</sup> But the Benjamites came out of Gibeah and slaughtered twenty-two thousand Israelites on the battlefield that day.

<sup>22</sup> But the Israelites encouraged one other to be confident, and they took up the same positions they had on the first day. <sup>23</sup> The Israelites went and cried before the Lord until the evening and asked, “Should we go and attack the Benjamites again, our relatives?”

“Go and attack them,” the Lord replied.

<sup>24</sup> So the second day they advanced to attack the army of Benjamin. <sup>25</sup> However, Benjamites came out of Gibeah once more and slaughtered eighteen thousand Israelites, all armed with swords.

<sup>26</sup> Then all the Israelites and all their army went to Bethel, and sat crying there before the Lord. That day they fasted until evening and gave burnt offerings and friendship offerings to the Lord. <sup>27</sup> The Israelites asked the Lord what to do. At that time the Ark of God's Agreement was kept there. <sup>28</sup> Phinehas, son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron, was the priest. The Israelites asked the Lord, "Should go and we fight again against our relatives from Benjamin, or not?"

"Yes, go! Tomorrow I will hand them over to you," the Lord replied.

<sup>29</sup> Then the Israelites set up an ambush around Gibeah. <sup>30</sup> On the third day they took up the same positions they had as before. <sup>31</sup> The Benjamites came out to attack them and were lured away from the town as they began to kill Israelites as they had before. Some thirty Israelites died on the battlefield and along the roads, the one that goes towards Bethel and the other that goes back towards Gibeah.

<sup>32</sup> "We're defeating them, just like before," the Benjamites shouted.

But the Israelites said, "Let's run away from them and lure them away from the town towards the roads."

<sup>33</sup> The main army of Israelites left where they were and took up positions at Baal-tamar, while

those in the ambush west of Gibeah charged out to attack from where they had been hiding. <sup>34</sup> Ten thousand seasoned Israelite warriors attacked Gibeah, and the fighting was so intense the Benjamites didn't realize they were on the brink of disaster. <sup>35</sup> So the Lord defeated Benjamin before Israel. That day the Israelites killed twenty-five thousand one hundred Benjamites, all armed with swords. <sup>36</sup> The Benjamites saw that they were defeated.

The Israelites had fallen back before the Benjamites because they were confident the ambush they had put in place near Gibeah would be successful. <sup>37</sup> The men from the ambush raced to attack the town, and they killed everyone in it. <sup>38</sup> The agreement was that they would send up a great cloud of smoke to show the town had fallen.† <sup>39</sup> The Israelite army turned to attack the Benjamites, who had already killed about thirty Israelites. The Benjamites were saying, “We're completely defeating them, just like the first battle!”

<sup>40</sup> However, when the Israelites saw the columns of smoke rising heavenwards to form a great cloud over the whole of the town, <sup>41</sup> they turned on their enemies. The Benjamites were horrified when they saw it and realized they were doomed. <sup>42</sup> They turned and ran from the Israelites towards the desert, but the battle caught up with them, and the Israelites also killed those who left the towns on the way. <sup>43</sup> Chasing after the Benjamites, the Israelites

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† **20:38** “Show the town had fallen”: supplied for clarity.

surrounded them, easily overtaking them east of Gibeah. <sup>44</sup> Eighteen thousand Benjamites were killed, all of them courageous warriors. <sup>45</sup> Some of the Benjamites that were left ran towards Pomegranate Rock in the desert, and the Israelites killed another five thousand men on the way. They chased another group of Benjamites as far as Gidom and killed another thousand.

<sup>46</sup> So that day twenty-five thousand Benjamite were killed, all armed with swords and all courageous warriors. <sup>47</sup> There were six hundred who ran away to Pomegranate Rock in the desert and they stayed there four months. <sup>48</sup> The Israelites went back into the territory of the Benjamites, and going from town to town, they killed everything: people, animals, everything they found. Then they burned down every town on their way.

## 21

<sup>1</sup> The men of Israel had sworn an oath at Mizpah, “None of us will allow our daughters to marry a Benjamite.” <sup>2</sup> The Israelites went to Bethel and sat there before God until the evening, crying loudly in distress. <sup>3</sup> “Lord, God of Israel, why has this happened to Israel?” they asked. “Today one of our tribes is missing from Israel.”

<sup>4</sup> The next day they got up early, built an altar, and brought burnt offerings and friendship offerings. <sup>5</sup> “Which of all the tribes of Israel didn't attend the assembly we held before the Lord?” they asked. For they had sworn a sacred

oath that anyone who did not come before the Lord at Mizpah would without exception be executed.

<sup>6</sup> The Israelites felt sorry for their brother Benjamin, saying, “Today one tribe has been hacked off from Israel! <sup>7</sup> What shall we do about wives for those who are left, since we have sworn an oath before the Lord that we will not allow any of our daughters to marry them?”

<sup>8</sup> Then they asked, “Which one of all the tribes of Israel didn’t attend the assembly we held before the Lord at Mizpah?” They found out that no one from Jabesh-gilead had come to the camp for the assembly, <sup>9</sup> for once they had done a head count, there was nobody there from Jabesh-gilead.

<sup>10</sup> So the assembly sent twelve thousand of their best warriors there. They gave them orders, saying, “Go and kill the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with your swords, even the women and children. <sup>11</sup> This is what you have to do: Destroy\* every male and every woman who has had sex with a man.”

<sup>12</sup> They managed to find among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead four hundred virgins who had not had sex with a man. They took them to the camp in Shiloh, in the land of Canaan.†

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\* **21:11** Literally, “devote to destruction”: this was the way God had ordered the Israelites to deal with the Canaanite towns (for example Jericho). Now it is being illegitimately applied to another Israelite town. † **21:12** It seems that this reference to Israel as “the land of Canaan” is deliberate and is intended to show how far Israel had fallen into idolatry.

<sup>13</sup> Then the whole assembly sent a message to the Benjamites at Pomegranate Rock to tell them, “Peace!” <sup>14</sup> So the men of Benjamin went back home, and gave to them the four hundred women from Jabesh-gilead who had been spared as wives. However, there wasn't enough for all of them.

<sup>15</sup> The people felt sorry for the Benjamites because the Lord had made this empty hole among the Israelite tribes. <sup>16</sup> The elders of the assembly asked, “What shall we do to supply the remaining wives because all the women of Benjamin have been destroyed?” <sup>17</sup> They added, “There have to be heirs for the Benjamite survivors—an Israelite tribe of Israel can't be wiped out. <sup>18</sup> But we can't let them have our daughters as wives, since we as the people of Israel swore a sacred oath, saying, ‘Anyone who gives a wife to a Benjamite is cursed!’”

<sup>19</sup> Then they said, “Look! Every year there's the Lord's festival in Shiloh. It's held north of Bethel, and east of the road that goes from Bethel to Shechem, south of Lebonah.”

<sup>20</sup> So they ordered the Benjamites, “Go and hide in the vineyards. <sup>21</sup> Keep a lookout, and when you see the young women from Shiloh come out to perform their dances, run out from the vineyards, and each of you abduct<sup>†</sup> a wife for yourself and go back home to the land of Benjamin. <sup>22</sup> If their fathers or brothers come complaining to us, we'll tell them, ‘Please do us

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<sup>†</sup> **21:21** The word used here is an unusual one and means to seize someone by force.

a favor, because we couldn't find enough wives for them in the war. § And it's not as if you're guilty of breaking the oath since you didn't give them in marriage.”

<sup>23</sup> The Benjaminites did as they were ordered. Each man grabbed one of the women dancers up to the total needed and carried her off to be his wife. Then they went back to their own land, where they rebuilt their towns and lived in them.

<sup>24</sup> Then the Israelites left and went home to their tribes and families, each one going to the land they owned. <sup>25</sup> At that time Israel didn't have a king—everyone did what they themselves thought was the right thing to do.

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§ 21:22 Referring to the attack on Jabesh-gilead

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