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Judges

Chapter 1

¹After Joshua died, the Israelite people asked Yahweh, "Which of our tribes should attack the Canaanites first?"

²Yahweh replied, "The men of the tribe of Judah must attack first. I will enable the tribe of Judah to defeat the Canaanites."

³The men of Judah went to their fellow Israelites, the men from the tribe of Simeon, and said to them, "Come and help us to fight the Canaanites in order that we can take from them the land that Yahweh allotted to us. If you do that, we will go with you and help you conquer the people in the land that Yahweh promised to give to you." So the men from the tribe of Simeon went with the men of the tribe of Judah.

⁴When the men of those two tribes attacked, Yahweh enabled them to defeat ten thousand men of the Canaanites and the Perizzites at the city of Bezek. ⁵During the battle they found Adoni-Bezek, the leader of the city. ⁶Adoni-Bezek tried to run away. The Israelites pursued him and caught him. Then they cut off his thumbs and his big toes.

⁷Adoni-Bezek said, "My army captured seventy kings. We cut off their thumbs and big toes. After that, we forced those kings to eat scraps that fell from our table. Now God has paid me back for what I did." Then the men of Judah took Adoni-Bezek to Jerusalem, and he died there.

⁸The army of Judah fought against the men of Jerusalem, and they captured the city. With their swords they killed the people who lived there and they burned the houses in the city.

⁹Later, the men of Judah went down to fight the Canaanites who lived in the hill country, in the southern Judean wilderness, and in the foothills to the west. ¹⁰The men of Judah also went to fight against the Canaanites who lived in the city of Hebron (which used to be named Kiriath Arba). They defeated the armies of kings Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai.

¹¹Then they left that area and went to fight against the people living in the city of Debir, which was previously named Kiriath Sepher. ¹²Before they attacked the city, Caleb said to them, "The person who attacks and captures Kiriath Sepher, I will allow him to marry my daughter Aksah." ¹³Othniel, who was the son of Caleb's younger brother Kenaz, captured the city. So Caleb gave his daughter Aksah to him, to become his wife.

¹⁴After Aksah married Othniel, she asked him to request her father to give him a field. Then she rode back to her father Caleb's house on her donkey. When she got off the donkey, Caleb asked her, "What do you want?"

¹⁵She replied, "I want you to do a favor for me. You have given me the land of the southern Judean wilderness, but it is very dry there. So please also give me some land that has springs of water." So Caleb gave her some land on higher ground that had a spring, and some land on lower ground that had a spring in it.

¹⁶The Kenites who were descendants of Moses' father-in-law left Jericho, which was called "The City of Palm Trees." They went with some of the men of Judah to live with them in the southern Judean wilderness, near the city of Arad.

¹⁷The men of Judah and their fellow Israelites from the tribe of Simeon defeated the Canaanites who lived in the city of Zephath. They completely destroyed the city and gave it a new name, Hormah, which means "complete destruction." ¹⁸The men of Judah also captured Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron cities and all the land that is near those cities. ¹⁹Yahweh helped the men of Judah to capture the hill country, but they could not force the people who were living in the plains to leave, because they had better weapons—they had iron chariots.

²⁰The city of Hebron was given to Caleb because Moses had promised him that he could have that city. And Caleb forced the three clans descended from Anak to leave that area. ²¹But the tribe of Benjamin could not force the Jebusites to leave Jerusalem. So, since that time the Jebusites have lived in Jerusalem with the tribe of Benjamin.

²²The men of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh went to fight against the men of the city of Bethel, and Yahweh helped them. ²³They sent some spies to find out everything that they could find out about Bethel, which was previously called Luz. ²⁴The spies saw a man who was coming out of the city. They said to him, "If you show us a way to get into the city, we will be kind to you and we will not kill you." ²⁵So the man showed them a way to enter the city. The men of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh entered the city and killed all the people with their swords, but they did not kill the man who showed them how to get into the city, and they did not kill his family. ²⁶That man went to the area where the descendants of Heth lived, and he built a city. He named the city Luz, and that is still the name of that city.

²⁷There were Canaanites who lived in Beth Shan, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, and Megiddo cities and in the surrounding villages. The men of the tribe of Manasseh did not force them to leave those towns, because the Canaanites were determined to stay there. ²⁸Later, the Israelites became stronger, and they forced the Canaanites to work for them as their slaves, but they did not force all the Canaanites to leave their land. ²⁹The men of the tribe of Ephraim did not force the Canaanites to leave the city of Gezer. So the Canaanites continued to live with the tribe of Ephraim.

³⁰The men of the tribe of Zebulun did not force the Canaanites who were living in the cities of Kitron and Nahalol to leave. They stayed there and lived with the tribe of Zebulun, but the people of Zebulun forced them to work for them as their slaves. ³¹The men of the tribe of Asher did not force the Canaanites who lived in Akko, Sidon, Ahlab, Aczib, Helbah, Aphek and Rehob cities to leave. ³²So the tribe of Asher lived with the Canaanites (those who were still there), and did not make them leave. ³³The men of the tribe of Naphtali did not compel the people who lived in the cities of Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath to leave, so they continued to live with the Canaanites in those cities, but the Canaanites were forced to work as the slaves of the tribe of Naphtali. ³⁴The Amorites forced the tribe of Dan to live in the hills. They did not allow them to come down and live on the plain. ³⁵The Amorites were determined to stay at Mount Heres and in the cities of Aijalon and Shaalbim. But when the Israelites became stronger, they forced the Amorites to work as their slaves. ³⁶The land where the Amorites lived extended from Scorpion Pass toward the west beyond Sela, up into the hill country.

Chapter 2

¹The angel of Yahweh went up from Gilgal to a place that the people of Israel would soon call Bokim. He said to the Israelite people, "I brought your ancestors up here from Egypt. I led them into this land that I solemnly promised to give to your ancestors. I said to them, 'I will never break the covenant I made with you. ²But as for you, you must never agree to have peace with the people who live in this land. You must tear down the altars where they make sacrifices to idols.' But you have not obeyed me. ³So now, I am telling you that I will not drive out your enemies as you advance. They will be like thorns in your sides. And they will try to trap you by persuading you to worship their idols."

⁴After he said that to all the Israelites, the people lamented loudly. ⁵They named that place Bokim, which means "weeping." There they offered sacrifices to Yahweh.

⁶After Joshua sent the people of Israel away, each group went to possess the land that had been permanently assigned to them. ⁷They obeyed Yahweh as long as Joshua was alive, and as long as the elders, those who had seen all the great things that Yahweh had done for Israel, were alive.

⁸Then Yahweh's servant Joshua died. He was 110 years old when he died. ⁹They buried his body in the land that he had received from Moses, at Timnath Heres, in the area where the descendants of Ephraim lived, north of Mount Gaash.

¹⁰After all the people who lived at the same time as Joshua died, more people grew up who did not know Yahweh and had not seen him do the great things he had done for the Israelite people. ¹¹⁻¹³They did things that Yahweh said were very evil. They worshiped idols that represented the god Baal and the female fertility goddess, the Ashtoreth. They worshiped the various gods that the people groups around them worshiped. They stopped worshiping Yahweh, the God their ancestors worshiped, the one who had brought their ancestors out of Egypt. This caused Yahweh to be very angry. ¹⁴Because Yahweh was angry, he allowed people from other groups to attack them and steal their crops and animals. They were no longer able to resist their enemies, and Yahweh allowed all their enemies around them to defeat them. ¹⁵Whenever the Israelites went to fight their enemies, Yahweh always worked against them and allowed their enemies to defeat them, just as he had said he would do. So the Israelites were greatly distressed.

¹⁶Then Yahweh brought leaders to them. These leaders rescued the Israelites from the people who were attacking them. ¹⁷But the Israelites still would not obey their leaders. Instead, they betrayed Yahweh for idols, like prostitutes to other gods and they worshiped those idols. They were not like their ancestors. Their ancestors obeyed what Yahweh commanded, but these new people quickly stopped behaving as their ancestors had behaved. ¹⁸Whenever Yahweh brought a leader to them, he helped that leader and enabled him to rescue the people from their enemies. He did that as long as that leader was alive. Yahweh pitied them as they groaned because they were being oppressed and caused to suffer. ¹⁹But after that leader died, the people always began behaving in more evil ways than their ancestors had behaved. They worshiped other gods and bowed down to them and did all the things that they thought those gods wanted them to do.

²⁰So Yahweh was very angry with the Israelite people. He said, "These people have disobeyed the covenant that I made with their ancestors. They have not done what I told them to do. ²¹So I will no longer expel the people groups that Joshua left in this land when he died. ²²I will use them to test the Israelite people to see whether they will do what I want them to do, as their ancestors did." ²³Yahweh allowed these people groups to stay in that land for a long time after the people of Israel had come. He did not expel them by allowing Joshua and his men to defeat them.

Chapter 3

¹At that time there were still many people groups in Canaan. Yahweh left them there to test the Israelite people because many of the Israelites in Canaan had not fought in any of the previous wars. ²So Yahweh did this to teach the new generation of Israelites how to wage war. ³This is a list of the people groups that Yahweh left there to test the Israelites: The Philistines and their five leaders, the people living in the area near the city of Sidon, the descendants of Canaan, and the Hivites who were living in the mountains of Lebanon between Mount Baal Hermon and Lebo Hamath ("the pass of Hamath"). ⁴Yahweh left these people groups there to test the Israelites, to see if they would obey his commands which he had told Moses to give them. ⁵The Israelites lived among the people groups of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁶But the Israelites took the daughters of those people to be their own wives, and gave their own daughters to those men to marry them. And they worshiped the gods of those people.

⁷The Israelites did things that Yahweh said were very evil. They forgot about Yahweh, their God, and they started to worship the idols that represented the god Baal and the goddess Asherah. ⁸Therefore Yahweh was very angry with Israel, and he handed them over that they might live under the power of King Cushan-Rishathaim, who was king of Aram Naharaim in Mesopotamia. The people of Israel served Cushan-Rishathaim for eight years. ⁹But when they pleaded to Yahweh to help them, he brought a leader to rescue them. He was Othniel (the son of Caleb's younger brother, Kenaz). ¹⁰Yahweh's Spirit gave him power and insight, and he became their leader. He led an army that fought against the army of Cushan-Rishathaim, and Othniel defeated them. ¹¹After that, for forty years there was peace in the land, until Othniel died.

¹²After that, the Israelites again did things that Yahweh had forbidden them to do, things that were very evil. Yahweh made the army of King Eglon, who ruled the land of Moab, much stronger so that he could defeat the

Israelites. ¹³Eglon persuaded the leaders of the Ammonites and the Amalekites to join their armies with his army to attack Israel. They captured Jericho, which was called "The City of Palm Trees." ¹⁴Then King Eglon ruled the Israelites for eighteen years.

¹⁵But then the Israelites again pleaded to Yahweh to help them. So he brought another leader to rescue them. He was Ehud son of Gera, a left-handed man from the descendants of Benjamin. The Israelites sent him to King Eglon to give him the money he required every year so he would not attack them. ¹⁶Ehud had with him a short double-edged sword, one-half meter in length. He hid it under his clothes by strapping the sword to his right thigh. ¹⁷He gave the money to King Eglon, who was a very fat man. ¹⁸Then Ehud started to go back home with the men who had carried the money. ¹⁹When they arrived at the stone quarries near Gilgal, he told the other men to go on, but he himself turned around and went back to the king of Moab. When he arrived at the palace, he said to the king, "Your majesty, I have a secret message for you." So the king told all his servants to be quiet, and he sent them out of the room.

²⁰Then, as Eglon was sitting alone in the upstairs room of his summer palace, Ehud came close to him and said, "I have a message for you from God." Just then the king got up from his chair. ²¹As the king got up, Ehud reached with his left hand and pulled the dagger from his right thigh, and plunged it into the king's belly. ²²He thrust it in so far that the handle went into the king's belly. Ehud did not pull the dagger out. He left it there, with the handle buried in the king's fat, and he went out from the room. ²³Then Ehud left the room. He went out to the porch. He shut the doors to the room and locked them.

²⁴After he had gone, King Eglon's servants came back, but they saw that the doors of the room were locked. They said, "The king must be defecating in the inner room." ²⁵So they waited, but when the king did not open the doors of the room, after a while they were worried. They got a key and unlocked the doors. And they saw that their king was lying on the floor, dead.

²⁶Meanwhile, Ehud escaped. He passed by the stone quarries and arrived at Seirah, in the hill country where the descendants of Ephraim lived. ²⁷There he blew a trumpet to tell everyone that the people should join him to fight the people of Moab. So the Israelites went with him from the hills. They went down toward the Jordan River, with Ehud leading them.

²⁸He said to the men, "Yahweh is going to allow us to defeat your enemies, the people of Moab. So follow me!" So they followed him down to the river, and they stationed some of their men at the place where people can walk across the river, in order that they could kill any people from Moab who tried to cross the river to escape. ²⁹At that time, the Israelites killed about ten thousand people from Moab. They were all strong and capable men, but not one of them escaped. ³⁰On that day, the Israelites conquered the people of Moab. Then there was peace in their land for eighty years.

³¹After Ehud died, Shamgar became their leader. He rescued the Israelites from the Philistines. In one battle he killed six hundred Philistines with an ox goad.

Chapter 4

¹After Ehud died, the Israelites again started doing things Yahweh said were very evil. ²So he allowed the army of Jabin, one of the kings in the region of Canaan, who ruled in the city of Hazor, to conquer the Israelites. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth (where many of those who were not Israelites lived).

³Sisera's army had nine hundred chariots made out of iron. For twenty years he cruelly oppressed the Israelites. Then they pleaded to Yahweh to help them.

⁴Now Deborah, a woman who proclaimed the word of Yahweh (who was the wife of Lappidoth), was a leading judge in Israel at that time. ⁵She would sit under her palm tree (they called it the "palm of Deborah") at a place between Ramah and Bethel, in the hill country where the descendants of Ephraim lived, and people would come to

her and ask her to settle their legal disputes. She would determine what was right and fair. ⁶One day she sent for Barak son of Abinoam and called him to come to her. He was from Kedesh (in the area where the descendants of Naphtali lived). She said to him, "This is what Yahweh, the God we worship, is commanding you to do: 'Take ten thousand men with you, some from Naphtali and some from Zebulun, and gather all your men together at Mount Tabor. ⁷Yahweh will make me able to persuade Sisera, the commander of King Jabin's army, to come with his chariots and his army, to the river Kishon, a few miles away. I will enable your men to defeat them there.'"

⁸Barak replied, "I will go only if you go with me. If you will not go with me, I will not go."

⁹She replied, "Indeed I will go with you. But because that is what you have decided to do, Yahweh will enable a woman to defeat Sisera, and the result will be that no one will honor you for doing that." So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. ¹⁰There he summoned men from Zebulun and Naphtali. Ten thousand men came to him there, and then they went together with Deborah to Mount Tabor.

¹¹At that time Heber (the Kenite) had moved away from the Kenites with his wife Jael, and set up his tent near the big oak tree at Zaananim, near Kedesh. (Heber was a descendant of Moses' father-in-law Hobab.)

¹²Someone told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up on Mount Tabor with an army. ¹³Sisera gathered his troops with their nine hundred chariots, and they marched from Harosheth (where the non-Israelites lived) to the river Kishon.

¹⁴Then Deborah said to Barak, "Get going! This is the day that Yahweh will enable your army to defeat the army of Sisera. Yahweh is going ahead of you!" So Barak led his men as they descended from Mount Tabor. ¹⁵As they advanced, Yahweh caused Sisera and all his chariots and his army to have great difficulty maneuvering around. So Sisera jumped down from his chariot and ran away. ¹⁶But Barak and his men pursued the other chariots and the enemy soldiers as far as Harosheth (where the non-Israelites lived). They killed all of the men in Sisera's army. Not one man survived.

¹⁷But Sisera ran to Jael's tent. He did that because Sisera's master, Jabin of the city of Hazor, was a good friend of her husband Heber.

¹⁸Jael went out to greet Sisera. She said to him, "Sir, come into my tent! Do not be afraid!" So he went into the tent and lay down, and she covered him with a blanket.

¹⁹He said to her, "I am thirsty; can you give me some water?" So she opened a leather container of milk, and gave him a drink. Then she covered him with a blanket again.

²⁰He said to her, "Stand in the entrance of the tent. If someone comes and asks, 'Is anyone else here?', say 'No'."

²¹Sisera was very exhausted, so he soon was asleep. While he was sleeping, Jael crept quietly to him, holding a hammer and a tent peg. She pounded the peg through his skull, and she hammered the peg all the way through his head and it stuck into the ground, and he died.

²²When Barak came to Jael's tent to look for Sisera, she went out to greet him. She said, "Come in, and I will show you the man you are searching for!" So he followed her into the tent, and he saw Sisera lying there, dead, with the tent peg still piercing through his head.

²³On that day God enabled the Israelites to defeat the army of Jabin, one of the kings of the Canaanites. ²⁴The Israelites became stronger and stronger, and they destroyed Jabin and his army.

Chapter 5

¹On that day, Deborah and Barak (the son of Abinoam) sang this song:

²When the leaders of the Israelite people really lead them, and the people willingly follow them, it is time to praise Yahweh!

³Listen, you kings! Pay attention, you leaders!

I will sing to Yahweh. With this song I will praise Yahweh, the God of Israel.

⁴O Yahweh, when you came from Seir, when you marched from that land, also known as Edom, the earth shook, and rain poured down from the skies.

⁵The mountains shook when you came, just like Mount Sinai shook when you appeared there, because you are Yahweh, the God of Israel.

⁶When Shamgar was our leader and in the days of Jael, we were afraid to walk on the main roads; instead, caravans of travelers walked on winding, less traveled roads to avoid being molested.

⁷People left their small villages, and moved into the walled cities until I, Deborah, became their leader.

I became like a mother to the Israelite people. ⁸When the Israelite people abandoned Yahweh and chose new gods, enemies attacked the gates of the cities, and then they took away the shields and spears from forty thousand Israelite soldiers. Not one was left with a metal weapon.

⁹I am thankful for the leaders and soldiers who volunteered to fight. I praise you, Yahweh, for them!

¹⁰You wealthy people who ride on donkeys, sitting on nice padded saddles, and you people who just walk on the road, think about all this!

¹¹Listen to the voices of the singers who gather at the places where the animals drink water. They tell about how Yahweh acted righteously when he enabled the Israelite warriors to conquer their enemies. Yahweh's people marched down to the city gates.

¹²The people came to my house and shouted,
'Deborah, wake up! Wake up and start singing!'

They also shouted,
'Barak (son of Abinoam), get up, and capture our enemies!'

¹³Later, some of the Israelite people who survived the battle
came down from the highlands to where their leaders were.
These were men who belonged to Yahweh and they came down to me
to fight their enemies alongside these warriors.

¹⁴Some came from the tribe descended from Ephraim.
They came from land that once belonged to the descendants of Amalek.
Men from the tribe descended from Benjamin followed them.
Troops from the group descended from Machir also came down,
and officers from the tribe descended from Zebulun came down, carrying staffs to show they were important.

¹⁵Leaders from the tribes descended from Issachar joined Barak and Deborah.
They followed Barak, rushing down into the valley.
But men from the tribe descended from Reuben could not decide what they should do.

¹⁶Why did you men stay at your fireplaces,
waiting to hear the shepherds whistle for their flocks of sheep to come to the pens?
Men in the tribe descended from Reuben could not decide
whether they would join us to fight our enemies, or not.

¹⁷Similarly, the men living in the Gilead area stayed at home, east of the Jordan River.
And the men from the tribe descended from Dan,
why did they stay home?
The tribe descended from Asher sat by the seashore.
They stayed in their coves.

¹⁸But men from the tribe descended from Zebulun risked their lives on the battlefield,
and men descended from Naphtali were ready to do that, also.

¹⁹The kings of Canaan fought us at Taanach, near the springs in Megiddo Valley.
But since they did not defeat us,
they did not carry away any silver or other treasures from the battle.

²⁰It was as though the stars in the heavens fought for us

and as though those stars in their paths fought against Sisera.

²¹The river Kishon swept them away—

that river that has been there for ages.

I will tell myself to be brave and continue marching on.

²²The hooves of the horses of Sisera's army pounded the ground.

Those powerful horses kept galloping along.

²³The angel sent by Yahweh said,

'I curse the people of the town of Meroz

because they did not come to help Yahweh

to defeat the mighty warriors of Canaan.'

²⁴But God is very pleased with Jael,

(the wife of Heber the Kenite).

He is more pleased with her than with all the other women who live in tents.

²⁵Sisera asked for some water,

and Jael gave him some milk.

She brought him some yogurt in a bowl that was suitable for kings.

²⁶Then, when he was asleep, she reached for a tent peg with her left hand,

and she reached for a hammer with her right hand.

She hit Sisera hard with it and crushed his head.

She pounded the tent peg right through his head.

²⁷He collapsed at her feet

and he fell and he layed there and did not move.

At her feet he sank down,

and there he fell limp. He was dead.

²⁸Sisera's mother looked out from her window.

She said, 'Why is he taking so long to come home in his chariot?

Why do I not hear the sound of the wheels of his chariot?'

²⁹Her wisest princesses replied to her,

and she kept consoling herself by repeating those words:

³⁰Perhaps they are dividing up the things and the people they captured after the battle.

Each soldier will get one or two women who will bear them children.

Sisera will get some beautiful robes,
and some beautiful embroidered robes for me.'

³¹But that is not what happened! Yahweh, I hope that all your enemies will die as Sisera did!

And I desire that all those who love you, Yahweh, be as strong as the sun when it rises!"

There was peace again in the land for forty years.

Chapter 6

¹Again the Israelites did what Yahweh said was very evil. So he allowed the people of Midian to conquer them and rule them for seven years. ²The people of Midian treated the Israelites so cruelly that the Israelites fled to the mountains. There they made places to live in caves and places to be safe. ³At the time when the Israelites planted their crops in the fields, the people of Midian and Amalek and people from the east attacked the Israelites. ⁴They set up tents in the area, and then destroyed the crops as far south as Gaza. They did not leave anything for the Israelites to eat and took away the sheep, the cattle and the donkeys. ⁵They came into Israel with their tents and their livestock like a swarm of locusts. There were so many of them that arrived riding on their camels that no one could count. They stayed so they could ruin the Israelites' livelihoods. ⁶The people of Midian took almost everything the Israelites owned. So finally the Israelites pleaded for Yahweh to help them.

⁷When the Israelites pleaded with Yahweh to help them because of what the people from Midian had done to them, ⁸Yahweh sent to them a prophet, who said, "This is what Yahweh the God of Israel says, 'I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, out of the places where you all were slaves. ⁹But I rescued them from the leaders of Egypt and from all the others who oppressed you. I expelled their enemies from this land, and gave it to you. ¹⁰I told you and your ancestors, "I am Yahweh, your God. You are now in the land of the Amorites, but you must not worship the gods they worship here in this land in which you are living." But you did not obey me.'"

¹¹One day the angel of Yahweh appeared and sat under a big oak tree at the town of Ophrah. (That tree belonged to Joash, who was from the clan of Abiezer.) Joash's son Gideon was threshing wheat in the pit where they pressed grapes to make wine. He was threshing the grain there in order to hide it from the people of Midian. ¹²Yahweh went over to Gideon and said to him, "You mighty warrior, Yahweh is helping you!"

¹³Gideon replied, "Sir, if Yahweh is helping us, why have all these bad things happened to us? We heard about all the miracles that Yahweh performed for our ancestors. We heard people tell us about how he rescued them from being slaves in Egypt. But now Yahweh has abandoned us, and we are ruled by the people from Midian."

¹⁴Then Yahweh turned toward him and said, "You have the strength to rescue the Israelites from the people of Midian. I am sending you to do that!"

¹⁵Gideon replied, "But Lord, how can I rescue the Israelites? My clan is the least significant in the whole tribe descended from Manasseh, and I am the least significant person in my whole family!"

¹⁶Yahweh said to him, "I will help you. So you will defeat the Midianite army as easily as if you were fighting only one man!"

¹⁷Gideon replied, "If you are truly pleased with me, do something which will prove that you who are speaking to me are really Yahweh. ¹⁸But do not go away until I go and bring back an offering to you."

Yahweh answered, "Very well, I will stay here until you return."

¹⁹Gideon hurried to his home. He killed a young goat and cooked it. Then he took a about twenty-two liters of flour and baked some bread without yeast. Then he put the cooked meat in a basket, and put the broth from the meat in a pot, and took it to Yahweh, who was sitting under the tree.

²⁰Then the angel of God said to him, "Put the meat and the bread on this rock. Then pour the broth on top of it." So Gideon did that. ²¹Then Yahweh reached out and touched the meat and bread with the walking stick that was in his hand. A fire flamed up from the rock and burned up the meat and the bread that Gideon had brought! And then Yahweh disappeared. ²²When Gideon realized that it was really Yahweh who had appeared in the form of an angel and talked with him, he exclaimed, "O, Yahweh, I have seen you face-to-face when you had the form of an angel! So I will surely die!"

²³But Yahweh called to him and said, "Do not be afraid! You will not die!"

²⁴Then Gideon built an altar to worship Yahweh there. He named it 'Yahweh is Peace.' That altar is still there at the town of Ophrah, in the land of the Abiezrites.

²⁵That night Yahweh said to Gideon, "Take the second-best bull that belongs to your father, the bull that is seven years old, and tear down the altar that your father built to worship the god Baal. Also cut down the pole for worshiping the goddess Asherah that is there beside it. ²⁶Then build a stone altar to worship me, your God Yahweh, here on this hill. Take the wood from the Asherah pole you cut down and make a fire to burn the meat of the bull as a burnt offering to me."

²⁷So Gideon and ten of his servants did what Yahweh commanded. But they did it at night, because he was afraid what the other members of his family and the other men in town would do to him if they found out that he had done that.

²⁸Early the next morning, as soon as the men got up, they saw that the altar to Baal was in ruins, and the Asherah pole was gone. They saw that there was a new altar there, and on it was what remained from the bull they had sacrificed.

²⁹The people asked each other, "Who did this?" After they investigated, someone told them that it was Gideon son of Joash who had done it.

³⁰The men of the town said to Joash, "Bring your son out here! He must be put to death, because he destroyed our god Baal's altar and cut down the Asherah pole where we worship!"

³¹But Joash replied to those who came against him, "Are you trying to defend Baal? Are you trying to argue his case? Anyone who tries to defend Baal should be executed by tomorrow morning! If Baal is truly a god, he ought to be able to defend himself, when someone tears down his altar!" ³²From that time, people called Gideon Jerub Baal, which means "Baal should defend himself," because he had torn down Baal's altar.

³³Soon after that, the armies of the people of Midian and of Amalek and the people from the east gathered together. They crossed the Jordan River to attack the Israelites. They set up their tents in the Valley of Jezreel.

³⁴Then Yahweh's Spirit took control of Gideon. He blew a ram's horn to summon the men to prepare to fight. So the men of the clan of Abiezer came to him. ³⁵He also sent messengers throughout the tribes descended from Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali to tell their soldiers to come, and all of them came.

³⁶Then Gideon said to God, "If you are truly going to enable me to rescue the Israelite people as you promised,

³⁷confirm it by doing this: Tonight I will put a dry wool fleece on the ground where I thresh the grain. Tomorrow morning, if the fleece is wet with dew but the ground is dry, then I will know that I am the one you will enable to rescue the people of Israel as you promised." ³⁸And that is what happened. When Gideon got up the next morning, he picked up the fleece, and squeezed out a whole bowlful of water!

³⁹Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me, but let me ask you to do one more thing. Tonight I will put the fleece out again. This time, let the fleece remain dry, while the ground is wet with the dew." ⁴⁰So that night, God did what Gideon asked him to do. The next morning the fleece was dry, but the ground was covered with dew.

Chapter 7

¹The next morning, Jerub Baal (his name is also Gideon) and his men got up early and went as far as the spring of Harod. The army of Midian was camped north of them, in the valley near the hill of Moreh. ²Yahweh said to Gideon, "You have too many soldiers with you. If I allow all of you to fight the army of Midian and your army defeats them, they will boast to me that they defeated their enemies by themselves, without my help. ³So tell the men, "Whoever among you is timid or afraid may leave us and depart from Mount Gilead." So after Gideon told that to them, twenty-two thousand of them went home. Only ten thousand men were left there.

⁴But Yahweh told Gideon, "There are still too many men! Take them down to the spring, and there I will choose from among them, which ones will go with you and which ones will not go."

⁵When Gideon took the men down to the spring, Yahweh told him, "When they drink, put into one group the ones who lap the water with their tongues, like dogs do. Put into another group the ones who kneel down to drink with their mouths in the water." ⁶So when they drank, only three hundred men used their hands to bring water to their mouths. All the others drank by kneeling down and putting their mouths into the water.

⁷Then Yahweh told Gideon, "The three hundred men who lapped the water from their hands will be your army! I will help them defeat the Midianite army. Let all the others go home!" ⁸So Gideon's three hundred men collected the food and rams' horns (used as trumpets) from all the other men, and then he sent them home.

The men of Midian were camping in the valley below Gideon. ⁹During that night, Yahweh said to Gideon, "Get up and go down to their camp, and you will hear something that will convince you that I will enable your men to defeat them. ¹⁰But if you are afraid to go by yourself, take your servant Purah with you. ¹¹Go down and listen to what some of the Midian soldiers are saying. Then you will be very encouraged, and you will be ready to attack their camp." So Gideon took Purah with him, and they went down to the edge of the enemy camp. ¹²The armies of the people of Midian and Amalek and from the east had set up their tents and looked like a swarm of locusts. It seemed that their camels were too many to count, like the grains of sand on the seashore.

¹³Gideon crept closer and heard one man telling a friend about a dream. He said, "I just had a dream, and in the dream I saw a round loaf of barley bread tumble down into our Midian camp. It struck a tent so hard that the tent turned upside down and collapsed!"

¹⁴His friend said, "Your dream can mean only one thing. It means that God will enable Gideon, the man of Israel, to defeat all of the armies that are here with us men from Midian."

¹⁵When Gideon heard the man tell about his dream and the meaning of that dream, he thanked God. Then he and Purah returned to the Israelite camp, and he shouted to the men, "Get up! Because God is enabling you to defeat the men from Midian!" ¹⁶He divided his men into three groups. He gave each man a ram's horn (as a trumpet) and an empty clay jar. He also gave each of them a torch to carry.

¹⁷Then he said to them, "Watch me. When we come close to the enemy camp, spread out to surround the camp. Then do exactly what I do. ¹⁸As soon as my men blow their ram's horns, you men in the other two groups surrounding the camp blow your horns and shout, 'We are doing this for Yahweh and for Gideon!'"

¹⁹A while before midnight at the start of the "middle watch," just when a new group of guards took the places of the previous guards, Gideon and the hundred men with him arrived at the edge of the Midian camp. Suddenly he and his men blew their horns, and broke the jars that they were carrying. ²⁰Then the men in all three groups blew their horns and smashed their jars. They held the torches high with their left hands, and held up the horns with their right hands and alternatively blew them and shouted, "We have swords to fight for Yahweh and for Gideon!" ²¹Each of Gideon's men stood in his position around the enemy camp. As they watched, all the Midian men started running around and shouting in a panic.

²²While the three hundred Israelite men kept blowing their horns, Yahweh caused the Midianites to start fighting each other with their swords. Some of them killed each other. The rest fled. Some fled south to Beth Shittah. Some fled to the town of Zerarah, as far as the border of Abel Meholah, near Tabbath. ²³Then Gideon sent messages to the soldiers in the areas where the descendants of Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh lived, to tell them to come and pursue the army of Midian. ²⁴Gideon sent messengers throughout the hill country where the descendants of Ephraim lived, saying, "Go down and attack the army of Midian. Go down to the Jordan River, to the places where people can wade across, to prevent enemy troops from crossing it! Station men as far south as Beth Barah."

So the men of Ephraim did what Gideon told them to do. ²⁵They also captured Oreb and Zeeb, the two generals of the Midian army. They killed Oreb at the big rock which is now called the rock of Oreb, and they killed Zeeb at the place where they crush grapes that is now called the winepress of Zeeb. Afterwards, the Israelites cut off the heads of Oreb and Zeeb and brought them to Gideon, who was on the other side of the Jordan River.

Chapter 8

¹Then the soldiers from the tribe of Ephraim said to Gideon, "Why have you acted toward us like this? When you went out to fight against the army of Midian, why did you not call us to help you?" They argued very much with Gideon.

²But Gideon replied, "I have done very little compared with what you have done! The grapes you do not bother to pick in the land of Ephraim are much better than the whole harvest among the descendants of Abiezer! ³God helped you defeat Oreb and Zeeb, the generals of the army from Midian. That is much more important than what I did!" After Gideon told them that, they no longer resented what he had done.

⁴Then Gideon and his three hundred men went east. They came to the Jordan River and crossed it. Although they were very tired, they continued to pursue their enemies. ⁵When they arrived at the town of Succoth, Gideon said to the town leaders, "Please give my men bread that they may eat it! They are very tired. We are pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian."

⁶But the leaders of Succoth replied, "You have not caught Zebah and Zalmunna yet. So why should we give food to your troops now? Catch them first, and then we will give you food."

⁷Gideon replied, "Because you said that, after Yahweh enables us to defeat Zebah and Zalmunna, we will return. And then we will make whips from thorns from the desert, and with them we will rip the flesh off your bones!"

⁸Gideon and his three hundred men went up to Peniel and asked for food there in the same way. But the people gave him the same answer. ⁹So he said to the men of Peniel, "After I defeat those kings and make peace, then I will come and pull down this tower!"

¹⁰By that time, Zebah and Zalmunna had gone to Karkor town with fifteen thousand troops. They were all that were left of the armies that had come from the people of the East, and 120,000 of their men had already been killed. ¹¹Gideon and his men went east along the road on which caravans travel. They went past the villages of Nobah and Jogbehah and arrived at the enemy camp by surprise. ¹²Zebah and Zalmunna fled, but Gideon's men pursued them. He captured the two kings of Midian—Zebah and Zalmunna, and their whole army was sent off in confusion.

¹³After that, Gideon and his men took Zebah and Zalmunna with them and started to return, going through the pass of Heres. ¹⁴There he captured a young man from Succoth, and demanded that he write down the names of all of the leaders in the town. The young man wrote down seventy-seven names. ¹⁵Then Gideon and his men returned to Succoth and said to those leaders, "Here are Zebah and Zalmunna. When we were here before, you made fun of me and said 'You have not caught Zebah and Zalmunna yet! After you catch them, we will give your exhausted men some food.'" ¹⁶Then Gideon's men took the town leaders and whipped them with whips made from briers from the

desert, to teach them that they deserved to be punished for not giving them food. ¹⁷Then they went to Peniel and tore down the tower, and killed all the men in the town.

¹⁸Then Gideon said to Zebah and Zalmunna, "The men you killed near Mount Tabor, what did they look like?"

They replied, "They were like you; they all looked like they were sons of a king."

¹⁹Gideon replied, "They were my brothers! Just as surely as Yahweh lives, I would not kill you if you had not killed them." ²⁰Then he turned to his oldest son, Jether. He said to him, "Kill them!" But Jether was only a boy, and he was afraid, so he did not pull out his sword to kill them.

²¹Then Zebah and Zalmunna said to Gideon, "Do not ask a young boy to do the work that a man should do!" So Gideon killed both of them. Then he took the golden crescent-shaped ornaments from the necks of their camels.

²²Then a group of Israelite men came to Gideon and said to him, "You be our ruler! We want you and your son and your grandsons to be our rulers, because you rescued us from the Midian army."

²³But Gideon replied, "No, I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you. Yahweh will rule over you."

²⁴Then he said, "I request only one thing. I request that each of you give me one earring from the things you captured after the battle." Now all the men descended from Ishmael wore gold earrings.

²⁵They replied, "We will be glad to give the earrings to you!" So they spread a cloth on the ground, and each man threw on it the gold earrings that he had taken from those whom he had killed in the battle. ²⁶The weight of all the earrings was twenty kilograms. That did not include other things that they gave to Gideon—the other ornaments or the pendants or the clothes that their kings wore or the gold chains that were on the necks of their camels.

²⁷Gideon made a sacred garment for the people and put it in his hometown of Ophrah. Soon the people worshiped it instead of worshiping only God. Gideon and all his family sinned by worshiping it.

²⁸That is how the Israelites defeated the people from Midian. The people of Midian did not become strong enough to attack Israel again. So while Gideon was alive, there was peace in the land for forty years.

²⁹Gideon went back home to live there. ³⁰He had many wives, and they bore him seventy sons. ³¹He also had a slave wife in the city of Shechem, who bore him a son whom he named Abimelech. ³²Gideon son of Joash died when he was very old. They buried his body in the grave where his father Joash was buried, at Ophrah, in the land of the Abietherites.

³³But as soon as Gideon died, the Israelites left God and gave themselves to worship the images of the god Baal, like adulteresses leave their husbands and go to other men. They made Baal-Berith the god they worshiped. ³⁴They forgot about Yahweh, the one who had rescued them from all their enemies that surrounded them. ³⁵And even though Gideon had done many good things for the Israelites, they did not act kindly toward Gideon's family.

Chapter 9

¹Gideon's son Abimelech went to talk with his mother's brothers in the city of Shechem. He said to them and to all his mother's relatives, ²"Ask all the leaders of Shechem: 'Do you think it would be good for all seventy of Gideon's sons to rule over you? Or would it be better to have only one man, Abimelech, to rule over you?' And do not forget that I am a part of your family!"

³So Abimelech's mother's brothers spoke to all the leaders of Shechem about what Abimelech had said. They said to each other, "We should allow Abimelech to rule over us, because he is our relative." ⁴So the leaders of Shechem took from the temple of their god Baal-Berith one kilo of silver and gave it to Abimelech. With that silver he paid some worthless troublemakers to help him, and they went with Abimelech wherever he went. ⁵Abimelech and his followers went to Ophrah, his father's town, and they murdered his seventy brothers, the sons of his father Gideon. They killed all those men on one huge rock. But Gideon's youngest son Jotham hid from Abimelech and his men,

and he escaped. ⁶Then all the leaders of the towns of Shechem and Beth-Millo gathered under the big sacred tree at Shechem. There they appointed Abimelech to be their leader.

⁷When Jotham heard about that, he climbed up Mount Gerizim. He stood at the top of the mountain and shouted to the people down below, "You leaders of Shechem, listen to me, in order that God will listen to you! ⁸One day the trees decided to appoint a king to rule over all of them. So they said to the olive tree, 'You be our king!'

⁹But the olive tree said, 'No! I will not be your king! The oil made from my fruit blesses both God and people. I will not stop producing olives from which we make that oil, in order to rule over you other trees!'

¹⁰Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come and be our king!'

¹¹But the fig tree replied, 'No! I do not want to stop producing my good sweet fruit, and go and rule over you other trees!'

¹²Then the trees said to the grapevine, 'Come and be our king!'

¹³But the grapevine replied, 'No! I will not be your king! The new wine that is made from my grapes causes God and people to be happy. I do not want to stop producing grapes and go and rule over you other trees!'

¹⁴Then all the trees said to the thornbush, 'Come and be our king!'

¹⁵The thornbush said to the trees, 'If you truly want to appoint me to be your king, come into the shade of my tiny branches. But if you do not want to do that, I hope that fire will come out from me and burn up all the cedar trees in Lebanon country!'

¹⁶After Jotham finished telling them this parable, he said, "So now I ask you, were you being completely honest and sincere when you appointed Abimelech to be your king? Have you rewarded Gideon (who is also called Jerub Baal) by honoring him as he deserved because of all the good things he did for you? No! ¹⁷Do not forget that my father fought a battle for you, and he was willing to die for you if that were necessary, to save you from the power of the Midian people group. ¹⁸But now you have rebelled against my father's family, and you have murdered seventy of his sons on one huge rock. And you have appointed Abimelech—who is the son of my father's slave girl, not the son of his wife—to be the king who will rule you people of Shechem. You have done that only because he is one of your relatives! ¹⁹So, if today you think that you have truly acted fairly and sincerely toward Gideon and his family, I hope that Abimelech will cause you to be happy and that you will cause him to be happy. ²⁰But if what you did was not right, I wish that Abimelech will destroy Shechem and Beth Millo!" I wish that the leaders of Shechem and Beth Millo will also destroy Abimelech!"

²¹After Jotham finished saying that, he escaped from them and ran away to the town of Beer. He stayed there because he was afraid that his half-brother Abimelech would try to kill him.

²²For three years Abimelech was the leader over the people of Israel. ²³Then God sent an evil spirit to cause trouble between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem, with the result that the leaders of Shechem rebelled against Abimelech. ²⁴The leaders of Shechem had helped Abimelech murder seventy of Gideon's sons, who were his half-brothers. So now God sent the evil spirit to punish all of them for what they had done. ²⁵The leaders of Shechem set an ambush on the hilltops. Those men robbed everyone who passed by. But someone told Abimelech about it, so he did not go near them.

²⁶There was a man named Gaal son of Ebed who moved into Shechem city, along with his brothers. The leaders of Shechem grew to trust him. ²⁷They went out to their vineyards to pick some grapes. They pressed the grapes to make juice, and then they made wine. Then they had a feast in the house of their god, and they ate a lot of food and drank a lot of wine. Then they cursed Abimelech. ²⁸Gaal said, "We should not allow Abimelech to rule over us! He is only one of Gideon's sons, so he really does not belong to us! And he appointed Zebul, the governor of our city, to be his deputy! We should be loyal to one of the descendants of Hamor, the founder of our city, to be our

leader, not Abimelech! ²⁹If you would appoint me to be your leader, I would get rid of Abimelech. I would say to him, 'Get your army ready! Come and fight us!'"

³⁰Someone told Zebul what Gaal had said, and he became very angry. ³¹He sent messengers to Abimelech. They told him, "Gaal and his brothers have come here to Shechem, and they are stirring up the people so they will rebel against you. ³²You and your men should get up during the night and go and hide in the fields outside the city. ³³As soon as the sun rises in the morning, get up and attack the city. When Gaal and his men come out to fight against you, you can do to them whatever you want to."

³⁴So Abimelech and all the men who were with him got up during the night. They divided into four groups and hid in the fields near Shechem. ³⁵The next morning, Gaal went out and stood at the entrance to the city gate. While he was standing there, Abimelech and his soldiers came out of their hiding places and started walking toward the city.

³⁶When Gaal saw the soldiers, he said to Zebul, "Look! There are people coming down from the hills!"

But Zebul said, "You are seeing only the shadows of trees on the hills. They are not people; they only look like people." ³⁷But Gaal looked again, and said, "Look! There are people coming down in the middle of the land! There is a group of them coming down by way of the oak tree where people claim to talk with the spirits of dead people!"

³⁸Zebul said to Gaal, "Now your bragging is worthless! You said, 'We should not allow Abimelech to rule over us?' You made fun of these men. So now go out and fight them!"

³⁹So Gaal led the men of Shechem outside the city to fight the army of Abimelech. ⁴⁰Abimelech and his men pursued them, and they killed many of Gaal's men before they could return safely inside the city gate. ⁴¹Abimelech then stayed at Arumah, about five miles away from Shechem, and Zebul's men forced Gaal and his brothers to leave Shechem.

⁴²The next day, the people of Shechem got ready to leave the city and work in their fields. When someone told Abimelech about that, ⁴³he divided his men into three groups, and told them to hide in the fields. So they did that. And when they saw the people coming out of the city, they jumped up and attacked them. ⁴⁴Abimelech and the men who were with him ran to the city gate and blocked it. The other two groups ran out to the people in the fields and attacked them. ⁴⁵Abimelech and his men fought all day. They captured the city and killed all the people. They tore down all the buildings, and then they threw salt over the ground to try to keep anything from growing there again.

⁴⁶When the leaders who lived in the tower outside of Shechem heard what had happened, they ran and hid inside the fortress, which was also a temple of their god El-Berith. ⁴⁷But someone told Abimelech that all the leaders had gathered there. ⁴⁸So he and all the men who were with him went up Mount Zalmon, which is near Shechem. Abimelech cut some branches of trees with an axe, and put them on his shoulders. Then he said to all the men who were with him, "Quickly, do what I have just done!" ⁴⁹So his men all cut branches carried them down the mountain, following Abimelech. They went to the fortress and piled the branches against its walls. Then they kindled a fire, and the fire burned down the fortress and killed all the people who were inside. So all the people who were inside the fortress—about a thousand men and women—died.

⁵⁰Then Abimelech and his men went to the city of Thebez. They surrounded it and captured it. ⁵¹But there was a strong tower inside the city. So all the men, women, and leaders of the city ran to the tower. When they were all inside, they locked the door. Then they climbed up to the roof of the tower. ⁵²Abimelech and his men came to the tower and tried to get in the door, but they could not. Then Abimelech prepared to light a fire to burn it down.

⁵³But when Abimelech came near the doorway, a woman who was on the roof dropped the upper half of a large grinding stone on his head, which cracked the bone of his skull.

⁵⁴Abimelech quickly called to the young man who carried Abimelech's weapons, and said, "Pull out your sword and kill me with it! I do not want people to say 'A woman killed Abimelech.'" So the young man thrust his sword into

Abimelech, and Abimelech died. ⁵⁵When the Israelite soldiers saw that Abimelech was dead, they all returned to their homes.

⁵⁶In that way God punished Abimelech for all the evil things that he had done to his father by murdering all seventy of his brothers. ⁵⁷God also punished the men of Shechem for the evil things that they had done. And when these things happened, it made true the curse of Jotham son of Gideon.

Chapter 10

¹After Abimelech died, Tola the son of Puah and grandson of Dodo became the leader to rescue the Israelites from their enemies. He belonged to the tribe of Issachar, but he lived in Shamir city in the hilly area where the descendants of Ephraim live. ²He ruled as judge over Israel for twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried in Shamir.

³After Tola died, Jair (the Gileadite) ruled as judge over Israel for twenty-two years. ⁴He had thirty sons, and each of them had his own donkey to ride on. They had thirty cities in the region of Gilead that are still named even today, Havvoth Jair (or the Cities of Jair). ⁵Then Jair died and was buried in the city of Kamon.

⁶Again the Israelites did things that Yahweh said were evil. They worshiped the Baal idols and female fertility idols called the Asthoreths. They worshiped the gods of the people groups of Aram, Sidon, Moab, and Ammon people groups, and the gods of the Philistines. They turned away from Yahweh and stopped worshiping him. ⁷So Yahweh was very angry with them, and he allowed the Philistines and Ammonites to conquer Israel. ⁸They crushed and oppressed the Israelites that year, and for eighteen years they oppressed all the people of Israel who lived on the east side of the Jordan River. That was the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. ⁹Then the Ammonites crossed over the Jordan River to fight against the people of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim. They caused the Israelites' to live their lives with great fear and dread. ¹⁰So the Israelites cried out to Yahweh, saying "We have sinned against you. We have abandoned you, and we have worshiped the idols of Baal."

¹¹Yahweh answered them, saying, "I delivered you from the people groups of the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, ¹²and also from the Sidonians, the Amalekites, and the Maonites. I did this because they hurt and imprisoned you. You cried out to me, and I brought you to freedom. ¹³But now you have abandoned me, and you have been worshiping other gods. Therefore, I will not rescue you again and again. ¹⁴You have chosen those gods to be the ones you worship. So ask them to help you. Let them be the ones who rescue you when you are in trouble!"

¹⁵But the people of Israel said to Yahweh, "We have sinned. Punish us in whatever way you wish. But please rescue us today!" ¹⁶Then the Israelites threw away the idols of the foreign gods they had cherished, and they worshiped Yahweh. He saw that they were suffering very much, and he reached the limit of his endurance over the misery of Israel.

¹⁷The Ammon people group gathered to fight against the Israelites, and they set up their tents in Gilead. The Israelite soldiers gathered and set up their tents at Mizpah. ¹⁸The leaders of the people of Gilead said to each other, "Who will lead our attack against the Ammonite army? The one who will lead us will become the leader of all us who live in Gilead."

Chapter 11

¹There was a man from the region of Gilead named Jephthah. He proved himself to be a great warrior. But his mother was a prostitute. His father was Gilead. ²Gilead's wife gave birth to several sons. When they grew up, they forced Jephthah to leave home, saying to him, "You are the son of another woman, not the son of our mother. So when our father dies, you will not receive any of his property." ³So Jephthah ran away from his brothers, and he

lived in the land of Tob. While he was there, some lawless men joined together with Jephthah, and they went out raiding together.

⁴Some time later, the soldiers of the Ammon people group attacked the soldiers of Israel. ⁵And the leaders of Gilead went out to find Jephthah so they could bring him back, and away from the land of Tob. ⁶They said to him, "Come with us and lead our army, and help us fight the army of Ammon!"

⁷But Jephthah replied, "You hated me! You forced me to leave my father's house! So why have you come to me now and ask for my help, just when you have trouble?"

⁸The leaders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "That is why we are coming to you now. Come and fight with us and lead our soldiers against the soldiers of Ammon, and you will be the leader over everyone who lives in Gilead."

⁹Jephthah answered them, "If I go back to Gilead with you to fight against the army of Ammon, and if Yahweh helps us to defeat them, then I will be your leader."

¹⁰They replied, "Yahweh is a witness to everything we are saying to you. So he will punish us if we do not what we are promising you." ¹¹So Jephthah went with them back to Gilead, and the people appointed him to be their leader and the commander of their army. And Jephthah repeated to Yahweh there at Mizpah the terms of the agreement he had made.

¹²Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammon people group. They asked the king, "What have we done to make you angry, so your army is coming to fight against the people in our land?"

¹³The king replied, "You took our land when you came here from Egypt. You took all our land east of the Jordan River, from the Arnon River in the south to the Jabbok River in the north. So now give it back to us without a fight."

¹⁴So Jephthah sent the messengers to the king again. ¹⁵They said to him, "This is what Jephthah says: 'Israel did not take the land of the Moabites and the Ammonites. ¹⁶When the Israelite people came out of Egypt, they walked through the desert to the Red Sea, and then walked across it and traveled to the town of Kadesh at the border of the region of Edom. ¹⁷They sent messengers to the king of the Edomites to say to him, "Please allow us to walk across your land." But the king of the Edomites refused. Later they sent the same message to the king of the Moabites, but he also refused to allow them to go through his land. So the Israelites stayed at Kadesh for a long time. ¹⁸Then the Israelites went into the desert and walked outside the borders of Edom and Moab. They walked east of Moab, and then north of the Arnon River, which is the northern border of Moab. They did not cross into the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was the border of Moab.

¹⁹Then the leaders of Israel sent a message to Sihon, the king of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon. They asked him, "Please allow us Israelite people to cross through your land so we may go into the land that is ours." ²⁰But Sihon did not trust the Israelites to pass through his land in peace. So he gathered all his soldiers and they set up their tents at the village of Jahaz, and there he fought against Israel. ²¹But Yahweh, the God of Israel, gave help to the Israelite army and they defeated Sihon and his army. Then they took possession of all the land where the Amorites had lived. ²²The Israelites took all the land that belonged to the Amorites, from the Arnon River in the south to the Jabbok River in the north, and from the desert in the east to the Jordan River in the west.

²³It was Yahweh, the God of Israel, who forced the Amorites to leave the places where they lived, as the Israelites advanced. So do you now think that you can now take possession of their land? ²⁴You have the right to the land when your god Chemosh gives it to you. And we will live in the land that Yahweh our God has given to us! ²⁵Are you better than Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab? He never dared to fight against Israel! ²⁶For three hundred years the Israelites lived in the cities of Heshbon and Aroer, in the surrounding towns, and in all the cities along the Arnon River. Why have you Ammonites not taken back those cities during all those years? ²⁷We have not done wrong against you, but you are doing wrong against me by attacking me and my army. I trust that Yahweh, who is the judge, will decide whether the people of Israel or the people of Ammon are in the right."

²⁸But the king of Ammon ignored the warning contained in this message from Jephthah.

²⁹Then the Spirit of Yahweh took control of Jephthah. Jephthah went through Gilead and through the area where the tribe of Manasseh lived, to enlist men for his army. He finally gathered them together in the city of Mizpah in Gilead to fight against the Ammonites. ³⁰There Jephthah made a solemn promise to Yahweh, saying "If you will give help to my army to defeat the Ammonites, ³¹when I return from the battle, I will sacrifice to you whatever comes out of my house to greet me. That will belong to you."

³²Then Jephthah and his men went from Mizpah to attack the Ammonites, and Yahweh enabled his army to defeat them. ³³Jephthah and his men killed them, from the city of Aroer all the way to the area around the city of Minnith. They destroyed twenty cities, as far as the city of Abel Keramim. So the Israelites completely defeated the Ammonites.

³⁴When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, his daughter was the first one to come out of the house to meet him. She was joyfully playing a tambourine and dancing. She was his only child and he had no other sons or daughters. ³⁵When Jephthah saw his daughter, he tore his clothes to show that he was very sad about what he was going to do. He said to her, "My daughter, seeing you now, you have crushed me with a terrible sorrow, because I made a solemn promise to Yahweh to sacrifice the first one who came out of my house, and I must do what I promised."

³⁶His daughter said, "My father, you made a solemn promise to Yahweh. So you must do to me what you promised, because you said that you would do that if Yahweh helped you to defeat our enemies, the Ammonites." ³⁷Then she also said, "But allow me to do one thing. First, allow me to go into the hills and wander around for two months. Since I will never be married and have children, allow me and my friends to go and cry together."

³⁸Jephthah replied, "All right, you may go." So she left for two months. She and her friends stayed in the hills and they cried for her because she would never be married. ³⁹After two months, she returned to her father Jephthah, and he did to her what he had solemnly promised. So his daughter never was married.

Because of that, the Israelites now have a custom ⁴⁰that the young Israelite women go into the hills for four days every year. There they remember and cry about what happened to the daughter of Jephthah.

Chapter 12

¹The leaders of the tribe of Ephraim called together their soldiers, and they crossed the Jordan River and went to the town of Zaphon to talk with Jephthah. They said to him, "Why did you not ask us to help your army fight the Ammonites. So we will burn down your house while you are in it."

²Jephthah replied, "The Ammonites were really oppressing us. When we were prepared to start to attack them, I requested you to come and help us, but you refused. My men and I defeated the Ammonites, but you did not help us. ³When I saw that you would not come to help us, I risked my own life by leading our people to pass through the people of Ammon. And Yahweh helped us to defeat them. So why do you come to fight against me today?"

⁴Then Jephthah called together the soldiers of Gilead to fight against the soldiers of Ephraim. They attacked them because men of the tribe of Ephraim said, "You men from Gilead are just refugees here in the land of Ephraim and Manasseh. ⁵The Gileadites captured the shallow places in the Jordan River where people could cross over the river and go to the territory of Ephraim. If someone from the tribe of Ephraim came to the ford to try to escape, he would say, "Allow me to cross the river." Then the men of Gilead would ask him, "Are you from the tribe of Ephraim?" If he said "No," ⁶they would say to him, "Say the word 'Shibboleth.'" The men of Ephraim could not pronounce that word correctly. So if the person from the tribe of Ephraim said "Sibboleth," they would know that he was lying and that he was really from the tribe of Ephraim, and they would kill him there at the ford.

So the men of Gilead killed forty-two thousand people from the tribe of Ephraim at that time.

⁷Jephthah, the man from Gilead, served as a judge and leader over Israel for six years. Then he died and was buried in one of the towns of Gilead.

⁸After Jephthah died, a man named Ibzan, from Bethlehem, became a leader and a judge over Israel. ⁹He had thirty sons and he gave thirty daughters away in marriage. He brought in thirty daughters from families outside his clan. He was a leader and a judge over Israel for seven years. ¹⁰When died, he was buried in Bethlehem.

¹¹After Ibzan died, a man named Elon, from the tribe of Zebulun, became a leader of Israel. He was their leader for ten years. ¹²Then he died and was buried in the city of Aijalon in the area where the tribe of Zebulun lives.

¹³After Elon died, a man named Abdon son of Hillel, from the city of Pirathon, became a leader and a judge over Israel. ¹⁴He had forty sons and thirty grandsons. They had seventy donkeys. Abdon was a leader and a judge over Israel for eight years. ¹⁵When Abdon died, he was buried in Pirathon, in the land of Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites.

Chapter 13

¹Again the Israelite people did evil, and Yahweh saw what they had done. So Yahweh helped the Philistines to conquer them. They ruled over the Israelites for forty years.

²There was a man named Manoah from the family of Dan who lived in the town of Zorah. His wife was unable to become pregnant, so they had no children. ³One day, the angel of Yahweh appeared to Manoah's wife and said to her, "Even though you have not been able to give birth to any children until now, you will soon become pregnant and you will give birth to a son. ⁴From now until he is born, you must not drink any wine or other alcoholic drink, and you must not eat any food that the law says we should not eat. ⁵You will become pregnant. After you give birth to your son, no one may ever cut his hair. He will be dedicated to God even before he is born until the day he dies. He will begin the work that will rescue Israel from the power of the Philistines."

⁶The woman ran and told her husband, "A man whom God sent came to me. I was very afraid of him, because he was like an angel from God. I did not ask where he came from, and he did not tell me his name. ⁷But he told me, 'You have become pregnant, and you will give birth to a son. Until then, you must not drink any wine or any alcoholic drink, and you must not eat any food that God's law says you are not to eat. Your son will be a Nazirite; that is one who is dedicated to God before he is born and until the day he dies.'"

⁸Then Manoah prayed to Yahweh, saying, "O Lord, I plead with you, allow that man whom you sent to us to come again and teach us how we should raise the boy who will be born to us."

⁹God did what Manoah asked, and his angel came to the woman again. This time she was out in the field. But again her husband Manoah was not with her. ¹⁰So she quickly ran and said to her husband, "The man who appeared to me a few days ago has come back again!"

¹¹Manoah ran back with his wife and asked him, "Are you the man who talked with my wife a few days ago?" He replied, "Yes I am."

¹²Manoah asked him, "When what you promised occurs and my wife gives birth to a son, what rules will there be for the child, and what work will he do when he grows up?"

¹³Yahweh's angel replied, "Your wife must obey all the instructions I gave her. ¹⁴Before the baby is born, she must not eat grapes, drink wine or any other alcoholic drink, or eat anything that the law says we should not eat."

¹⁵Then Manoah said, "Please stay here until we can kill and cook a young goat for you."

¹⁶Yahweh's angel replied, "I will stay here, but I will not eat anything. However, you may kill an animal and sacrifice it as a burned offering to Yahweh." But Manoah did not yet realize that this was Yahweh's angel.

¹⁷Then Manoah asked him, "What is your name? When what you have promised happens, we want to honor you."

¹⁸Yahweh's angel replied, "Why do you ask me my name? It is too marvelous." ¹⁹Then Manoah killed a young goat and burned it on a rock, along with a grain offering, as a sacrifice to Yahweh. Then Yahweh did an amazing thing as Manoah and his wife watched. ²⁰When the flames went up from the altar toward the sky, Yahweh's angel went up in the flame from the altar. Manoah and his wife saw that and lay facedown on the ground. ²¹Although Yahweh's angel did not appear again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized who this angel really was.

²²So Manoah said, "Now we are sure to die, because we have seen God!"

²³But his wife said, "No, I do not think so. If Yahweh intended to kill us, he would not have accepted the burned offering and the grain offering. And he would not have appeared to us and told us the wonderful thing that would happen to us, and he would not have performed this miracle."

²⁴When their son was born, they named him Samson. Yahweh blessed him as he grew up. ²⁵While he was in Mahaneh-Dan, which is between the towns of Zorah and Eshtaol, Yahweh's Spirit began to control him.

Chapter 14

¹Samson went down to the town of Timnah, and there he saw a young Philistine woman. ²When he returned home, he told his mother and father, "I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines in Timnah, and I want you to get her for me so I can marry her."

³His mother and father objected very strongly. They said, "Is there no woman from our tribe, or from the other Israelite tribes, that you could marry? Why do you want a wife from the Philistines, who are not circumcised and do not worship Yahweh?"

But Samson told his father, "Get her for me! She is the one I want!" ⁴His mother and father did not realize that Yahweh was arranging this. He was preparing a way for Samson to create a conflict with the Philistines, for they were ruling over Israel at that time. ⁵Then Samson went down to Timnah with his mother and father. A young lion roared at him, threatening him near the vineyards close to the town. ⁶Then Yahweh's Spirit came on Samson, and he tore the lion apart with his hands. He did it as easily as if it had been a young goat. But he did not tell his mother and father about it. ⁷When they arrived in Timnah, Samson talked with the young woman, and he liked her very much. And his father made arrangements for the wedding.

⁸Later, when Samson returned to Timnah for the wedding, he turned off the path to see the lion carcass. He discovered that a swarm of bees had made a nest in the carcass and had made some honey. ⁹So he dug out some of the honey into his hands and ate some of it as he was walking along. He also gave some of it to his mother and father, but he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the carcass of the lion.

¹⁰As his father was making the final arrangements for the marriage, Samson gave a feast for the young men in that area. That was the custom for men to do when they were about to be married. ¹¹As soon as her relatives saw him, they brought him thirty of their friends to be with him.

¹²Samson said to them, "Allow me to tell you a riddle. If you tell me the correct meaning of my riddle during these seven days of the celebration, I will give each one of you a linen robe and an extra set of clothes. ¹³But if you cannot tell me the correct meaning, you must each give me a linen robe and an extra set of clothes." They replied, "All right. Tell us your riddle."

¹⁴So he said,

"From out of the eater I found something to eat;

from out of the strong I found something sweet."

But for three days they could not tell him the meaning of the riddle.

¹⁵On the fourth day, they said to Samson's wife, "Use your tricks and make your husband tell you the meaning of the riddle. If you do not do that, we will burn down your father's house, with you and your family inside it! Did you invite us here only to make us poor by forcing us to buy a lot of clothes for your husband?"

¹⁶So Samson's wife came to him, crying. She said to him, "You do not really love me. You hate me! You have told a riddle to my friends, but you have not told me the answer to it!"

He replied, "I have not even told my own mother and father the answers, so why should I tell you?" ¹⁷She continued to cry every time she was with him, all during the rest of the celebration. Finally, on the seventh day, because she continued to nag him, he told her the answer to the riddle. Then she told it to the young men.

¹⁸So before sunset on the seventh day, the young men came to Samson and said to him,

"Nothing is sweeter than honey;

Nothing is as strong as a lion."

Samson replied, "People use their own animals to plow their fields. My bride is like a young heifer that you have used, but she does not belong to you!

If you had not forced her to ask me,
you would not have learned the answer!"

¹⁹Then Yahweh's Spirit powerfully came on Samson. He went down to the coast at the city of Ashkelon and killed thirty men. He took their clothes and went back to Timnah; then he gave them to the men at the feast. But he was very angry about what had happened, so he went back home to live with his mother and father. ²⁰So his wife's father gave her instead to the man who had been Samson's special friend when he got married.

Chapter 15

¹During the time that they were harvesting the wheat, Samson took a young goat to Timnah as a present for his wife. He wanted to sleep with his wife, but her father would not let him go into her room.

²He said to Samson, "I really thought that you hated her. So I gave her to the man who was your best friend at the wedding, and she has married him. But look, her younger sister is more beautiful than she is. Take her instead."

³Samson replied, "No! And this time I have a right to get revenge on you Philistines!" ⁴Then he went out into the fields and caught three hundred foxes. He tied their tails together, two by two. He fastened torches to each pair of tails. ⁵Then he lit the torches and let the foxes run through the fields of the Philistines. The fire from the torches burned all the grain to the ground, including the grain that had been cut and stacked in bundles. The fire also burned down their grapevines and their olive trees.

⁶The Philistines asked, "Who did this?" Someone told them, "Samson did it. He married a woman from Timnah, but then his father-in-law gave her to the man who was Samson's best friend at the wedding, and she married him." So the Philistines went to Timnah and got the woman and her father, and burned them to death.

⁷Samson found out about that and said to them, "Because you have done this, I will get revenge on you, and then I will be happy!" ⁸So he attacked the Philistines furiously and killed many of them. Then he went to hide in a cave in the large rock at a place called Etam.

⁹The Philistines did not know where he was, so they went up to where the descendants of Judah lived, and they arranged themselves for battle at the town of Lehi. ¹⁰The men there asked the Philistines, "Why do you want to attack us?"

The Philistines replied, "We have come to capture Samson. We have come to get revenge on him for what he did to us."

¹¹Someone there knew where Samson was hiding. So three thousand men from Judah went down to get Samson at the cave in the rock where he was hiding. They said to Samson, "Do you not realize that the people of Philistia are ruling over us? Do you not realize what they will do to us?"

Samson replied, "The only thing I did was that I got revenge on them for what they did to me."

¹²But the men from Judah said to him, "We have come to tie you up and put you in the hands of the Philistines."

Samson said, "All right, but promise me that you yourselves will not kill me!"

¹³They replied, "We will just tie you up and take you to the Philistines. We will not kill you." So they tied him with two new ropes and led him away from the cave. ¹⁴When they arrived at Lehi, the Philistines came toward him, shouting triumphantly. But Yahweh's Spirit powerfully came on Samson. He snapped the ropes on his arms as easily as if they had been stalks of burned flax, and they fell off his wrists. ¹⁵Then he saw a donkey's jawbone lying on the ground. It was new, so it was hard. He picked it up and killed about a thousand Philistine men with it. ¹⁶Then Samson wrote this poem:

"With the jawbone of a donkey

I have made them like a heap of dead donkeys.

With the jawbone of a donkey

I have killed a thousand men."

¹⁷When he finished, he threw the jawbone away, but later that place was called Ramath Lehi (or Jawbone Hill).

¹⁸Then Samson was very thirsty, so he called out to Yahweh, "You have given me strength to win a great victory. So now must I die because of being thirsty, with the result that those heathen, uncircumcised Philistines will capture me?" ¹⁹So God caused water to gush out of a depression in the ground at Lehi. Samson drank from it and soon felt strong again. He named that place En Hakkore (or "The spring of the one who called out"). That spring can still be found at Lehi, even today.

²⁰Samson was the leader and judge over Israel for twenty years, but during that time the Philistines were in control of the entire land.

Chapter 16

¹Samson went to the city of Gaza. He saw a prostitute there, and he spent the night with her. ²The Gazites were told, "Samson has come here." They surrounded the place where Samson was, and they waited in secret all night. They were beside the city gate, so they would be sure he could not escape. They said, "Let us wait until the light, and then we will kill him."

³But Samson did not stay there all night. At midnight, he got up. He went to the city gate, he took hold of its two posts, and he lifted them up out of the ground, with its connecting cross bar still attached. He put it on his shoulders and carried it many miles uphill, in front of the town of Hebron.

⁴Later Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah. She lived in the Valley of Sorek (in the Philistine area). ⁵The Philistine leaders went to her and said, "Use your tricks to find out from Samson what makes him so strong. And find out how we can subdue him and tie him up securely. If you do that, each of us will give you 1,100 pieces of silver."

⁶So Delilah went to Samson and said, "Please tell me what makes you so strong, and tell me how someone can subdue you and tie you up."

⁷Samson said, "If someone ties me with seven new bowstrings, ones that are not dry yet, I will become as weak as other men."

⁸So after Delilah told that to the Philistine leaders, they brought seven new bowstrings to Delilah. ⁹Then she hid the leaders in one of the rooms in her house. She tied Samson up with the bowstrings and then called out, "Samson! The Philistines have come here to capture you!" But Samson snapped the bowstrings as easily as though they had been strings that had been singed in a fire. So the Philistines did not find out what made Samson so strong.

¹⁰Then Delilah said to Samson, "You have deceived me and lied to me! Now tell me the truth, how someone can tie you up securely."

¹¹Samson replied, "If someone ties me with new ropes, ones that have never been used, I will be as weak as other men."

¹²So again, she told the Philistine leaders, and then came and hid in the room as they did before. And again, while Samson was sleeping, she took the new ropes and tied him up with them and then called out, "Samson! The Philistines have come to capture you!" But Samson snapped the ropes on his arms as easily as if they had been threads.

¹³Then Delilah said, "You have deceived me and lied to me again! Please tell me how someone can tie you up securely!" Samson replied, "If you weave the seven braids of my hair into the threads you are weaving on the loom, and then fasten those threads with a nail that makes the threads tight, then I will become as weak as other men."

So again, Delilah held the seven braids of his hair, and wove them into the threads on the loom, ¹⁴and she secured them with a pin. Then she called out, "Samson! The Philistines have come to capture you!" But Samson woke up and pulled away his hair, taking with it the pin of the loom and the fabric in the loom.

¹⁵Then Delilah said to him, "How can you say that you love me when you do not tell me the truth about yourself? You have deceived me three times, and you still have not told me what really makes you so strong!" ¹⁶Day after day she used every trick to get him to tell her his secret. He thought he would die from her nagging.

¹⁷Finally Samson told her the truth. He said, "I have been set apart for God since the day I was born. And because of that, my hair has never been cut. If my hair were shaved off, my strength would be gone, and I would be as weak as other men."

¹⁸Delilah realized that this time he had told her the truth. So she called together the Philistine leaders, saying, "Come back one more time, because Samson has finally told me the secret about his strength." So the Philistine leaders returned and gave Delilah the money they promised to give her. ¹⁹Again she lulled Samson to sleep, with his head in her lap. Then she called one of the Philistine men to come and cut off Samson's hair. As he did that, Samson became weak; he had no more strength.

²⁰Then after she tied him up, she called out, "Samson! The Philistines have come to capture you!"

He woke up and thought, "I will do as I did before. I will shake these ropes off myself and be free!" But he did not realize that Yahweh had left him.

²¹So the Philistine men seized him and gouged out his eyes. Then they took him to Gaza. There they put him in prison and bound him with bronze chains. They made him turn a large millstone to grind grain every day. ²²But his hair started to grow again after it had been cut.

²³Several months later the Philistine leaders celebrated a big festival. During the festival they offered sacrifices to their god Dagon. They praised him, saying, "Our god has enabled us to defeat our great enemy Samson!"

²⁴When the other people saw Samson, they also praised their god Dagon, saying,

“Our god has put our great enemy into our hands.

Our god helped us to capture the one who has harmed our country so much!”

²⁵By that time the people were half-drunk. They shouted, “Bring Samson out of the prison! Bring him here so he can entertain us!”

So they brought Samson from the prison and made him stand in the center of the temple. They made him stand between the two pillars that held up the roof. ²⁶Samson said to the servant who was leading him by his hand, “Place my hands against the two pillars. I want to rest against them.” ²⁷At that time the temple was full of men and women. All the Philistine leaders were also there. And there were about three thousand people on the roof, watching Samson and making fun of him. ²⁸Samson prayed to Yahweh and he said, “Lord Yahweh, think about me again! Please give me strength only this once more, so that I may get revenge on the Philistines for gouging out my eyes!” ²⁹Then Samson put his hands on the two center pillars of the temple—his right hand on one pillar and his left hand on the other one. ³⁰Then he shouted to God, “Let me die with the Philistines!” He pushed with all his strength. The pillars collapsed, and the temple crashed down on the Philistine leaders and all the other Philistine people, and they all died. So Samson killed more people when he died than he had killed all during his life.

³¹Later his brothers and their relatives went down from Zorah to Gaza to get his body. They took it back home and buried it between Zorah and Eshtaol, at the place where Samson’s father Manoah was buried. Now Samson had led Israel for twenty years.

Chapter 17

¹There was a man named Micah who lived in the hill country where the tribe of Ephraim live. ²One day he said to his mother, “I heard you curse whoever stole eleven hundred pieces of silver from your house. I am the one who took the silver, and I still have it.” His mother replied, “My son, I pray that Yahweh will bless you.”

³Micah gave all the silver back to his mother. Then she said to herself, “I will give some of this silver to Yahweh.” And she said to her son, “My son, I want you to make an idol and a statue from this silver. So I will give some of this silver back to you for making these things.”

⁴After he had given the silver back to his mother, she took two hundred pieces and gave them to a metal worker. With the silver that man made a carved figure and a cast metal figure, and gave them to Micah. Micah put them in his house.

⁵He had a house in which he worshiped his idols. He made a kind of vest that was worn by priests, and some smaller, personal idols and Micah gave one of his sons the task of being the priest for all his idols. ⁶At that time, Israel did not have a king, and everyone did whatever they each decided was okay.

⁷There was a young man who had been living in town of Bethlehem which is in the area where the tribe of Judah lives. He wanted to work as a priest because he was a member of the tribe of Levi. ⁸So he left Bethlehem to find another place to live and work. He came to Micah’s house in the hill country where the tribe of Ephraim lived.

⁹Micah asked him, “Where are you from?”

He replied, “I come from Bethlehem. I am from the tribe of Levi, and I am looking for a place to live and work as a priest.” ¹⁰Micah said to him, “Stay with me, and you can advise me and be my priest. Each year I will give to you ten pieces of silver and some new clothes. And I will provide food for you.” ¹¹So the young man agreed to live with Micah. He became like one of Micah’s own sons. ¹²Micah appointed him to be a priest, and he lived in Micah’s house. ¹³Then Micah said, “Now I know that Yahweh will do good things for me, because I have a man from the tribe of Levi to be my priest.”

Chapter 18

¹At that time the Israelites had no king.

The tribe of Dan was looking for a good place for them to settle down. The other Israelite tribes had been able to receive the land that had been allotted to them, but the tribe of Dan had not been able to do that. ²So they chose five soldiers from their clans, men who lived in the cities of Zorah and Eshtaol, to go through the land and explore it and try to find some land where their tribe could live.

They came to Micah's house in the hill country where the tribe of Ephraim lived, and they stayed there that night.

³While they were in his house, when they heard the young man who had become Micah's priest talking, they recognized him from his accent. So they went to him and asked him, "Who brought you here? What are you doing here? Why did you come here?"

⁴He told them the things that Micah had done for him. And he said, "Micah has hired me, and I have become his priest."

⁵So they said to him, "Please ask God if we will succeed in what we are trying to do on this journey."

⁶The young man replied, "Go in the knowledge that Yahweh will be with you on this journey."

⁷Then the five men left. When they came to the city of Laish, they saw that the people there lived safely, as the people did in the city of Sidon. The people there thought that they were safe, because there was no one nearby to cause trouble for them, they were far from Sidon, and they rarely had contact with any outsiders.

⁸When those five men returned to Zorah and Eshtaol, their relatives asked them "What did you find out?"

⁹They replied, "We have found some land, and it is very good. We should go and attack the people who live there. Why are you staying here and doing nothing? Do not wait any longer! We should go immediately and take possession of that land! ¹⁰When you go there, you will see that there is plenty of land, and it has everything that we will need. The people there are not expecting anyone to attack them. God is certainly giving that land to us."

¹¹So six hundred men from the tribe of Dan left Zorah and Eshtaol, carrying their weapons. ¹²On their way they set up their tents near the city of Kiriath Jearim in the area where the tribe of Judah live. That is why the area west of Kiriath Jearim was named Mahaneh Dan (or the "Camp of Dan"), and that is still its name. ¹³From there, they went to the hill country where the tribe of Ephraim lived. And they arrived at Micah's house.

¹⁴The five men who had explored the land near Laish said to their fellow Israelites, "Do you know that in one of these houses there is a sacred vest, several household idols, a carved figure and a cast metal figure? We think that you know what you should do." ¹⁵So they went to the house where the man from the tribe of Levi lived, which was the house where Micah lived, and they greeted the young man from the tribe of Levi who was Micah's priest. ¹⁶The six hundred men of the tribe of Dan stood outside the gate of the house, carrying their weapons. ¹⁷The five men who had explored the land went into Micah's house, and took the carved figure, the sacred vest, the household gods, and the cast metal figure. While they did that, the six hundred men stood outside the gate, talking with the priest.

¹⁸When the priest saw them bringing out the carved figure, the sacred vest, the household gods, and cast metal figure, and he said to them, "What are you doing?"

¹⁹They replied, "Be quiet! Do not say anything! You come with us and be like a father to us and a priest for us. Is it better for you to stay here and be a priest for the people in the house of one man, or to be a priest for a clan, and a priest for a whole tribe of Israelites?" ²⁰The priest liked what they were suggesting. So he took the sacred vest and the household gods, and the carved figure, and he prepared to go with the people. ²¹All the men made their wives and little children, their animals, and everything else that they owned to travel just in front of themselves.

²²After they had gone a little distance from Micah's house, Micah saw what was happening. He quickly summoned the men who lived near him, and they ran and caught up with the men from the tribe of Dan. ²³They shouted at them. The men of the tribe of Dan turned around and said to Micah, "What is the problem? Why have you gathered these men to pursue us?"

²⁴Micah shouted, "You took the silver idols that were made for me! You also took my priest! I do not have anything left! So why do you ask me, 'What is the problem?'"

²⁵The men from the tribe of Dan replied, "You better not say anything about this matter. Some of our men might become angry and attack you, killing you and your family!" ²⁶Then the men from the tribe of Dan continued walking. Micah realized that there was a very large group of them, so that it would be useless for him to try to fight them. So he turned around and went home.

²⁷The men of the tribe of Dan were carrying the things that had been made for Micah, and they also took his priest, and they continued traveling to Laish. They attacked the people who were peacefully living there, and killed them with their swords. Then they burned everything in the city. ²⁸There was no group of people to rescue the people of Laish. Laish was far from Sidon, so the people who lived there could not help the people of Laish. And the people of Laish had no other allies. Laish was in a valley near the town of Beth Rehob.

The people of the tribe of Dan rebuilt the city and started to live there. ²⁹They gave a new name to the city, they called it Dan, in honor of their ancestor whose name was Dan. He was one of Israel's sons. The town used to be called Laish. ³⁰The people of the tribe of Dan set up in the city a carved figure that had been made for Micah. Jonathan son of Gershom, and the grandson of Moses, was appointed to be their priest. His descendants continued to be priests until the Israelites were captured and taken away. ³¹After the people of the tribe of Dan set up the carved figure that had been made for Micah, and it stayed there as long as the house of God was in Shiloh.

Chapter 19

¹At that time the Israelite people had no king.

There was a man from the tribe of Levi who lived in a remote place in the hill country where the tribe of Ephraim lives. He had previously taken to live with him a woman who was a slave. She was from Bethlehem, in the area where the tribe of Judah lives. ²But she started to sleep with other men also. Then she left him and returned to her father's house in Bethlehem. She stayed there for four months. ³Then her husband took his servant and two donkeys and went to Bethlehem. He went to ask her to come back to live with him again. When he arrived at her father's house, she invited him to come in. Her father was happy to see him. ⁴The woman's father asked him to stay. So he stayed there for three days. During that time he ate and drank and slept there.

⁵On the fourth day, they all got up early in the morning. The man from the tribe of Levi was preparing to leave, but the woman's father said to him, "Eat something before you go." ⁶So the two men sat down to eat and drink together. Then the woman's father said to him, "Please stay another night. Relax and have a good time." ⁷The man from the tribe of Levi wanted to leave, but the woman's father requested him to stay one more night. So he stayed again that night. ⁸On the fifth day, the man got up early and prepared to leave. But the woman's father said to him again, "Have something to eat. Wait until this afternoon, and then leave." So the two men ate together.

⁹In the afternoon, when the man from the tribe of Levi and his slave wife and his servant got up to leave, the woman's father said, "It will soon be dark. The day is almost finished. Stay here tonight and have a good time. Tomorrow morning you can get up early and leave for your home." ¹⁰But the man from the tribe of Levi did not want to stay for another night. He put saddles on his two donkeys, and started to go with his slave wife and his servant toward the city of Jebus, which is now named Jerusalem.

¹¹When it was late in the afternoon, they came near to Jebus. The servant said to his master, "We should stop in this city where the Jebus people group live, and stay here tonight."

¹²But his master said, "No, it would not be good for us to stay here where foreign people live. There are no Israelite people here. We will go on to the city of Gibeah." ¹³He said to his servant, "Let us go. It is not far to Gibeah. We can go there, or we can go a bit further to Ramah. We can stay in one of those two cities tonight." ¹⁴So they continued walking. When they came near to Gibeah, where people from the tribe of Benjamin live, the sun was setting.

¹⁵They stopped to stay there that night. They went to the public square of that city and sat down. But no one who passed by invited them to stay in their house for that night.

¹⁶But then an old man came by. He had been working in the fields. He was from the hill country of the tribe of Ephraim, but at that time he was living in Gibeah. ¹⁷He realized that the man from the tribe of Levi was only traveling and that he did not have a place to stay in that city. So he asked the man, "Where have you come from? And where are you going?"

¹⁸He replied, "We are traveling from Bethlehem to my home in the hill country where people of the tribe of Ephraim live. I went from there to Bethlehem, but now we are going to Shiloh where Yahweh's house is. No one here has invited us to stay in their house tonight. ¹⁹We have straw and food for our donkeys, and bread and wine for me and the young woman and my servant. We do not need anything else."

²⁰The old man said, "May everything go well for you. I can provide whatever you need. Do not stay here in the square tonight." ²¹Then the old man took them to his house. He gave food to the donkeys. He gave water to the man and the woman and the servant to wash their feet. And the old man gave them something to eat and drink.

²²While they were having a good time together, some wicked men from that city surrounded the house and started to bang on the door. They shouted to the old man, "Bring out to us the man who has come to your house. We want to have sex with him."

²³The old man went outside and said to them, "My brothers, I will not do that. That would be a very evil thing. This man is a guest in my house. You should not do such a terrible thing! ²⁴Look, my virgin daughter and his slave wife are here. I will bring them out to you now. You may do to them whatever you wish, but do not do such a terrible thing to this man!"

²⁵But the men did not pay attention to what he said. So the man took his slave wife and sent her to them, outside the house. They forced her to have sex with them and abused her all night. Then at dawn, they let her go. ²⁶She returned to the old man's house, and she fell down at the doorway and lay there until it was light.

²⁷The next morning, her master got up and went outside of the house to continue his journey. He saw his slave wife lying there at the doorway of the house, her hands still touching the doorsill. ²⁸He said to her, "Get up! We will go now!" But she did not answer. He put her body on the donkey, and he and his servant traveled to his home.

²⁹When he arrived at his home, he took a knife and he cut the body of the slave woman into twelve pieces. Then he sent one piece to each area of Israel, along with a message telling what had happened. ³⁰Everyone who saw a piece of the body and the message said, "Nothing like this has ever happened before. Not since our ancestors left Egypt have we heard of such a terrible thing. We need to think carefully about it. Someone should decide what we should do."

Chapter 20

¹All the soldiers of Israel came out united as one man, from the city of Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, and from the region of Gilead to the east of the Jordan River, all of them heard what had happened. So they gathered together before Yahweh at Mizpah. ²The leaders of eleven of the tribes of Israel stood in front of the people who gathered there. There were 400,000 men on foot, fighting men who were there. ³The people of the tribe of Benjamin heard that the other Israelites had gone up to Mizpah, but none of the men from the Benjamin tribe had gone to the meeting there.

The people of Israel asked about the evil thing that had happened. ⁴So the Levite who was the husband of the woman who had been killed replied, "My slave wife and I came to Gibeah, wanting to stay there that night. ⁵That evening, the men of Gibeah came to attack me. They surrounded the house where I was staying and wanted to have sex with me and then kill me. They abused my slave wife and raped her all night, and she died. ⁶I took her body home and cut it into pieces. Then I sent one piece to each area of Israel, because I wanted you all to know about this wicked and disgraceful thing that has been done here in Israel. ⁷So now, all you Israelite people, speak, and tell me what you think should be done!"

⁸All the people stood up, and unitedly said, "None of us will go home! Not one of us will return to his house! ⁹This is what we must do to the people of Gibeah. First, we will cast lots to determine which group should attack them.

¹⁰We will choose one tenth of our number to get supplies we will need to punish Gibeah for the terrible thing that they have done here in Israel." ¹¹And all the Israelite people agreed that the people of Gibeah should be punished.

¹²Then the Israelite men sent messengers throughout the tribe of Benjamin. They demanded, "Do you realize that some of your men have done a very evil thing? ¹³Bring those wicked men to us, in order that we can execute them. By doing that, we will get rid of this evil thing that has happened in Israel."

But the people of the tribe of Benjamin paid no attention to their fellow Israelites. ¹⁴The men of the tribe of Benjamin left their cities and gathered at Gibeah to fight the other Israelites. ¹⁵In that one day the men of the tribe of Benjamin recruited twenty-six thousand fighting men. They also chose seven hundred men from Gibeah. ¹⁶From all those soldiers there were seven hundred men who were left-handed, and each of them could sling a stone without missing a target that was very small and as narrow as a hair.

¹⁷The soldiers of Israel, not including the soldiers from Benjamin, numbered 400,000 men. All of these were trained to fight with the sword, men experienced at fighting in war.

¹⁸Those other Israelites went up to Bethel and asked advice from God, "Which tribe should be the first to attack the men from the tribe of Benjamin?"

Yahweh answered, "The men from the tribe of Judah should go first."

¹⁹The next morning, the Israelite men went and set up their tents near Gibeah. ²⁰Then they went to fight against the men from the tribe of Benjamin, and stood in their positions for fighting a battle, facing Gibeah. ²¹The men of the tribe of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and fought against them, and they killed twenty-two thousand soldiers from Israel on that day. ²²But the soldiers of Israel encouraged themselves. Then they got ready to fight the next day in the same battle lines as on the first day. ²³Then they came together and begged Yahweh for help; they prayed until evening. They asked advice from Yahweh about what they should do: "Should we go again to fight against our brothers, the people of Benjamin?" Yahweh answered, "Attack them!" ²⁴The next day they again stood in their positions for fighting, just as they had done on the previous day. ²⁵The men of the tribe of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and attacked the Israelites, and killed eighteen thousand more of their men.

²⁶In the afternoon, all the people of Israel who had not been killed again went to Bethel. There they sat down and cried to Yahweh, and they fasted until it was evening. They brought some offerings which they burned completely on the altar, and they also brought some offerings to restore fellowship with Yahweh. ²⁷The people of Israel asked Yahweh,—for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, ²⁸and Phinehas son of Eleazar, was the grandson of Aaron; he was serving before the ark in those days—"Should we go out to battle once more against the people of Benjamin, who are our brothers, or should we stop?" Yahweh said, "Attack! For tomorrow I will help you defeat them." ²⁹Israelite men set up an ambush in the fields around Gibeah. ³⁰The other Israelite men went and stood in their positions for fighting a battle just as they had done on the previous days. ³¹When the men of the tribe of Benjamin came out of the city to fight against them, the Israelite men retreated away from the city, and the men of the tribe of Benjamin pursued them. The men of the tribe of Benjamin killed many Israelites, like they had done before. They killed about thirty Israelites, who died in the fields and on the roads—one of the roads went to Bethel and another road went to Gibeah.

³²The men of the tribe of Benjamin said, "We are defeating them like we did before!" But then Israelite men did what they had planned. The main group of Israelite men retreated a short distance from the city, to trick the men of Gibeah and cause them to pursue the Israelite men along the roads outside the city.

³³The main group of Israelite men left their positions and retreated, and then they stood in their battle positions again at a place named Baal Tamar. Then the soldiers of Israel who had been hiding in secret places ran out from their places in Maareh Gibeah. ³⁴Then the other ten thousand Israelites came out from the places where they had been hiding, west of Gibeah, and attacked the city. They were men who had come from all parts of Israel. There was a very big battle. But the men of the tribe of Benjamin did not know that they were about to have a disastrous defeat. ³⁵Yahweh enabled the Israelite men to defeat the men of the tribe of Benjamin. They killed 25,100 of them, all of them were fighting men. ³⁶So the soldiers of Benjamin saw they were defeated. The men of Israel had allowed the Benjamites to advance, because they were relying on the men they had placed in hidden positions outside Gibeah to go out and shift the battle in their favor. ³⁷Then the men who were hiding got up and hurried and they rushed into Gibeah, and with their swords they killed everyone who lived in the city. ³⁸Now the arranged signal between the soldiers of Israel and the men hiding in secret would be that a great cloud of smoke would rise up out of the city.

³⁹By that time, the Israelite men had turned away from attacking, so the men of the tribe of Benjamin said, "We are winning the battle, as we did before!" ⁴⁰But then smoke from the burning buildings began to rise up from the city. The men of the tribe of Benjamin turned around and saw that the whole city was burning. ⁴¹Then the main group of Israelite men also saw the smoke, and they knew that the smoke signaled that they should turn around and begin to attack. The men of the tribe of Benjamin were very afraid, because they realized that they were about to have a disastrous defeat. ⁴²So the men of the tribe of Benjamin tried to run away toward the wilderness to escape from the Israelite men, but they were not able to escape, because the Israelite men who had burned the two cities came out of those cities and killed many of them. ⁴³They surrounded some of the men of the tribe of Benjamin, and pursued the others to the area east of Gibeah. ⁴⁴They killed eighteen thousand strong soldiers of the tribe of Benjamin. ⁴⁵Then the rest of the men of the tribe of Benjamin realized that they had been defeated. They ran toward the rock of Rimmon, but the Israelite men killed five thousand more men of the tribe of Benjamin who fell behind along the roads. They pursued the rest of them to Gidom, and they killed two thousand more.

⁴⁶Altogether, there were twenty-five thousand—men of the tribe of Benjamin who were killed, all of them were experienced fighting men. ⁴⁷But six hundred men of the tribe of Benjamin ran to the rock of Rimmon in the wilderness. They stayed there for four months. ⁴⁸Then the Israelite men went back to the land belonging to the tribe of Benjamin, and killed the people in every city. They also killed all the animals, and destroyed everything else that they found there. And they burned all the cities that they came to.

Chapter 21

¹When the Israelite men had gathered at Mizpah before the battle started, they solemnly declared, "None of us will ever allow one of our daughters to marry any man from the tribe of Benjamin!" ²But now the Israelites went to Bethel and cried loudly to Yahweh all day until the sun went down. ³They kept saying, "Yahweh, God of us Israelite people, one of the tribes of us Israelites does not exist anymore! Why has this happened to us?"

⁴Early the next morning the people built an altar. Then they completely burned some sacrifices on the altar, and also offered other sacrifices to restore fellowship with God.

⁵Then, because they had solemnly declared that anyone who did not meet with them at Mizpah to help fight the men of the tribe of Benjamin would be killed, they asked among themselves, "Were there any of the tribes of Israel who did not come to Mizpah to meet with us in the presence of Yahweh?"

⁶The Israelites felt sorry for their fellow Israelites from the tribe of Benjamin. They said, "Today one of our Israelite tribes has been cut off from Israel. ⁷What can we do to make certain that the men of the tribe of Benjamin who

were not killed will have wives?" Yahweh heard us solemnly declare that we would not allow any of our daughters to marry any man from the tribe of Benjamin. ⁸Then one of them asked, "Which of the tribes of Israel did not send any men here to Mizpah?" ⁹They realized that when the soldiers were counted, there was no one who had come from the city of Jabesh Gilead.

¹⁰So all the Israelites decided to send twelve thousand very good soldiers to Jabesh Gilead to kill the people there, even the women and the children. ¹¹They told this to those men: "This is what you must do: You must kill every man in Jabesh Gilead. You must also kill every married woman. But do not kill the unmarried women." ¹²So those soldiers went to Jabesh Gilead and killed all the men, married women, and the children. But they found four hundred virgin young women there. So they brought them to their camp at Shiloh in Canaan, across the river from the region of Gilead that belonged to the tribe of Benjamin.

¹³Then all the Israelites who had gathered sent a message to the six hundred men who were at the rock of Rimmon. They said that they would like to make peace with them. ¹⁴So the men came back from the rock of Rimmon. The Israelites gave to them the young women from Jabesh Gilead. But there were only four hundred women. There were not enough women for those six hundred men.

¹⁵The Israelites still felt sorry for the men of the tribe of Benjamin, because Yahweh had set the other tribes against them. ¹⁶The Israelite leaders said, "We have killed all the married women of the tribe of Benjamin. Where can we get women to be wives of the men who are still alive? ¹⁷These men must have wives to give birth to children, in order that their families of Benjamin will continue. If that does not happen, all the people of one of the tribes of Israel will all die out, and the tribe will be destroyed. ¹⁸But we cannot allow our daughters to marry these men, because we solemnly declared that Yahweh will curse anyone who gives one of his daughters to become a wife of any man of the tribe of Benjamin." ¹⁹Then they had an idea. They said, "Every year there is a festival to honor Yahweh at Shiloh, which is north of Bethel and east of the road that extends from Bethel to Shechem, and it is south of the city of Lebonah."

²⁰So the Israelite leaders told the men of the tribe of Benjamin, "When it is the time for that festival, go to Shiloh and hide in the vineyards. ²¹Keep watching for the young women to come out of the city to dance. When they come out, run out of the vineyards. Each of you can seize one of the young women of Shiloh. Then you can all return to your homes with those women. ²²If their fathers or brothers come to us and complain about what you have done, we will say to them, 'Act kindly toward the men of the tribe of Benjamin. When we fought them, we did not leave any women alive to become their wives, and you did not give those young women to the men from the tribe of Benjamin. They stole them. So you will not be guilty, even though you said that you would not give any of your daughters to marry one of them.'"

²³So that is what the men of the tribe of Benjamin did. They went to Shiloh at the time of the festival. And when the young women were dancing, each man caught one of them and took her away and married her. Then they took their wives back to the land that God had given to them. They rebuilt their cities that had been burned down, and they lived there.

²⁴The other Israelites went to their home in the areas where their tribes and clans lived, the areas that God had allotted to them.

²⁵At that time, the Israelite people did not have a king. Everyone did what was right according to his own opinion.

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