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Judges

Chapter 1

¹After Joshua died, the Israelite people asked Yahweh, "Which of our tribes should send their soldiers into the hill country to attack the Canaanites first?"

²Yahweh replied, "The soldiers of the tribe of Judah must attack first. I have already made the people of Judah the owners of the land {in Canaan that Joshua assigned to them}."

³Then the men of Judah went to their fellow Israelites, the men from the tribe of Simeon. They said to them, "Come and help us fight the Canaanites. That way we will be able to conquer the territory that Yahweh has given to us. {If you do that,} we will go with you and help you conquer the territory that Yahweh has given to you." So the soldiers of the tribe of Simeon went with the soldiers of the tribe of Judah.

⁴So the soldiers from the tribes of Judah and Simeon went together. Yahweh enabled them to defeat the army of the Canaanites and Perizzites. At the city of Bezek, they killed about 10,000 enemy soldiers. ⁵The king of Bezek, Adoni-Bezek, personally commanded his army to defend his city. But the Israelite soldiers were able to defeat his army of Canaanites and Perizzites. ⁶Adoni-Bezek tried to run away, but the soldiers from the tribes of Judah and Simeon chased him and caught him. Then they cut off his thumbs and his big toes.

⁷Adoni-Bezek said, "My army captured 70 kings. We cut off their thumbs and big toes. After that, we gave them little to eat, and we humiliated them. Because I did that to them, now God has done the same thing to me." Then the soldiers took Adoni-Bezek to the city of Jerusalem. That was where he died.

⁸The soldiers from the tribes of Judah and Simeon fought against the people of Jerusalem, and they captured that city. They killed all the people who lived there, and they burned down all the buildings in the city.

⁹After that, the soldiers from the tribes of Judah and Simeon went to fight against the Canaanites who lived in the hill country, the southern wilderness, and the western lowland. ¹⁰The soldiers from the tribes of Judah and Simeon also went to fight against the Canaanites who lived in the city of Hebron. (People used to call that city Kiriath Arba). {Those Canaanites were from} the clans of Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi. The soldiers defeated them.

¹¹Then they left that area and went to fight against the people who lived in the city of Debir. (People used to call that city Kiriath Sepher). ¹²A man whose name was} Caleb {was commanding the soldiers. He} told them, "I need someone to lead the attack against Kiriath Sepher and conquer that city. I will allow the man who does that to marry my daughter Aksah." ¹³Caleb had a younger brother whose name was Kenaz. Kenaz had a son whose name was Othniel. Othniel commanded the soldiers who captured the city of Kiriath Sepher. So Caleb allowed Othniel to marry his daughter Aksah.

¹⁴Aksah came {to Kiriath Sepher} to marry Othniel. When she got there, she convinced Othniel to let her ask her father for some land they could farm. She {went to see her father and respectfully} got off the donkey she was riding. Caleb asked her, "What would you like me to do for you?"

¹⁵She replied, "Please do a favor for me. You have given {my husband and} me some land in an area where it is very dry. So please also give us some land that has springs on it." So Caleb gave her some land on higher ground that had a spring and some land on lower ground that had a spring.

¹⁶The father-in-law of Moses belonged to the Kenite people group. Some of his descendants had been living in the area of Jericho, which people called Palm Tree City. They went with some people from the tribe of Judah to the wilderness {in the southern part} of the territory that belonged to that tribe. They settled with those Judeans in the dry region that is around the city of Arad.

¹⁷The army of the tribe Judah then went with their fellow Israelites, the army of the tribe of Simeon{, to help them conquer the territory that Joshua had assigned to them.} They defeated the Canaanites who lived in the town of Zephath. They completely destroyed that city. Then they gave it a new name, Hormah{, which means “complete destruction.”} ¹⁸The soldiers from the tribes of Judah and Simeon also captured the cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron and all the land around those cities. ¹⁹So Yahweh helped the soldiers from Judah to capture the hill country. But they could not force the people who were living in the plains to leave. That was because those people had {better weapons. They had} chariots that had iron parts.

²⁰The people of the tribe of Judah gave the city of Hebron to Caleb because Moses had promised him that he could have that city. Caleb forced the three clans whose ancestor was Anak to leave that area. ²¹But the tribe of Benjamin could not force the Jebusite people group to stop living in the city of Jerusalem. So those Jebusites stayed in Jerusalem and lived there with the tribe of Benjamin. They are still living with them there now.

²²Just as the soldiers from Judah and Simeon had done, soldiers from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh went {to conquer the territory that Joshua had assigned to them. They first attacked} the city of Bethel, and Yahweh helped them. ²³They sent some spies to find out everything they could about Bethel. (People used to call that city 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, then we will be kind to you {and not kill you when we capture the city}.” ²⁵So the man showed them a way to get into the city. The soldiers from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh went in and killed all the people who lived in the city. But they allowed the man and his whole family to leave safely. ²⁶That man went to the area where the Hittite people group lived. He built a city there and named it Luz. That is still the name of that city now.

²⁷People from the Canaanite people group were living in the cities of Beth Shan, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, and Megiddo. They were also living in the villages around those cities. The soldiers from the tribe of Manasseh were not able to force them to leave their homes. That was because those Canaanites fought very hard 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 soldiers from the tribe of Ephraim were not able to force the Canaanites who were living in the city of Gezer to leave. So the Canaanites continued to live in that city with the tribe of Ephraim. ³⁰There were also Canaanites living in the cities of Kitron and Nahalol. The soldiers from the tribe of Zebulun were not able to force them to leave. So those Canaanites stayed in those cities and lived with the tribe of Zebulun. But the people of Zebulun forced them to work as their slaves. ³¹There were Canaanites living in the cities of Akko, Sidon, Ahlab, Aczib, Helbah, Aphek, and Rehob. The soldiers from the tribe of Asher were not able to force them to leave. ³²So those Canaanites continued to live in those cities. The people of the tribe of Asher lived with them, because they were not able to force them to leave. ³³There were Canaanites living in the cities of Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath. The soldiers from the tribe of Naphtali were not able to force them to leave. So those Canaanites continued to live in that area. The people of the tribe of Naphtali lived with them. But they forced the ones who lived in Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath to work as their slaves. ³⁴The Amorites forced the people of the tribe of Dan to live in the hills. That was because they did not allow them to come down and live on the plain. ³⁵The Amorites fought hard to keep living at Mount Heres and in the cities of Aijalon and Shaalbim{, and so the Israelites were not able to force them to leave}. But when the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh became stronger, they forced those Amorites to work as their slaves. ³⁶The land where the Amorites lived extended from the Ascent of Akrabbim {toward the west} beyond Sela, up into the hill country.

Chapter 2

¹An angel representing Yahweh went from Gilgal to a place that the people of Israel would soon call Bochim. He said to the Israelite people, “Your ancestors were slaves in Egypt, but I set them free, and they escaped. I promised your ancestors that I would give this land to you, and I have now brought you to it. I told them I would never break the promises I made to them. ²But I also told them that you, their descendants, must never make any peace treaties with the people who lived in this land. You were supposed to tear down all the altars {where those people made sacrifices to idols}. But you have not obeyed me. You have done a wicked thing {by making peace treaties

with them and not destroying their altars}. ³So now, as I warned you {through Joshua}, I will no longer help you force the people who live here to leave. They will bother you continually, as if they were thorns in your sides. And when you worship their idols, it will be as if a hunter catches you in a trap {and kills you}.”

⁴After the angel representing Yahweh had said these things to all the Israelites, they cried loudly. ⁵So they named that place Bochim, which means “weeping.” They offered sacrifices there to Yahweh.

⁶After Joshua had sent the people of Israel away {from the assembly at Shechem}, each group had gone to occupy the land that Joshua had assigned to them. ⁷The Israelites had obeyed Yahweh for as long as Joshua was alive. After he died, there were still some older leaders alive who had seen all the miracles that Yahweh had done for Israel. For as long as those leaders were alive, the people had continued to obey Yahweh.

⁸Yahweh's servant Joshua was 110 years old when he died. Joshua's father's name was Nun. ⁹The Israelites buried the body of Joshua within the territory that he had received from Moses. That was at Timnath Heres, north of Mount Gaash. That is in the hilly area where the descendants of Ephraim settled.

¹⁰Finally, all the people who had lived at the same time as Joshua died. After that, more people grew up who did not know Yahweh. They had also not seen the miracles he had done for the people of Israel. ¹¹⁻¹³The Israelites then did things that Yahweh had said were very evil. They worshiped different idols that represented gods such as Baal. They stopped worshiping Yahweh, the God their ancestors had worshiped. He was the one who had brought their ancestors out of Egypt. Instead, they began to worship the various gods that the people groups around them worshiped. They bowed down to those gods in order to honor them. This caused Yahweh to be very angry. When the Israelites stopped worshiping Yahweh and started worshiping Baal, they also started worshiping female fertility goddesses such as Ashtoreth. ¹⁴This made Yahweh very angry with the Israelites. So he allowed people from other groups to attack the Israelites and steal their crops and animals. Yahweh allowed the hostile nations around them to conquer them. The Israelites were no longer able to defeat their enemies in battle. ¹⁵Whenever the Israelites went to fight their enemies, Yahweh always worked against them and allowed their enemies to defeat them. That was just what he had warned them he would do. So the Israelites were greatly distressed.

¹⁶But then Yahweh brought leaders to them. These leaders rescued the Israelites from the powerful enemies who had been attacking them. ¹⁷But the Israelites did not obey those leaders. Instead, they were unfaithful to Yahweh and worshiped false gods. They bowed down to idols that represented those gods. They were not like their ancestors. Their ancestors had obeyed what Yahweh commanded. But these younger people quickly stopped behaving as their ancestors had behaved. ¹⁸The Israelites were groaning because their enemies were treating them badly and making them suffer. Yahweh heard them groaning and felt sorry for them. So he brought leaders to them, and he helped each leader rescue the people from their enemies. He did that for as long as the leader was alive. ¹⁹But after that leader died, the people stopped living as God wanted. Instead, they did even more evil things than the Israelites who had lived before them. They worshiped other gods and bowed down to them and did what they thought those gods wanted them to do. They stubbornly continued to do very wicked things.

²⁰This made Yahweh very angry with the Israelite people. He said, “These people have disobeyed the agreement that I made with their ancestors. They have not done what I told them to do. ²¹When Joshua died, there were still some other people groups living in this land. Because the Israelites are disobeying me, I will no longer help them force any of those people groups to leave. ²²Instead, I will use those people groups to create difficult situations for the Israelites. That will show whether or not they will consistently do what I want them to do, as their ancestors did.” ²³That is why Yahweh did not allow Joshua and his army to force those people groups to leave. Instead, he allowed those people groups to stay in the land for a long time after the people of Israel arrived.

Chapter 3

¹The younger Israelites had not fought in any of the wars against the Canaanites. Yahweh wanted them to show faith and courage. So he allowed some enemy people groups to stay in the land. ²Yahweh did that in order to teach the new generation of Israelites how to wage war, since they had no experience fighting battles before. ³These are

the people groups that Yahweh allowed to stay in the land: the Philistines and their five leaders, the Canaanites, the people living in and around the city of Sidon, and the Hivites living in the mountains of Lebanon between Mount Baal Hermon and Lebo Hamath. ⁴Yahweh left those people groups there to test the Israelites. He wanted to see whether they would obey the commands that he had told Moses to give to their ancestors. ⁵That was why the Israelites lived among these people groups: the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁶The Israelite men married women from those people groups. They also allowed their daughters to marry men from those people groups. And they worshiped the gods of those people groups.

⁷The Israelites then did things that Yahweh had said were very wicked. They stopped worshiping Yahweh, the God their ancestors had worshiped. Instead, they started to worship idols that represented gods such as Baal and goddesses such as Asherah. ⁸This made Yahweh very angry with the people of Israel. So he allowed Cushan-Rishathaim, the king of Aram Naharaim {in Mesopotamia}, to conquer them. Cushan-Rishathaim ruled over the people of Israel for eight years. ⁹But when the people of Israel pleaded with Yahweh to help them, he brought a leader to rescue them. This leader was Othniel, the son of Caleb's younger brother Kenaz. ¹⁰Yahweh's Spirit gave Othniel special strength and courage to be a leader for the Israelites. Then he led an army that fought against the army of Cushan-Rishathaim, the king of Aram. Yahweh enabled the Israelites to win this battle. So Othniel defeated Cushan-Rishathaim {and he no longer ruled over the people of Israel}. ¹¹After that, the land of Israel was a peaceful place for the next 40 years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died.

¹²Then the Israelites once again did things that Yahweh had said were very wicked. Because they were doing these things, Yahweh gave Eglon, the king of Moab, a stronger army than the Israelites had {so that he could defeat them}. ¹³Eglon persuaded the leaders of the Ammonites and the Amalekites to join their armies with his army to attack Israel. They defeated the Israelites and captured Jericho, which people called Palm Tree City. ¹⁴Then King Eglon of Moab ruled the Israelites for 18 years.

¹⁵After that, the Israelites again pleaded with Yahweh to help them. So he brought another leader to rescue them. This leader was Ehud, the son of Gera. He was from the tribe of Benjamin, and he was left-handed. King Eglon of Moab made the Israelites send him goods such as gold, silver, animals, and crops every year so that he would not attack them. This time, the Israelites put Ehud in charge of delivering those goods. ¹⁶Ehud had made a special sword to bring with him on this trip. Both of its edges were sharp, and it was only half a meter long. He hid it under his clothes by strapping it onto his right thigh. ¹⁷Ehud made sure that King Eglon of Moab received all of the goods that the Israelites had sent. (Eglon was a very fat man.) ¹⁸After he had delivered all of the goods, Ehud told the men who had carried them to go back to Israel. ¹⁹Ehud went with the men as far as the boundary stones near the city of Gilgal. There 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 told 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.

²⁰This left Eglon sitting all by himself in the room of his palace where he stayed cool in the heat of summer. Ehud came close to him and said, "I have a message for you from God." The king stood up from his throne {to receive the message}. ²¹As the king got up, Ehud reached with his left hand and pulled the dagger from his right thigh. He plunged it into the king's stomach. ²²Ehud plunged the sword in so far that even the handle went into the king's belly. Ehud did not pull the sword out. He left it there, with the king's fat surrounding it. {From the force of the blow,} Eglon's bowels discharged. ²³Then Ehud stepped out of the room into its entrance area. He closed the doors to the room, and he bolted them shut as he closed them.

²⁴Then Ehud ran away from the palace. King Eglon's servants came back, but they found that someone had locked the doors to the room. They said {to each other}, "The king must be relieving himself in there." ²⁵So they waited. But when the king did not open the doors of the room for a long time, they became concerned because they had left him alone for so long. They got a key and unlocked and opened the doors. And they saw that their king was lying on the floor dead {from the sword wound}.

²⁶The servants had taken so long to enter the king's room that Ehud had time to escape. He ran back to Israel, passed by the boundary stones {at Gilgal}, and arrived at the city of Seirah. ²⁷That city was in the hilly area where

the descendants of Ephraim lived. When Ehud got there, he blew a ram's horn {to call the people to join him in fighting against the people of Moab}. So the Israelites went with him down from the hills {toward the Jordan River}. Ehud was leading them.

²⁸Ehud told the men he was leading, "Yahweh is going to enable us to defeat our enemies, the people of Moab. So follow me!" So they followed him down to the Jordan River, and they stationed some of their men at the place where people could walk across the river into Moab. That way they could kill any people from Moab who tried to cross the river to escape. ²⁹At that time, the Israelites killed about 10,000 Moabite soldiers {who had been occupying the city of Jericho}. They were all strong and capable soldiers, but the Israelites killed them all. ³⁰On that day, the Israelites conquered the people of Moab. After that, the land of Israel was a peaceful place for the next 80 years.

³¹After Ehud died, Shamgar, the son of Anath, became their leader. In one battle, Shamgar killed 600 Philistine soldiers even though his only weapon was an ox goad. In that way, he rescued the Israelites from the Philistines.

Chapter 4

¹After Ehud died, the Israelites once again did things that Yahweh had said were very wicked. ²A strong king whose name was Jabin ruled the city of Hazor and many other parts of the region of Canaan. Yahweh allowed Jabin to conquer the Israelites with his army because they had disobeyed him. The commander of Jabin's army was a man whose name was Sisera. He lived in a place that people called Harosheth Hagoyim. ³Sisera's army had 900 chariots that had iron parts. He cruelly oppressed the Israelites for 20 years. Then they pleaded with Yahweh to help them.

⁴At that time, a woman whose name was Deborah was a leader of the people of Israel. She was a prophetess. Her husband's name was Lappidoth. ⁵She would sit under her palm tree (which people called Deborah's Palm Tree) at a place between Ramah and Bethel in the hilly area where the descendants of Ephraim lived. The Israelites would come to her and ask her to help them settle their disputes. ⁶One day she sent for Barak, the son of Abinoam. She called him to come to her. He was from Kedesh, in the area where the descendants of Naphtali lived. She told him, "Yahweh, the God whom we Israelites worship, is commanding you to do something. He is telling you to gather an army of {at least} 10,000 men from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun. Have this army assemble at Mount Tabor. ⁷Sisera is the commander of King Jabin's army. Yahweh will make him come near you with his chariots and his army. He will come to the Kishon River {a few miles away from you}. Yahweh will enable your men to defeat them."

⁸Barak told her, "I will only go if you go with me. If you do not go with me, then I will not go."

⁹She replied, "I will certainly go with you. But because you would not go without me, Yahweh will enable a woman to defeat Sisera. The result will be that no one will honor you for doing that." So Deborah left her home and went with Barak to Kedesh. ¹⁰Barak called for the men of Zebulun and Naphtali to assemble at Kedesh. With Barak as their commander, 10,000 men came there. Deborah accompanied this army.

¹¹Now there was a man whose name was Heber who belonged to the Kenite people group. (He was a descendant of Moses' father-in-law Hobab.) He had moved away from the rest of the Kenites. He was living at this time near the big oak tree at Zaanannim, near Kedesh.

¹²People told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had assembled an army on Mount Tabor. ¹³When Sisera heard that, he gathered all his troops. They brought all 900 of the chariots that had iron parts, and they marched from Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River {to attack Barak and his army}.

¹⁴Then Deborah said to Barak, "It is time to attack! Today Yahweh is going to enable your army to defeat the army of Sisera. Yahweh is already fighting against Sisera for you." So Barak led his thousands of troops down the slopes of Mount Tabor {to fight with Sisera}. ¹⁵As Barak and his troops advanced, Yahweh caused Sisera and all his chariots and his army to become disorganized. The Israelites were killing so many of his soldiers that Sisera jumped down from his chariot and ran away. ¹⁶But Barak and his soldiers chased after the other chariots and

enemy soldiers all the way to Harosheth Haggoyim. They killed all of the soldiers in Sisera's army. None of them got away.

¹⁷But Sisera ran away to the place where Heber the Kenite was staying. He went up to the tent where Heber's wife Jael lived. He did that because Heber and his family were good friends of Sisera's master Jabin, the king of the city of Hazor, so he thought Jael would hide him.

¹⁸Jael went out to greet Sisera. She said to him, "Sir, please come into my tent. You do not have to be afraid." So he went into her tent and lay down, and she covered him with a blanket to hide him.

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

²⁰He told her, "Stand near the door of the tent to meet anyone who arrives. If someone who is looking for me comes and asks you, 'Is anyone else here?' say 'No.'"

²¹Sisera was very exhausted, so he soon fell asleep. While he was sleeping, Jael picked up a hammer and a tent peg and crept quietly over to him. Suddenly she pounded the peg into his skull. She hammered it all the way through his head until it stuck into the ground. This killed Sisera.

²²Meanwhile, Barak was looking for Sisera. When he got to Jael's tent, she went out to greet him. She told him, "The man you are looking for is in here!" So he followed her into the tent, and there he saw Sisera lying dead with the tent peg through his head.

²³And that was how God enabled the Israelites that day to defeat the army of Jabin, one of the kings of the Canaanites. ²⁴The Israelites had become stronger and stronger, and finally they completely defeated the army of Jabin, that Canaanite king.

Chapter 5

¹At the time when the Israelites defeated Jabin's army, Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang a song to celebrate. This is the song that they sang:

²"We should all praise Yahweh for the Israelite men who promised to fight
and who fought willingly.

³Even the most important people in the world
should pay attention to this!

I am going to sing to Yahweh.

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

⁴Yahweh, when you came from Seir,
when you marched from that land that people also call Edom,
thunder shook the earth
and clouds poured down rain from the skies.

⁵The mountains shook when you came,
just as Mount Sinai shook when you appeared there,

because you are Yahweh,
the God whom we Israelites worship.

⁶After our leader Shamgar son of Anath died
and before Jael helped us defeat the army of Jabin,
we Israelites were afraid to walk on the main roads,
{because Jabin's soldiers would rob us}.

Instead, when our people had to travel,
they used little roads that wound through the countryside.

⁷Israelites who lived in small villages left them
and moved into walled cities {for safety}.

But then I, Deborah, became a leader of the Israelite people,
and I protected them just as a mother protects her children.

⁸When the Israelite people {abandoned Yahweh} and began to worship different gods,
enemies attacked their cities.

The Israelites {could barely defend themselves
because they} had hardly any weapons.

⁹So I am very thankful for the Israelite leaders
and soldiers who willingly fought against Sisera.

We should all praise Yahweh for them!

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

¹¹Listen to the songs that people sing at the places along the road where travelers stop to get water.

Those songs tell about how Yahweh acted righteously when he enabled the Israelite warriors to defeat their enemies.

After that, Yahweh's people were able to return safely to their cities.

¹²Sing energetically, Deborah! Sing from your own vivid recollections!

Now is the time, Barak son of Abinoam, to show the prisoners that your army captured.

¹³The Israelite people who had scattered for safety
came down from the highlands to where their leaders were gathering an army.

These were men who were loyal to Yahweh,

and they came to help me, Barak, fight against the enemy soldiers.

¹⁴Some soldiers came from the tribe of Ephraim. They came from land that had once belonged to the descendants of Amalek.

Soldiers also came from the tribe of Benjamin. They reached the Israelite camp before the ones from Ephraim.

Military leaders from the clan of Machir in the tribe of Manasseh led their troops to fight.

So did officers from the tribe of Zebulun. They carried staffs to indicate their rank.

¹⁵Leaders from the tribe of Issachar brought their soldiers when Deborah told Barak to gather an army.

They fully supported Barak. He led these soldiers down into the valley {to fight Sisera}.

But the men of the tribe of Reuben could not decide what they should do.

¹⁶They should not have stayed away from the battle,

taking care of their sheep and listening to shepherds playing their flutes.

But the men of the tribe of Reuben could not decide what they should do.

¹⁷So the men of all the tribes living in the Gilead area stayed at home, east of the Jordan River.

And the men of the tribe of Dan just kept fishing in the sea {when they should have been helping to fight against Sisera}.

"Similarly, the men of the tribe of Asher did not leave their harbors on the seacoast {to come and help fight}.

¹⁸But the soldiers from the tribe of Zebulun risked their lives on the battlefield.

The soldiers from the tribe of Naphtali also risked their lives in order to occupy the high ground on the battlefield.

¹⁹Sisera brought an army of soldiers from many Canaanite kingdoms {that were subject to Jabin} to fight against us.

They fought a battle against us near the city of Taanach.

That city is near the river that flows through the Valley of Megiddo. But {they did not defeat us, and so} they did not carry any valuable things away from the battle.

²⁰It was as if the stars in the sky fought for us,

and as if those stars fought against Sisera,

as they moved across the sky.

²¹The Kishon River, that river that has been there for a long time, was drowning Sisera's soldiers.

So I told myself to be brave and to keep fighting.

²²Then the horses of Sisera's army {ran away from the battle.

As they ran, they} pounded the ground with their hooves.

Those powerful horses kept galloping along.

²³{After the battle,} an angel representing Yahweh said,

'The people who live in the town of Meroz did not help Yahweh by stopping Sisera's army from retreating.

And so you must call for Yahweh to punish them by making bad things happen to them.'

²⁴But God is very pleased with the woman whose name is Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite.

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

²⁵Although Sisera only asked for some water, Jael gave him some milk.

She brought him some yogurt in the kind of bowl that rulers have.

²⁶Then{, when Sisera was asleep,} Jael picked up a tent peg with her left hand and a heavy hammer with her right hand.

She pounded the tent peg into Sisera's head so hard that it went right through his temple. This smashed his head.

²⁷As Jael stood over him, Sisera died {from the crushing blow to his head}.

He did not even move from where he was when she hit him. He died right there.

²⁸Sisera's mother looked out through her window

{to see whether he was returning from the battle}.

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

Why have I not yet heard his chariot horses pounding the ground with their feet?'

²⁹Some tactful ladies in her household reassured her,

and she told herself the same thing they told her:

³⁰Sisera and his soldiers are probably {late returning because they are} dividing up the things and the people they captured after the battle.

Each soldier will get one or two women as slaves.

Each of Sisera's soldiers will also get one or two expensive robes that have bright colors and gold thread for decoration.

They will probably wear them home from the battle to show that they won.'

³¹{But that is not what happened!}

Yahweh, I hope that all your enemies will die as Sisera did!

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

After that, the land of Israel was a peaceful place for the next 40 years.

Chapter 6

¹But then the Israelites once again did things that Yahweh had said were very wicked. 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 they hid from them. The Israelites made places where they could live on mountains, in caves, and in other safe locations. ³This is what the enemies of the Israelites were doing to them. The Israelites would plant crops in their fields. Once those crops began to grow, enemies from Midian and Amalek and from desert tribes would come into Israel. ⁴They set up their tents in the land, and their animals devoured the crops as far south as Gaza. They did not

leave anything for the Israelites to eat. They also took away their sheep, cattle, and donkeys. ⁵They came into Israel with their tents and their livestock. When they came, there were so many of them that they seemed like a huge swarm of locusts. One could hardly count how many of them arrived riding on their camels. They came into the land of Israel and ruined the land, so that crops could not grow there. 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 were doing to them, ⁸Yahweh sent a prophet to them. He told them, "Yahweh is the God we Israelites are supposed to worship. He sent me to tell you, 'I brought your ancestors out of Egypt. I rescued them from that place where they were slaves.' ⁹I made the Egyptian rulers who had made them slaves set them free. When you got to this land, I enabled you to defeat your enemies. I forced them to leave, and I allowed you to live here instead. ¹⁰I told your ancestors, 'I am Yahweh, the God whom you must worship. Once you Israelites are living in the land that belonged to the Amorites, you must not worship the gods that they worshiped.'" But you have disobeyed what I told them."

¹¹One day an angel representing Yahweh came and sat under a big oak tree in 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 because it was a place where the people of Midian could not see him. ¹²The angel representing Yahweh went over to Gideon and told him, "You mighty soldier, Yahweh is helping you!"

¹³Gideon replied, "Pardon me for asking, sir, but if Yahweh is really helping us, then why have all these bad things happened to us? Yahweh is not doing any miracles for us like the ones that our ancestors have told us about. They have said that he rescued them from being slaves in Egypt. But now Yahweh has abandoned us. He is allowing the people from Midian to rule us."

¹⁴Then Yahweh looked right at him and said, "I have made you strong enough to rescue the Israelites from the people of Midian who are ruling you. So lead an army against them. I am commanding you to do that!"

¹⁵Gideon replied, "I am sorry, sir, but I do not believe that I can rescue the Israelites. This is why I cannot: my clan is the smallest and weakest one in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least important person in my whole family!"

¹⁶Yahweh said to him, "I will help you{, and so you will be able to rescue the Israelites}. I will enable you to defeat the entire Midianite army at one time."

¹⁷Gideon replied, "If you truly are pleased with me, then let me ask you to do something that will prove that you, Yahweh, really are the one who is speaking with me. ¹⁸I would like to go and prepare a special meal and bring it to you. Please do not leave here until I get back."

Yahweh answered, "{I agree.} I will wait here until you come back."

¹⁹So Gideon hurried to his home. He killed a young goat and cooked it. He also took about 22 liters of flour and baked some bread without yeast. Then he put the cooked meat in a basket, and he put the broth from the meat in a pot. He brought the meat and the bread to Yahweh, who was still sitting under the oak tree. Gideon invited him to eat these foods as a special meal.

²⁰But Yahweh told Gideon, "Put the meat and the bread on this rock. Then pour the broth on top of it." So that is what Gideon did. ²¹Then the angel representing Yahweh reached out and touched the meat and bread with the tip of the walking stick that he was holding. Flames came up from the rock and completely burned up the meat and the bread! And then the angel representing Yahweh disappeared. ²²Then Gideon realized that it had actually been an angel representing Yahweh who had come and spoken with him. He exclaimed, "Oh, no! Yahweh my Lord, I just saw your angel in person! {No one can see you and live, so I am going to die!}"

²³But Yahweh called to him and said, "You are safe. You do not have to be afraid. I am not going to kill you."

²⁴Then Gideon built an altar there to worship Yahweh. He gave it the name Yahweh is Peace. That altar is still there at this time in the town of Ophrah in the land that belongs to the Abiezrite clan.

²⁵Then, that same night, Yahweh told Gideon, "Tear down the altar that your father built to worship the god Baal. Also cut down the pole for worshipping the goddess Asherah that is beside that altar. Use the young bull that your father owns {to pull down the altar}. But also bring another bull with you that your father owns, the one that is seven years old. ²⁶Build a plain stone altar here on this hill to worship me, your God Yahweh. Take the wood from the Asherah pole that you cut down and use it to make a fire. Then burn the meat of that seven-year-old bull on that fire as a burnt offering to me."

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

²⁸The next morning, when the people who lived in the town got up, they saw that the altar to Baal was in ruins. The Asherah pole that had been next to it was gone. They saw that there was a new altar on the hill above the town, and on it were the remains of a bull that someone had sacrificed.

²⁹The people asked each other, "Who did this?" When some of the town leaders investigated, someone finally told them. So they announced publicly, "It was Gideon son of Joash who did this."

³⁰The men of the town came to the house of Joash. They told him, "Bring your son out here! We want to kill him to punish him for destroying the altar of our god Baal and for cutting down the Asherah pole where we worship!"

³¹But Joash {refused to bring Gideon out. He} told the hostile crowd that had gathered around his house, "You should not have to argue a case on behalf of Baal! You should not have to defend him! Anyone who thinks he needs to defend Baal is the one whom we should execute. In fact, we should execute him right now! If Baal really is a god, he ought to be able to defend himself when someone tears down his altar!" ³²And that was how Gideon got the nickname Jerubbaal{, which means, "Let Baal defend himself."} People said, "Yes, Baal should be the one to punish this man for tearing down his altar."

³³Soon after that, the people of Midian and Amalek and the desert tribes that were their allies sent their armies together across the Jordan River to attack the Israelites. Their soldiers set up their camp in the Valley of Jezreel.

³⁴Then Yahweh's Spirit gave Gideon special strength and courage. Gideon blew a ram's horn {to call the people of Israel to join him in fighting against these invaders}. The men from his clan of Abiezer gathered to fight, with him as their commander. ³⁵Gideon also sent messengers throughout the territory of the tribe of Manasseh to tell its soldiers to come and fight under his command. He also sent messengers throughout the territories of the tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and soldiers from those tribes came and joined his army.

³⁶Then Gideon said to God, "I want to be sure that you are truly going to enable me to rescue the Israelite people as you promised. ³⁷Please confirm that by doing something for me. Tonight I will put a dry wool fleece on this place where people thresh grain. Tomorrow morning, if only the fleece is wet with dew and the ground is dry, then I will know that you are going to enable me 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 he squeezed enough dew from it to fill a bowl with water! {But the ground all around the fleece was dry.}

³⁹Then Gideon said to God, "Please do not be angry with me, but I would like to ask you to do one more thing. Tonight let me put the fleece out again. This time, please let only the fleece remain dry, and let the whole ground become wet with dew." ⁴⁰And that night God did what Gideon had asked him to do. The next morning only the fleece was dry, but the whole ground was wet with dew.

Chapter 7

¹So that morning Gideon (whom people were calling Jerubbaal) got up right away and led all of his soldiers as far as the spring that people would soon call Harod. The army of Midian had camped north of there, in the valley near the hill of Moreh. ²Yahweh said to Gideon, "You have too many soldiers with you. Suppose I allow all of you to fight the army of Midian and your army defeats them. Then the Israelites will boast that they defeated their enemies by themselves, without my help. ³So I want you to make an announcement to the soldiers. Tell them, 'Any one of you who is too afraid to fight may leave this army camp and go home by way of Mount Gilead.'" When Gideon made that announcement, 22, 000 of the soldiers went home. Only 10, 000 of them stayed in the camp.

⁴But Yahweh told Gideon, "You still have too many soldiers! Take them down to the spring, and there I will show you which ones to bring. I will tell you which ones to take with you and which ones not to take with you."

⁵When Gideon took the men down to the spring, Yahweh told him, "Watch how the men drink. Put in one group the men who scoop up the water with their hands and lick it with their tongues the way dogs do. {Put in another group} the men who kneel down and put their faces in the water to drink." ⁶Now when the soldiers drank, only 300 of them used their hands to bring water to their mouths. All the others drank by kneeling down and putting their faces in the water.

⁷Then Yahweh told Gideon, "I will use the 300 men who lapped the water from their hands to rescue Israel! I will enable you to defeat the Midianites. All the others may return to their homes." ⁸So the 300 soldiers who were staying with Gideon collected the food that the other men had brought. They also collected the ram's horns they had brought. Then Gideon sent those other men home, but he kept the 300 soldiers with him.

The army of Midian was camping in the valley below Gideon and his army. ⁹The night after all the other soldiers left, Yahweh said to Gideon, "Now is the time for you to attack the Midianites in the valley! You can be confident that I will enable you and your men to defeat them. ¹⁰But if you are afraid to attack the Midianites, then go secretly to their camp with Purah, your armor-bearer. ¹¹Listen to what some of the Midianite soldiers are saying. Then you will be very encouraged, and you will be ready to attack their army." So Gideon took Purah with him and they went secretly to where sentries were guarding the enemy camp. ¹²The armies of the people of Midian and Amalek and the desert tribes that were their allies had set up their tents in the valley. They seemed to have as many soldiers as there are locusts in a swarm. It seemed that their camels were too many to count, like the number of grains of sand on the seashore.

¹³But Gideon and Purah crept close to the edge of the camp. There they heard one man telling a friend about a dream. The man said, "I just had a dream, and in it I saw a round loaf of barley bread rolling down into our Midianite camp. When it reached a tent, it hit it so hard that the tent turned upside down and collapsed!"

¹⁴His friend replied, "Your dream can mean only one thing. It means that God is going to enable Gideon son of Joash, that Israelite man, to lead his soldiers to defeat our combined armies from Midian and its allies."

¹⁵When Gideon heard the man tell about his dream and his friend say what it meant, he thanked God {for the victory that the Israelites were going to win}. Then he and Purah returned to the Israelite camp. Gideon shouted to the men, "Now is the time to attack! Yahweh is going to enable us to defeat the Midianite army!" ¹⁶Gideon then divided his 300 soldiers into three groups. He gave each soldier a ram's horn {to blow as a trumpet}. He also gave each one a torch and an empty clay jar to cover the torch and hide its light.

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. ¹⁸I will be leading one group of soldiers. As soon as we blow our ram's horns, you men in the other two groups surrounding the camp must blow your horns too. Then shout, 'We are Yahweh's army! We are Gideon's army!'"

¹⁹A new group of guards was just replacing the guards who had been watching the camp since the start of the night. That was when Gideon and the 100 men with him arrived at the edge of the Midianite camp. They suddenly

blew their horns and broke the jars they were carrying. {The torches that had been inside the jars shone brightly.} ²⁰Then the men in all three groups blew their horns and smashed their jars. They held the torches high with their left hands {so that the light would awaken and frighten the Midianites}. They held up the horns with their right hands and alternately blew them and shouted, "We are Yahweh's army! We are Gideon's army!" ²¹Each of Gideon's men stayed in position all around the enemy camp. All of the enemy soldiers started running around and sounding the alarm and trying to escape.

²²While the 300 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 others ran away. Some fled south to the town of Beth Shittah. Some fled to the town of Zererah. Others ran away as far as the outskirts of the town of Abel Meholah, near the town of Tabbath. ²³Then Gideon sent messengers to the Israelite men who lived in the territories of the tribes of Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh. The messengers got them to come and help finish defeating the army of Midian. ²⁴Gideon sent messengers throughout the hilly area where the tribe of Ephraim lived. The messengers told the men there, "Go down and attack the fleeing Midianite soldiers. So that those soldiers do not escape, put guards at the shallow places where people can wade across rivers and streams. Put guards at the crossings of the streams in the area of Beth Barah and the crossings of the Jordan River." So the men of Ephraim came and put guards in those places.

²⁵They also captured Oreb and Zeeb, the two rulers who were commanding the Midianite army. They found Oreb hiding in a cave in a big rock. They killed him there, and that is why people now call it the Rock of Oreb. They found Zeeb hiding in a pit where people press grapes to make wine. They killed him there, and that is why people now call it the Winepress of Zeeb. The Israelites cut off the heads of Oreb and Zeeb so they could bring them to Gideon. They pursued the Midianites across the Jordan River, and they met Gideon there.

Chapter 8

¹Then the soldiers from the tribe of Ephraim told Gideon, "You have not treated us fairly! You should have given us the opportunity to help you fight against the army of Midian!" They argued very angrily with Gideon.

²But Gideon told them, "I have done very little compared with what you have done! It is as if I and my soldiers from the clan of Abiezer and other Israelite tribes harvested a crop of grapes. And it is as if you soldiers from the tribe of Ephraim came along after us and collected the few grapes that we had left on the vines. And it is as if those few grapes you collected were better than the whole crop that we harvested. ³God enabled you to capture Oreb and Zeeb, the rulers who were commanding the Midianite army. What you did is much more important than what I was able to do!" After Gideon told them that, they were no longer angry with him.

⁴Then Gideon and his 300 men came to the Jordan River and crossed it. They were very tired, but they continued to chase their enemies. ⁵When they arrived at the town of Succoth, Gideon said to the town leaders, "Please give my soldiers something to eat. They are tired and hungry, and we are still trying to capture the Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna."

⁶But the leaders of Succoth replied, "You have not caught Zebah and Zalmunna yet! So we are not going to give your troops anything to eat."

⁷Gideon replied, "Because you have refused to give us food, we will return here after Yahweh enables us to capture Zebah and Zalmunna. We are going to make whips out of the stems of thorny desert plants. Then we are going to use them to whip you and cut you!"

⁸Next Gideon and his 300 men went to the town of Penuel and asked for food there. But the town leaders of Penuel also refused to give them anything to eat. ⁹So Gideon told the town leaders of Penuel, "I am going to defeat those kings. Then I will come back here and demolish your tower{, which you think is going to protect you}!"

¹⁰By that time, Zebah and Zalmunna had gone to the town of Karkor with 15,000 troops. Those were all who were left of the armies of Midian, Amalek, and the desert tribes that were their allies. Of their fighting men, 120,000 had

already died. ¹¹Gideon and his men took the road through the wilderness on which caravans travel. This took them east of the villages of Nobah and Jogbehah. The Midianite soldiers were feeling safe out in the wilderness, so Gideon was able to attack them by surprise. ¹²When Gideon and his soldiers attacked, the Midianite army panicked and ran away. Zebah and Zalmunna tried to escape, but Gideon and his soldiers chased them. And they captured those two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna.

¹³After that, Gideon the son of Joash and his men {took Zebah and Zalmunna with them} and started to return home. They went through the Ascent of Heres. ¹⁴Gideon was able to capture a young man who lived in Succoth. Gideon made him tell him who were all the leaders and elders of the town. The young man wrote down the names of all 77 of those men. ¹⁵Then Gideon and his men went into Succoth and said to those leaders, "Here are Zebah and Zalmunna! When we were here before, you made fun of me. You said 'You have not caught Zebah and Zalmunna yet! So we are not going to give your hungry troops anything to eat.'" ¹⁶Then Gideon and his men grabbed the town leaders. They made whips from the stems of thorny desert plants, and they whipped the town leaders with them. They did that to punish the leaders for not giving them food. ¹⁷Then Gideon and his men went to the town of Penuel. They tore down the tower and killed men in that town.

¹⁸Then Gideon said to Zebah and Zalmunna, "You and your soldiers killed some men near Mount Tabor. Tell me about those men."

They replied, "They looked like you. They all looked like royal princes."

¹⁹Gideon replied, "Those men were my own brothers! I swear by Yahweh that I would spare your lives now if you had spared their lives then." ²⁰Then Gideon turned to his oldest son, Jether. He told him, "Now you kill these two kings!" But Jether was still only a boy, so 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 boy to do the work that a man should do! You kill us yourself." So Gideon killed both of them. Then he took the golden crescent-shaped ornaments that their camels were wearing.

²²Then the soldiers whom Gideon had led into battle told him, "You should be our king! In fact, we want you and your son and your grandson to be our kings. That is because you rescued us from the Midianites who were oppressing us."

²³But Gideon told them, "No, I will not be your king. My son will not be your king either. Yahweh is your real king."

²⁴But he added, "There is one thing that I would like you to do for me. Would each of you please give me one earring from the things you captured after the battle?" (The Midianite soldiers were descendants of Ishmael, and it was their custom to wear golden earrings.)

²⁵They replied, "We will each be glad to give an earring to you!" So they spread out a large garment on the ground. Then each man threw a gold earring onto it from the things he had taken from the enemy soldiers he had killed in the battle. ²⁶The golden earrings that Gideon received weighed a total of over 20 kilograms. That weight did not include some other things that Gideon received. He also received gold, jewels, and luxurious purple robes that the Midianite kings had been wearing and gold chains that had been around their camels' necks. ²⁷Gideon used the gold to make a sacred garment. He set it up in his hometown of Ophrah. The people of Israel started going there to worship it, instead of worshipping only Yahweh. Gideon and his family had great trouble because of this.

²⁸So that is the story of how the Israelites defeated the army of Midian. The people of Midian did not become strong enough to attack Israel again. So while Gideon was alive, Israel was a peaceful place for 40 years.

²⁹Then Gideon son of Joash, whom people also called Jerubbaal, went back home to live there. ³⁰Gideon had many full legal wives, and they bore him 70 sons. ³¹Gideon also had a secondary wife in the city of Shechem. She too bore him a son, and Gideon named him Abimelech. ³²Gideon son of Joash lived for a long time. When he died, his family buried his body in the burial ground that his father Joash owned. This was in the town of Ophrah in the territory that belonged to the clan of Abiezer.

³³But as soon as Gideon died, the Israelites were unfaithful to Yahweh. They once again worshiped idols that represented gods such as Baal. They made an idol that they called Baal-Berith, and they worshiped it as their god.

³⁴The enemy nations that surrounded the Israelites had conquered them. Yahweh their God had rescued the Israelites from their control. But they were not grateful for this. ³⁵Gideon, whom people also called Jerubbaal, had done many good things for the Israelites. But they did not act kindly toward his family.

Chapter 9

¹Gideon's son Abimelech went to talk with his mother's brothers in the city of Shechem. He spoke to them and to all his mother's relatives. He said, ²"I want you to gather all the leaders of Shechem. Tell them, 'It would not be good to have all 70 of Gideon's sons rule over us. It would be better to have only one man, Abimelech, rule over us.' And do not forget that I am a part of your family!"

³So Abimelech's mother's brothers gathered all the leaders of Shechem. They told them everything that Abimelech wanted them to say. The leaders decided to allow Abimelech to rule over them, considering that he was their relative. ⁴So the leaders of Shechem took about a kilogram of silver from the temple of their god Baal-Berith and gave it to Abimelech. He used that money to hire some wicked and violent men. They did whatever he told them to do. ⁵Abimelech and the men he had hired went to Ophrah, his father's town. There they murdered his 70 brothers, the sons of his father Gideon. They brought each one of them to a huge rock and killed him there. But Gideon's youngest son Jotham escaped because he hid from Abimelech and his men. ⁶Then all the town leaders of Shechem and the officers from the nearby fort gathered next to the pillar under the big sacred tree at Shechem. There they appointed Abimelech to be their king.

⁷When Jotham heard about that, he climbed high up on Mount Gerizim. From where he was standing, he shouted very loudly to the people below, "You leaders of Shechem, pay attention to what I say, or God will not answer your prayers!" ⁸One day the trees decided to choose one tree to be their king. First they told the olive tree, 'We would like you to be our king.'

⁹But the olive tree replied, 'I produce olives, and people make oil from them. They put the oil in sacrifices that they offer, and they use it to anoint people whom they want to honor. It is much more important for me to keep producing olives than to wander around settling matters for other trees as a king would do. {So I will not be your king.}'

¹⁰So the trees told the fig tree, 'Then we want you to be our king!'

¹¹But the fig tree replied, 'I produce figs. They are good to eat, and they taste sweet. It is much more important for me to keep producing figs than to wander around settling matters for other trees as a king would do. {So I will not be your king.}'

¹²So the trees told the grapevine, 'Then we want you to be our king!'

¹³But the grapevine replied, 'I produce grapes, and people produce new wine from them. That new wine causes gods and people to be happy. It is much more important for me to keep producing grapes than to wander around settling matters for other trees as a king would do. {So I will not be your king.}'

¹⁴So all of the trees finally told the thornbush, 'Then we want you to be our king!'

¹⁵The thornbush said to the trees, 'If you sincerely want to appoint me to be your king, then accept my protection and obey my commands. But be sure that you are sincere, because if you do not obey me, then I will start a fire that will burn up all of you, even the biggest trees, such as the cedar trees in the country of Lebanon!'"

¹⁶After Jotham finished telling them this parable, he said, "Now you must consider whether you have truly done the right thing by making Abimelech your king. You must consider whether you have treated Gideon and his family properly. You must consider whether you have treated him the way he deserved for what he did. ¹⁷Remember

what my father did for you. He led the Israelites into battle against the Midianites. He was willing to die if necessary to rescue you from their power. ¹⁸But now you have rebelled against my father's family. You have murdered 70 of his sons on one huge rock. And you have appointed Abimelech to be the king who will rule you people of Shechem. {You think he will treat you well} because he is your relative. {But he has no right to be a king, since} he is only the son of my father's slave girl, not of one of his full legal wives. ¹⁹Now if you truly have done the right thing toward Gideon and his family, then may you now be happy that Abimelech is your king, and may he also be happy that you are his subjects. ²⁰But if what you did was not right, then I hope that Abimelech destroys you leaders of Shechem and you officers from the fort, and I hope that you destroy him!"

²¹After Jotham finished saying all of this, the leaders of Shechem tried to capture him, but he got away from them. He ran away to the town of Beer. He stayed there so that his half-brother Abimelech would not be able to kill him.

²²For the next three years, Abimelech ruled as the king of the city of Shechem. Many Israelites also accepted him as their king. ²³Then God made Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem hostile toward each other. The leaders of Shechem started plotting against Abimelech. ²⁴The 70 sons of Jerubbaal were Abimelech's half-brothers, but he hired men to kill them. The leaders of Shechem gave him the money to have men kill his half-brothers. {So God made them enemies so that} they would suffer violently, just as they had caused others to suffer violently. God did this to punish them for the murders they had committed. ²⁵The leaders of Shechem decided not to rely on Abimelech anymore. Instead, they had some of their men hide up high on the hills around the city. {From there these men could see travelers approaching, and they surprised them} and robbed them when they got close. Abimelech heard about what they were doing.

²⁶Then Gaal son of Ebed moved into the city of Shechem along with a group of men he commanded. The leaders of Shechem liked him and welcomed him. ²⁷Then the people who lived in Shechem went out to their vineyards to pick some grapes. They pressed the grapes to make juice, and from the juice they made wine. They brought some of the wine as an offering into the temple of their god Baal-Berith. There they had a big feast and drank a lot of wine. Then they started cursing Abimelech. ²⁸Gaal son of Ebed said, "We should not allow Abimelech to rule over us! His mother was from Shechem, but his father was Jerubbaal{, an Israelite}. So he is not really part of our people group! {We should not allow} Zebul {to rule over us either, since} it was Abimelech who appointed him as governor of our city. Instead, our ruler should be one of the descendants of Hamor, who founded our city of Shechem. We should not be allowing a foreigner like Abimelech to rule us. ²⁹If you appoint me to be your leader, I will make Abimelech stop being your leader." Then Gaal boasted that he would not be afraid to fight Abimelech and his whole army.

³⁰When Zebul, the governor of Shechem, heard Gaal son of Ebed talking {about Abimelech} this way, he became very angry. ³¹But Zebul did not show that he was angry. He sent messengers to warn Abimelech, but he pretended he was sending them for some other reason. The messengers told Abimelech, "Be careful! A certain man, Gaal son of Ebed, has brought a group of men that he commands to Shechem. You need to know that they are getting the people who live in Shechem to rebel against you. ³²So you and your troops should come here at night{, when no one will see you,} and hide in the area outside the city. ³³That way, in the morning, as soon as it becomes light, you can immediately attack the city. Gaal and his men will surely come out of the city to fight against you, and when they do, you can do whatever you want to him."

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

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

But Zebul said, "You are just seeing the shadow that one hill casts on another as the sun gets higher in the sky. That dark shape is not a group of people. It only looks like one." ³⁷But Gaal {kept watching and} spoke again. He said to Zebul, "Look! I do see groups of people coming down that central hill! I also see a group coming towards us along the road that goes past the Oak of the Diviners."

³⁸Then Zebul said to Gaal, "Earlier you spoke boastfully. You said, 'We should not allow Abimelech to rule over us!' That is who you see coming: the army that you said you could easily defeat. So now that they are here, go out and fight them!"

³⁹So Gaal and his men went out of the city and fought against the army of Abimelech. The leaders of Shechem were watching {to see what would happen}. ⁴⁰Abimelech and his men {defeated them and} chased them when they ran away. They stabbed and killed many of Gaal's men all the way back to the city gate of Shechem.

⁴¹Abimelech then went to the nearby town of Arumah. Zebul forced Gaal and the group of men he commanded to leave Shechem, where they had been living.

⁴²Then, the next day, the people of Shechem were getting ready to leave the city and go out and work in their fields. Someone told Abimelech what they were going to do. ⁴³So Abimelech divided his men into three groups and had them hide in the fields around Shechem. Then, once they saw that the people were out in the fields away from the city, they got up and attacked them. ⁴⁴When Abimelech and his soldiers came out of hiding, he and one group of them ran to the city gate {and blocked it}. The other two groups of soldiers ran out to the fields and killed the people of Shechem who were there. ⁴⁵Abimelech and his soldiers fought against the people of Shechem all that day. When they finally conquered the city, they killed all the people who lived there. They tore down all of the buildings. Then they threw salt over the ruins to show that they never wanted anyone to live there again.

⁴⁶A group of soldiers lived in a fortress near Shechem that had a defensive tower. When their commanders heard what had happened, all of them went inside the fortress, which was also a temple of their god El-Berith.

⁴⁷Somebody told Abimelech that the commanders of the fortress near Shechem had all gone inside it. ⁴⁸So Abimelech and all of his soldiers went onto the slopes of {nearby} Mount Zalmon. They brought axes with them. Abimelech cut a large branch from a tree and put it on his shoulder. He told all of his soldiers, "Quickly, all of you cut branches as you just saw me do!" ⁴⁹So each one of the soldiers also cut a branch, {and they carried them down the mountain,} following Abimelech. They went to the fortress and piled the branches against its walls. Then they set the branches on fire. About 1,000 men and women were inside the tower near Shechem. The fire burned up the fortress and killed all of them too.

⁵⁰After that, Abimelech and his soldiers went to the town of Thebez{, whose people had also rebelled against him}. They surrounded it and conquered it. ⁵¹But the people of that city had built a tower where they would be safe if someone attacked them. Many men and women from the city, including its leaders, ran to the tower. Once they were inside, they locked the door. Then they climbed up to the roof of the tower. ⁵²Abimelech and his soldiers came to the tower to try to kill the people who were in it. Abimelech went right up to the tower to start a fire that would burn it down. ⁵³But when Abimelech came near the tower, a woman who was on the roof dropped a large grinding stone on his head. It cracked the bone of his skull.

⁵⁴The servant who was carrying Abimelech's weapons was nearby. Abimelech quickly ordered him, "Pull out your sword and kill me with it! I do not want people to say about me, 'A woman killed Abimelech.'" So the servant stabbed Abimelech with his sword, and that killed him. ⁵⁵When the Israelite soldiers saw that Abimelech was dead, they all returned to their homes.

⁵⁶In that way, God punished Abimelech for murdering all 70 of his brothers. When Abimelech did that, he did a wicked thing to his father. ⁵⁷God also punished the people of Shechem for all the wicked things that they had done. Jotham son of Gideon had said that Abimelech would destroy them, and that is what happened.

Chapter 10

¹After Abimelech died, Tola, the son of Puah and grandson of Dodo became a leader. He rescued the Israelites from their enemies. He belonged to the tribe of Issachar. However, he lived in the town of Shamir in the hilly area where the descendants of Ephraim live. ²Tola was the leader of the Israelites for 23 years. When he died, his family buried him in Shamir.

³After Tola died, Jair from the region of Gilead became a leader. He was the leader of the Israelites for 22 years. ⁴He had 30 sons, and he gave each of them his own donkey to ride on. They lived in 30 cities in the region of Gilead. People still call those cities Havvoth Jair. ⁵When Jair died, his family buried him in the town of Kamon.

⁶Once again the Israelites did things that Yahweh said were very wicked. They worshiped various idols that represented gods such as Baal. They also worshiped female fertility goddesses such as Ashtoreth. They also worshiped the gods that people worshiped in the countries of Aram and Moab and in the city of Sidon. And they worshiped the gods that the Ammonite and Philistine people groups worshiped. But they did not worship Yahweh at all anymore. ⁷So Yahweh became very angry with the Israelites, and he allowed the Philistines and Ammonites to conquer them. ⁸For 18 years, the Amorites had already been oppressing all the people of Israel who lived in the area east of the Jordan River. That land formerly belonged to the Amorites. (People also call it Gilead.) But now they began to oppress all of the Israelites severely. ⁹The Ammonites crossed over the Jordan River and also fought against the people of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim. They made the Israelites suffer terribly. ¹⁰So the Israelites prayed desperately to Yahweh. They said, "We have sinned against you. We have stopped worshiping you, and instead we have been worshiping idols representing false gods such as Baal."

¹¹Yahweh answered them, saying, "{In the past,} the Egyptians, Amorites, Ammonites, Philistines, ¹²Sidonians, Amalekites, and Maonites were treating you badly. You prayed desperately to me, and I rescued you from them.

¹³But even after that, you stopped worshiping me. You worshiped other gods instead. So I am not going to keep rescuing you. ¹⁴See whether the gods you are worshiping can rescue you now that you are in trouble again!"

¹⁵But the people of Israel said to Yahweh, "We confess that we have sinned. Punish us in whatever way you wish. But please rescue us now!" ¹⁶Then the Israelites threw away the idols that represented the foreign gods they had been worshiping. They worshiped Yahweh instead. Yahweh saw that they were suffering greatly. He felt compassion for them and decided to help them.

¹⁷Soldiers from the Ammonite people group gathered {to fight against the Israelites}. They set up their tents in the region of Gilead. So the Israelite soldiers gathered {to fight against them}. They set up their tents near the city of Mizpah. ¹⁸The leaders of the people of Gilead said to each other, "Who will lead our attack against the Ammonite army? If someone will do that, we will make him the leader of everyone who lives in the region of Gilead."

Chapter 11

¹There was a man from the region of Gilead whose name was Jephthah. He was a great soldier. But his mother was a prostitute. His father was a man whose name was Gilead. ²Gilead also had a legal wife who gave birth to several sons. When they became adults, they forced Jephthah to leave. They told him, "You are not the son of our father's legal wife, so you have no right to inherit any of his property." ³So Jephthah ran away from his brothers. He settled in the region of Tob. He attracted a group of lawless men, and they went out raiding together.

⁴Some time later, the soldiers of the Ammon people group attacked the people of Israel. ⁵The Israelites needed someone to lead their soldiers to fight against the Ammonites. So the leaders of the region of Gilead went to the land of Tob. They wanted to bring Jephthah back {to be their commander}. ⁶They said to him, "Come back with us and lead our army. That way we will be able to defeat the Ammonite army."

⁷But Jephthah told the leaders of Gilead, "You rejected me! You let my brothers force me to leave home {without any inheritance}! So you should not come and expect me to help you now that you are in trouble."

⁸The leaders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "That is exactly why we are coming to you now{, because we are in trouble}. Come back with us and lead our soldiers against the Ammonite army. If you do, we will make you the leader over everyone who lives in Gilead."

⁹Jephthah answered them, "So 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."

¹⁰The leaders of Gilead told Jephthah, "We swear that we will do what you have just described. Yahweh is a witness of the promises we are making to you. May he punish us if we do not keep those promises!" ¹¹So Jephthah went with the leaders back to Gilead. {In a religious gathering} at Mizpah, Jephthah repeated to Yahweh the terms of the agreement they had made. Then the people appointed him to be their leader and the commander of their army.

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

¹³The Ammonite king replied to Jephthah's messengers, "I am invading because you Israelites took our land when you came here from Egypt. You took all of 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."

¹⁴But Jephthah sent his messengers back to the Ammonite king. ¹⁵They said to him, "Jephthah told us to tell you: 'Israel did not take any land that belonged to the Moabites or the Ammonites. ¹⁶Here is what actually happened. When the Israelite people came out of Egypt, they walked through the desert to the Sea of Reeds. From there they traveled to the town of Kadesh {at the border of the region of Edom}. ¹⁷From there the Israelites sent messengers to the king of the Edom people group. They asked him, "Please allow us to walk across your land." But the king of the Edomites refused. When they sent the same message to the king of the Moabites, 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 stayed to the east of Moab, and they did not set up their camp until they were north of the Arnon River. That means that they never went into the territory of Moab, since the Arnon River is the {northern} border of Moab.

¹⁹Then the leaders of Israel sent a message to the king of the Amorite people group. His name was Sihon. He ruled in the city of 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 thought that if he allowed the Israelites to come into his land, they would try to conquer it. So he gathered his whole army. His soldiers set up their tents at the town of Jahaz. From there, they attacked the Israelite people. ²¹But Yahweh, the God of Israel, made the Israelite army stronger than the army of Sihon. So the Israelites destroyed that enemy army. Then they took possession of all the land where those Amorites had lived. ²²Yes, the Israelites took all the land that belonged to those Amorites. It extended 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.

²³So it was Yahweh, the God of Israel, who forced the Amorites to leave the land in which they were living. Yahweh allowed the Israelites to live there instead. So you cannot claim that land as if it belonged to you. ²⁴You have the right to live in any land that your god Chemosh may give to you. But Yahweh our God forced others to leave this entire land so that we could live in it. And we are going to keep living in it! ²⁵You are not greater than Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab. He never disputed that this land now belonged to the Israelites. He never fought against the Israelites to try to take the land from them{, even though it once belonged to the Moabites and Ammonites}. ²⁶The Israelites have been living for the past 300 years in the city of Heshbon and the town of Aroer and in the villages around them. They have also been living in settlements along the Arnon River. But during all of that time, you Ammonites have not tried to capture those areas for yourselves. ²⁷So we Israelites have not harmed you {by taking any land from you}. But you Ammonites are doing something bad to us by attacking us {to try to conquer our land}. Yahweh {our God} makes sure that people treat each other properly. If we fight, he will enable our Israelite army to defeat your Ammonite army, because we have done what is right and you are doing what is wrong."

²⁸But even though Jephthah sent him this message, the king of Ammon did not command his army to stop fighting against the Israelites.

²⁹Then the Spirit of Yahweh gave Jephthah special strength and courage. He went through the region of Gilead and through the area east of the Jordan River where the tribe of Manasseh lived {to enlist men for his army}. He brought all those soldiers to the city of Mizpah in Gilead{, where some of the Israelites had already gathered}. From there, they would go to fight against the Ammonites. ³⁰There Jephthah made a solemn promise to Yahweh. He

said, "If you will enable my army to defeat the Ammonites, ³¹when I return safely from defeating the Ammonites, then I will devote to you the first person who comes out of my house to greet me. I will sacrifice that person by burning him up completely on an altar."

³²Then Jephthah and his soldiers went from Mizpah to attack the Ammonites. Yahweh enabled his army to defeat them. ³³Jephthah and his men defeated the Ammonites at the town of Aroer. Then they pursued them all the way to the area around the city of Minnith. They destroyed 20 settlements, as far as the city of Abel Keramim. The Israelites killed a very great number of Ammonites. After that the Ammonites could no longer oppose the Israelites.

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. Since he had no other sons or daughters, she was his only child. ³⁵When Jephthah saw his daughter, he tore his clothes to show that he was very sad about what he thought he had to do. He said to her, "Oh, no! My daughter, you have made me terribly distressed {by being the first one to greet me}. You are troubling me just as the Ammonites did. I made a solemn promise to Yahweh {to sacrifice the first person who came out of my house}, and I have to do what I promised."

³⁶His daughter said, "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 your enemies, the Ammonites." ³⁷But then she asked him, "Please do something for me first. Do not offer me as a sacrifice right away. Let me go into the hills and wander around with my friends for two months. Let me grieve with them the fact that I will never get married and have children."

³⁸Jephthah told her, "You may go." And he let her leave for two months. So she and her friends wandered in the hills, and they all cried for her because she would never get married and have children. ³⁹After two months, she returned to her father Jephthah, and he did to her what he had solemnly promised. So his daughter never married.

Because of that, the Israelites now have a custom. ⁴⁰The young Israelite women go into the hills for four days each year. There they sadly remember what happened to the daughter of Jephthah from the region of Gilead.

Chapter 12

¹The men of the tribe of Ephraim got ready for battle. They crossed the Jordan River and went northeast to where Jephthah was. They said to Jephthah, "You should not have gone to fight the Ammonites without asking us to help you. We will burn down your house with you inside it!"

²Jephthah replied to them, "My people and I were in a big fight with the Ammonites. I called for you to help me against them, but you did not come. ³When I saw that you would not help me, I risked my own life and led my men against the Ammonites. Yahweh helped me defeat them. So you should not have come to fight against me today!"

⁴The Ephraimites insulted the Gileadites. They said, "You Gileadites are just runaway people from Ephraim. You live between Ephraim and Manasseh." {Because the Ephraimites insulted them,} Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead. They fought against the men of Ephraim and defeated them. ⁵The men of Gilead blocked the places where people could cross the Jordan River. They did this to stop the Ephraimites from escaping. Some of the soldiers from Ephraim tried to cross the river. The men of Gilead asked everyone who wanted to cross, "Are you from the tribe of Ephraim?" If a man said "No," ⁶the men of Gilead would tell him, "Say the word 'Shibboleth.'" The Ephraimites could not pronounce that word correctly. They would say "Sibboleth" instead. When they said that, the men of Gilead knew they were from Ephraim. Then they would catch them and kill them at the river crossing. At that time they killed 42,000 people from the tribe of Ephraim. ⁷Jephthah, who came from the region of Gilead, led the people of Israel for six years. Then he died. People buried him in one of the towns of Gilead.

⁸After Jephthah died, a man whose name was Ibzan became the next leader of Israel. Ibzan was from the town of Bethlehem. ⁹Ibzan had 30 sons and 30 daughters. He let all his daughters marry men from other clans. He brought

in 30 young women from other clans to marry his sons. Ibzan led Israel for seven years. ¹⁰Then Ibzan died, and people buried him in the town of Bethlehem.

¹¹After Ibzan died, a man whose name was Elon became the next leader of Israel. Elon was from the tribe of Zebulun. He led Israel for ten years. ¹²Then Elon the Zebulunite died. People buried him in the town of Aijalon. That town was in the territory that belonged to the tribe of Zebulun.

¹³After Elon died, a man whose name was Abdon became the next leader of Israel. Abdon was the son of Hillel. He came from the town of Pirathon. ¹⁴Abdon had 40 sons and 30 grandsons. He was rich enough to buy donkeys for all of them to ride. Abdon led Israel for eight years. ¹⁵Then Abdon son of Hillel died, and people buried him in his home town of Pirathon. This town was in the territory that belonged to the tribe of Ephraim. It was in the hill country where the Amalekite people used to live.

Chapter 13

¹The Israelites again did what Yahweh had said was wicked. So Yahweh allowed the Philistines to rule over them for 40 years.

²There was a man whose name was Manoah who lived in the town of Zorah. He belonged to the tribe of Dan. His wife could not have children. ³One day, an angel representing Yahweh appeared to Manoah's wife. The angel told her, "Please pay attention to this. You have not been able to have children. But you will soon become pregnant and have a son. ⁴Please make sure that from now until he is born, you do not drink any wine or beer. Also, do not eat any food that God has said is unclean. ⁵You must do this because you are going to become pregnant and have a son {who must not drink or eat these things}. You must dedicate him to God as a Nazirite as soon as you give birth to him. Therefore you must never cut his hair. He will begin to stop the Philistines from ruling the Israelites."

⁶The woman ran and told her husband, "A man from God came to me. He looked like an angel from God. Looking at him made me afraid. I did not ask where he came from, and he did not tell me his name. ⁷But he told me, 'Pay attention to this. You will become pregnant and have a son. From now until he is born, do not drink any wine or beer. Do not eat any food that God has said is unclean. You must do this because you are to dedicate your son to God as a Nazirite as soon as you give birth to him. He must continue to be a Nazirite for his entire life.'"

⁸Then Manoah prayed to Yahweh, "Please, Lord, let the man you sent who looked like an angel come back to us. We want him to teach us how to raise the son my wife will have."

⁹God did what Manoah asked. The angel representing God came again to the woman while she was out working in the field. But her husband Manoah was not with her. ¹⁰The woman ran quickly and told her husband, "Listen to this! The man who appeared to me the other day has come back!"

¹¹Manoah went out with his wife right away. When he came to the man, he asked him, "Are you the one who talked to my wife?" The man replied, "Yes, I am."

¹²Manoah asked him, "When what you have said comes true, what rules should the boy follow? What work should he do?"

¹³The angel representing Yahweh said to Manoah, "Your wife must be careful to do everything I told her. ¹⁴She must not eat any grapes or raisins or drink grape juice. She must not drink any wine or beer. And she must not eat any food that God has said is unclean. She must obey everything I have told her."

¹⁵Manoah said to the angel, "Please stay here for a while. We would like to prepare a young goat for you to eat."

¹⁶The angel replied, "All right, I will stay, but I will not eat a meal. If you want to prepare something, you should offer it as a burnt offering to Yahweh." Now Manoah did not realize that this was an angel representing Yahweh.

¹⁷Then Manoah asked the angel, "What is your name? We want to honor you when what you have said comes true."

¹⁸The angel told him, "You should not ask me my name. It is a mysterious name that I do not tell other people."

¹⁹Then Manoah took a young goat and a grain offering and offered them on a rock to Yahweh. As Manoah and his wife were watching, the angel did something amazing. ²⁰As the flame went up from the altar toward the sky, the angel went up in the flame. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they knelt down and put their faces to the ground {as an act of humble worship}. ²¹The angel did not appear to Manoah and his wife again. Then Manoah realized that the angel had been representing Yahweh.

²²Manoah said to his wife, "We have seen God, so we are going to die!"

²³But his wife said to him, "If Yahweh had wanted to kill us, he would not have accepted our burnt offering and grain offering {to show that he is pleased with us}. He also would not have done this remarkable sign for us. And he would not have told us that we were going to have a baby even before I conceived him and gave birth to him."

²⁴Then the woman did have a son{, just as the angel had said}. She named him Samson. As the boy was growing up, Yahweh did good things for him {to show that he was going to use him to help the Israelites}. ²⁵Samson went to live in the town of Mahaneh Dan, between the towns of Zorah and Eshtaol. There the Spirit of Yahweh began to make him want to stop the Philistines from ruling the Israelites.

Chapter 14

¹Samson went to the town of Timnah. There he saw a young Philistine woman. ²Samson went back home and told his parents, "I saw a young Philistine woman in Timnah. I want you to arrange for me to marry her."

³His parents said to him, "There are many young women in our own tribe of Dan and among our people of Israel. You can marry one of them. You should not marry someone from a people group that does not worship Yahweh."

But Samson told his father, "No, I like her very much, and so I want you to arrange for me to marry her." ⁴His parents did not know that Yahweh wanted this to happen. Yahweh was looking for a way to act against the Philistines because they were oppressing Israel at that time. ⁵Samson went to Timnah with his parents. As they came near the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion attacked Samson {as he was walking alone}. ⁶The Spirit of Yahweh gave Samson great strength. He ripped the lion apart with his bare hands as easily as if it had been a young goat. But he did not tell his parents what he had done. ⁷When they arrived in Timnah, Samson talked with the young woman, and he liked her very much. {So his father made arrangements for the wedding.}

⁸Later, Samson went back to marry her. On the way, he went to look at the dead lion. He saw that a swarm of bees had made a nest in the lion's body and produced some honey. ⁹Samson scooped out some of the honey with his hands. He ate some as he walked along. When he came to his parents, he gave them some, and they ate it too. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the lion's body.

¹⁰Samson's father went to arrange the marriage with the woman's family. Samson gave a feast for the young men in that area. That was what young men did when they married someone. ¹¹The family of the woman saw that Samson had not brought any other young men with him. So they had 30 of their own young men accompany him at the feast.

¹²Samson said to them, "Let me tell you a riddle. If you can answer it during the seven days of the feast, I will give you 30 linen garments and 30 changes of clothes. ¹³But if you can not answer it, then you must give me 30 linen garments and 30 changes of clothes." They told him, "{We agree.} Tell us your riddle, and we will try to solve it."

¹⁴He said to them,

"Something to eat came out of something that eats.

Something sweet came out of something strong."

They tried for three days to solve the riddle, but they could not.

¹⁵On the last day of the feast, they said to Samson's bride, "Get the answer to the riddle for us from your bridegroom. If you do not, we will burn you and your family to death. We did not come to this feast to become poor!"

¹⁶So Samson's bride went to him and started crying. She shouted, "You hate me! You do not love me! You told a riddle to my relatives, but you did not tell me the answer."

Samson said to her, "I have not even told the answer to my parents. So I am not going to tell you." ¹⁷But she kept crying for the rest of the feast. Finally, as it was about to end, he told her the answer to the riddle because she had kept bothering him. She went and told the answer to the Philistine young men.

¹⁸Before sunset on the last day of the feast, the Philistine guests said to Samson,

"The sweet thing was honey,
and the strong thing was a lion!"

Samson said to them, "You must have gotten the answer from my bride! Otherwise, you could not have solved my riddle!"

¹⁹Then the Spirit of Yahweh gave Samson great strength. He went to the city of Ashkelon and killed 30 men there. He took their clothes and gave them to the men who had answered his riddle. But he was very angry about what had happened. He went back to his father's house without marrying the woman. ²⁰So her father had her marry instead the Philistine young man who had been a special helper to Samson at the wedding feast.

Chapter 15

¹Some time later, during the wheat harvest, Samson visited the woman he was supposed to marry. He brought a young goat as a gift. He told her father that he wanted to sleep with her {to make their marriage official}. But her father would not let him do that.

²Her father told him, "I honestly thought that you hated her. So I had her marry the young man who was your helper at the wedding feast. But her younger sister is even prettier. You can marry her instead."

³Samson refused, and he said to everyone who was listening, "Now I have a good reason to hurt the Philistines!"

⁴Then Samson went out into the fields and caught 300 foxes. He tied their tails together in pairs. He got some torches, and he put a torch between each pair of tails. ⁵He lit the torches and let the foxes run through the Philistines' fields. The fire burned the grain they had harvested and the grain that was still in the fields. It also burned their olive trees.

⁶The Philistine leaders asked, "Who did this?" Someone told them, "Samson did it. He was supposed to marry the daughter of a man who lived in the town of Timnah. But that man had his daughter marry Samson's best man instead." In revenge, the Philistines went and killed Samson's fiancée and her father by burning them.

⁷Samson found out that they had done that. He told them, "Because you killed my bride and her father, I am going to avenge their deaths. But I will do no more than that." ⁸Samson attacked the Philistines furiously and killed many of them. Then he went and hid in a cave in the rock of Etam.

⁹Then many Philistine soldiers came and set up camp in the territory of Judah. There were so many of them that their camp covered a large area near the town that people later called Lehi. ¹⁰The men of Judah asked them, "Why have you come to fight us?"

The Philistines answered, "We have come to capture Samson. He killed many of us, and so we are going to kill him."

¹¹Then 3,000 men from Judah went to the cave in the rock of Etam where Samson was hiding. They said to Samson, "The Philistines rule over us. You should have known not to upset them. You have caused much trouble for us."

Samson answered, "They killed my fiancée and her father, so I killed some of them."

¹²The men of Judah told Samson, "We have come to tie you up. We are going to give you to the Philistines."

Samson said to them, "Promise me that you will not kill me yourselves."

¹³They answered, "We will only tie you up and give you to the Philistines. We will not kill you." So they tied him with two new ropes and led him away from the rock. ¹⁴When Samson came to the town of Lehi, the Philistines came toward him shouting. Then the Spirit of Yahweh gave Samson great strength. His arms became so strong that he was able to break the rope around them as if it were weak thread. He also easily broke the rope that was around his hands. ¹⁵Then Samson saw a donkey's jawbone lying on the ground. It was new, so it was hard. He picked it up and used it to kill 1,000 men. ¹⁶Then Samson made up this poem:

"With a donkey's jawbone,

I have made piles of bodies.

With a donkey's jawbone,

I have killed 1,000 men."

¹⁷After Samson finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone. He named that place Ramath Lehi.

¹⁸Samson was very thirsty. He called out to Yahweh, "You have given me this great victory. But now I am afraid that I will die of thirst. Then the Philistines, who do not worship you, will take my body and treat it shamefully!" ¹⁹Then God split open a hollow place in Lehi. Water came out of it. When Samson drank some of that water, he felt strong again. So he named that spring En Hakkore. It is still in Lehi today.

²⁰Samson was the leader of Israel for 20 years. But during that time, the Philistines were in control of the land of Israel.

Chapter 16

¹Samson later went to the city of Gaza. He saw a prostitute there, and he had sexual relations with her {and then stayed in her room}. ²People told the leaders of the Gazites, "Samson has come inside our city!" So the leaders sent men to surround the place where Samson was. They waited there secretly all night. The leaders also put guards at the city gate. But they did not try to capture Samson that night. They decided that once day came, {they would be able to see clearly} to catch him and kill him. ³But Samson did not stay where he was all night. At midnight, he got up. He went to the city gate {to leave the city, but he found that it was barred shut}. So he lifted the entire gate up out of the ground, the doors and their posts and the bar. He carried all of this on his shoulders uphill {for many miles,} all the way to the top of the hill near the town of Hebron. ⁴Later Samson fell in love with a woman who lived in the Valley of Sorek. Her name was Delilah. ⁵The Philistine leaders came to her and said, "See if you can get Samson to tell you what makes him so strong. See if you can find out how we can capture him and tie him up so that he cannot get away. If you do that, each of us will give you 1,100 pieces of silver." ⁶So Delilah told Samson, "I want you to explain to me what makes you so strong. Tell me how anyone could ever tie you up to capture you." ⁷Samson replied, "If someone ties me with seven new bowstrings, ones that are not dry yet, I will have only the strength of an ordinary person." ⁸So {Delilah told this to the Philistine leaders, and} they brought her seven new bowstrings. {When Samson fell asleep,} she used them to tie him up. ⁹Some men were hiding in one of the other rooms in her house {to capture Samson when they were sure that the bowstrings would restrain him}. Delilah

called out, "Samson! The Philistines have come here to capture you!" But Samson {woke up and} snapped the bowstrings as easily as fire burns through string. So the Philistines did not find out what made Samson so strong.

¹⁰Then Delilah said to Samson, "Now listen, you made up a story to trick me! Now tell me how someone can really tie you up securely." ¹¹Samson replied, "If someone actually ties me up with new ropes, ones that no one has used for anything else, then I will have only the strength of an ordinary person."

¹²So Delilah {once again told the Philistine leaders what Samson had said. She} got some new ropes, and she had men hide in one of the rooms in her house. {When Samson fell asleep,} she tied him up with the ropes. Then she called out, "Samson! The Philistines have come to capture you!" But Samson {woke up and} snapped the ropes off his arms as easily as if they had been threads.

¹³Then Delilah told Samson, "You made up another story to trick me! Now tell me how someone can really tie you up securely." Samson replied, "You have a loom here with threads going in one direction. If you weave the seven braids of my hair into those threads in the other direction, {as if you were making fabric,} then I will have only the strength of an ordinary person."

¹⁴So Delilah {once again told the Philistine leaders what Samson had said, and she had men hide in one of the rooms in her house. Then she} used a shuttle to weave the seven braids of Samson's hair in and out of the threads she had on her loom. Then she called out, "Samson! The Philistines have come to capture you!" When Samson woke up, his hair was still in the shuttle. But he pulled it right out of the threads on the loom.

¹⁵After this, Delilah said to him, "You say that you love me, but I do not believe that you do, because you have not told me the truth about yourself. You have tricked me three times and you have not really told me what makes you so strong!" ¹⁶Day after day she nagged him relentlessly to tell her his secret. He felt as if he was going to die from her nagging.

¹⁷So finally Samson told her the whole truth. He told her, "My parents dedicated me to God as a Nazirite on the day I was born. Because of that, no one has ever cut my hair. If someone did shave the hair off my head, then I would lose my great strength. I would have only the strength of an ordinary person." ¹⁸Delilah realized that this time he had told her the whole truth. So she sent someone to get the Philistine leaders. She told them, "Come back one more time, because Samson has finally told me the secret of his strength."

So the Philistine leaders came back to her house and brought the money they had promised to give her. ¹⁹Then she got Samson to fall deeply asleep. Then she called one of the Philistine men to come and cut off Samson's hair. This would enable the Philistines to capture him, because he would lose his great strength.

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

He woke up and thought, "I will be able to do whatever I need to do to get away from them, just as I did the other times!" But he did not realize that Yahweh was no longer helping him. ²¹Instead, the Philistine men captured him. They blinded him by gouging out both of his eyes {so that he could no longer attack any of them}. Then they took him to Gaza. They put him in prison there and put bronze chains on him {so he could not escape}. They made him turn a large millstone to grind grain every day. ²²But his hair started to grow again after the man had cut it. ²³Then the Philistine leaders had a big celebration. They offered many sacrifices to their god Dagon. They praised him, saying, "Our god has enabled us to capture Samson, who did so many things to harm us!" ²⁴When the other people at the festival saw Samson, they also praised their god Dagon, saying, "Samson harmed us greatly. He killed many of our soldiers and ruined many of our crops, but our god Dagon has enabled us to capture him!" ²⁵The people drank a lot of wine and began to become drunk. Then they shouted, "Get Samson out of the prison! Bring him here so we can ridicule him!"

So they brought Samson from the prison and made him stand {in the center of the temple,} between the pillars that supported the roof. The people ridiculed him. ²⁶Samson said to the servant who was leading him by the hand {because he was blind}, "I want to rest. Place my hands against the two pillars that support the roof so that I can lean against them." ²⁷All the Philistine leaders were in the temple, along with a great crowd of men and women.

There were about 3,000 people on the roof, looking at Samson and ridiculing him. ²⁸Samson prayed to Yahweh and said, "Lord Yahweh, please think about me again! Please, God, give me strength just once more so that I can take revenge on the Philistines for gouging out my eyes!" ²⁹Then Samson put his right hand on one of the central pillars of the temple, and he put his left hand on the other one. He pushed hard against both pillars. ³⁰Then Samson shouted, "I am going to kill all these Philistines, even though I have to die myself!" He pushed on the pillars as hard as he could, and he broke them and the temple collapsed. This killed the Philistine leaders and all the other people who were in the temple. So Samson killed more people when he died than he had killed while he was alive.

³¹Later his brothers and other relatives traveled from Zorah to Gaza to get his body. They took it back home and

buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol, at the place where people had previously buried his father Manoah. Samson had led Israel for 20 years.

Chapter 17

¹There was a man whose name was Micah who lived in the hilly area that belongs to the tribe of Ephraim. ²One day he said to his mother, "Someone stole 1, 100 pieces of silver from your house. I heard you ask Yahweh to make bad things happen to whoever did that. I confess that I took that silver, and I still have it." His mother replied, "My son, may Yahweh do good things for you {because you admitted this}!" ³Micah gave the 1,100 pieces of silver back to his mother. Then she said, "I am dedicating some of this silver to Yahweh. I am giving it to you, my son, so that you can have someone mold a figure from it. I will give you enough silver to do that." ⁴When Micah gave the silver pieces back to his mother, she took 200 of them and gave them to a metal worker. That man made a molded figure with the silver. Then he gave the figure to Micah. Micah kept it in his home. ⁵Micah made a shrine in which he worshiped idols. He made the kind of vest that priests wear. He also made some small, personal idols. Micah appointed one of his sons to be his priest at this shrine. ⁶At that time, Israel did not have a king, so everyone did what they thought they should do. ⁷There was a young man who had been living in the town of Bethlehem where people from the tribe of Judah live. He belonged to the tribe of Levi, but he had been living temporarily in the territory that Joshua had assigned to the tribe of Judah. ⁸Then he left Bethlehem to look for another place to live. As he was looking, he came to Micah's house in the hilly area that belongs to the tribe of Ephraim. ⁹Micah asked him, "Where are you from?"

He replied, "I have come from Bethlehem in the territory of Judah. I belong to the tribe of Levi, and I am looking for a new place to live for a while." ¹⁰Micah told him, "You may live in my house with me. You can advise me and be my priest. Each year I will give to you ten pieces of silver and some new clothes. I will also provide food for you." So the Levite stayed there. ¹¹The Levite agreed to live with Micah. He became like one of his own sons. ¹²Micah appointed the Levite to be his priest, and he lived on Micah's property. ¹³Then Micah said, "Now I know that Yahweh will do good things for me, because I have a Levite as my priest."

Chapter 18

¹At that time the Israelites had no king.

And at that time people of the tribe of Dan wanted more land where they could live. The other Israelite tribes had been able to occupy the territories that their leaders had assigned to them. But the tribe of Dan had not yet been able to occupy all of their territory. ²So the Danites chose five strong soldiers from their tribe to look carefully for more land where they could live. These men lived in the part of their territory that the tribe had been able to occupy, in the cities of Zorah and Eshtaol. When the tribe sent them out to explore the land, the men went to the hilly area where the people of the tribe of Ephraim live. They stayed overnight in the area where Micah lived. ³Since they were close to his house, they could hear the people there talking. They recognized from the way he spoke that the young Levite was from the southern part of Israel, as they were. So they went and asked him, "How did you come here? What are your duties here? How do you support yourself?" ⁴He answered, "Let me explain exactly what Micah has done for me. He has given me the job of being his priest." ⁵So they said to him, "Please ask God to tell us whether we will succeed in what we are trying to do on this journey." ⁶The young man replied, "You should not worry. Yahweh will make you successful in what you are trying to do on your journey." ⁷Then the five men left. They came to the city of Laish, and they saw that the people there were not warlike. Instead, they engaged in trading, as the people of the city of Sidon do. The people there thought that they were safe. No ruler was controlling them. Their city was far from Sidon, and they were not part of a defensive league of cities. ⁸When those five men returned to their tribe in Zorah and Eshtaol, the other Danites asked them "What do you have to report?" ⁹They replied, "We have found some land, and we can assure you that it is very good. So we should go and attack the people who live there. We should not stay here and do nothing. We should go right away and take possession of that land!" ¹⁰When

you get there, you will find that the people there are not expecting anyone to attack them. There is plenty of land, and it has everything that we will need. {We should certainly go there,} because God will enable us to conquer that land.” ¹¹So 600 men from the tribe of Dan left Zorah and Eshtaol. They brought their weapons with them {so they could attack the people of Laish}. ¹²On their way, they set up their tents near the city of Kiriath Jearim in the area where the tribe of Judah lives. That is why people call the area west of Kiriath Jearim Mahaneh Dan. People still call it that now. ¹³From there, they went to the hilly area where the people of the tribe of Ephraim live. And they arrived at Micah’s house. ¹⁴The five men who had explored the land near Laish said to their fellow Danites, “We want to inform you that in one of these houses, there is a sacred vest, several household idols, and a silver molded figure. Think about the advantages of having those things for ourselves.” ¹⁵So they interrupted their journey and went to the house on Micah’s property where the young Levite lived. They told him they hoped he was doing well. ¹⁶The 600 soldiers from the tribe of Dan stood outside the gate to the compound, holding their weapons. ¹⁷The five men who had explored the land went into the house where Micah himself lived. They took the sacred vest, the household idols, and the silver molded figure. They made the priest go out and stand outside the gate with the 600 soldiers who were holding weapons. ¹⁸He saw them bringing out the sacred vest, the household idols, and the silver molded figure from Micah’s house. The priest told them it was wrong to take those things. ¹⁹They replied, “Do not object. Just come quietly with us and advise us and be our priest. It is certainly better for you to be the priest for a whole tribe of Israelites than to stay here and be the priest just for one man’s family and servants.” ²⁰The priest liked what they were suggesting. So he took the sacred vest, the household idols, and the silver molded figure and he left with the Danites. ²¹When they left, the soldiers had their children and cattle walk in front of them. They also had the animals that were carrying their baggage{, including the items they had taken from Micah,} walk in front of them. {That was to protect them from an attack from the rear.} ²²Micah gathered together the men who lived near him and they formed an army. Although the Danites had gotten some distance away by the time they started pursuing them, they were able to catch up with them. ²³Micah and his men shouted at the men of the tribe of Dan. They turned around and asked Micah, “Why have you come after us with this army?” ²⁴Micah replied, “You took away my own silver idols and my priest! Those were the things I valued the most. So you should not be asking me why I have come after you with an army.” ²⁵The men from the tribe of Dan replied, “You had better not say anything further about this to us. Otherwise some of our men will become angry and attack you, and they would kill you and your relatives and servants!” ²⁶Then the men from the tribe of Dan continued walking. Micah realized that those soldiers would defeat him and his neighbors if they fought. So he turned around and went home. ²⁷The men of the tribe of Dan kept Micah’s household idols and his priest, and they continued traveling to Laish. They attacked the people who were living there, who had thought that they were safe. They killed all of them, and then they burned everything in the city. ²⁸There was no group of people to rescue the people of Laish. The city was far from Sidon, so the people who lived there could not help them. 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 lived there themselves. 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. But previously the name of the city had been Laish. ³⁰The people of the tribe of Dan began to worship the silver molded figure that had belonged to Micah. They appointed Jonathan son of Gershom, the grandson of Moses, to be their priest. His descendants continued to be their priests until the Assyrians captured the Israelites who lived in that area and took them away to other countries. ³¹Even though the sacred tent was in Shiloh at this time {and Israelites were supposed to worship there}, the people of the tribe of Dan worshiped the silver molded figure that had belonged to Micah.

Chapter 19

¹At that time the Israelites had no king.

There was a Levite who lived in a remote place in the hilly area where the people of the tribe of Ephraim live. He had married a woman as a secondary wife. She was from the city whose name is Bethlehem that is in the area where the tribe of Judah lives. ²But his secondary wife was unfaithful to him, and then she left him and returned to her father’s house in Bethlehem in Judah. She kept living there for four months. ³Then her husband went to Bethlehem to try to persuade her to live with him again. He brought his servant and two donkeys with him. When

he arrived at her father's house, she invited him to come in. When her father saw him, he was happy that he had come. ⁴The woman's father insisted that he stay for a visit. So he stayed there for three days. During that time, he shared meals with his host and slept in his house. ⁵On the fourth day, they all got up early in the morning because the Levite wanted to travel back home that day. But his wife's father said to him, "You should really have something to eat before you go {so that you are not hungry on your journey}." ⁶So the two men had a meal together. Then the wife's father said to the Levite, "Please agree to stay another night. Relax and have a good time." ⁷The Levite wanted to leave, but his wife's father finally persuaded him to stay again that night. ⁸On the fifth day, the man got up early and prepared to leave. But the woman's father said to him once again, "You should have something to eat." So the two men once again had a meal together, and they did not finish until the end of the day. ⁹Then the Levite got up to leave with his wife and his servant. But the woman's father said, "Please do not leave. See how the sun is getting lower in the sky. See how dark it is getting already. You should stay here tonight and have a good time. Then you can leave on your journey tomorrow morning and get all the way home {in one day}." ¹⁰But the Levite did not want to stay for another night. So he put saddles on his two donkeys and left with his wife {and his servant}. They traveled as far as the city of Jebus, which people now call Jerusalem. ¹¹It was late in the afternoon by the time they got to Jebus. So the servant said to his master, "I know that the Jebusite people group lives in this city, but I think we need to stop and stay here for the night." ¹²But his master told him, "No, it would not be good for us to stay here where foreign people live. There are no Israelite people here. We should go on to the city of Gibeah." ¹³He told his servant, "Instead of staying here, we can go a little farther to a city where Israelites live. We could stay for the night in either Gibeah or Ramah." ¹⁴So they continued walking. By the time they reached Gibeah, where people from the tribe of Benjamin live, the sun was setting. ¹⁵So they stopped there in Gibeah to stay for the night. They went into the public square of that city and sat down {as travelers did who were hoping that someone would give them a place to stay}. But no one who went through the square invited them to stay in his house for the night. ¹⁶But then an old man came by. He had been out working in the fields all day. He was from the hilly area where the people of the tribe of Ephraim live. But at that time, he was living in Gibeah. He did not belong to the tribe of Benjamin as most of the people there did. ¹⁷When he saw the Levite in the open area, he realized that he was traveling and did not have a place to stay in that city. So the old man asked him, "Where have you come from? And where are you going?" ¹⁸The Levite replied, "We are returning from Bethlehem in Judah to my home in the hilly area where the people of the tribe of Ephraim live. I went from there to Bethlehem. However, before we return to my home, we are going to the sacred tent {in Shiloh}. No one here has invited us to stay in their house tonight." ¹⁹{But wanting to be polite and not wanting to impose, the Levite continued,} "However, we have straw and grain to feed our donkeys. And I and my wife and our servant have bread and wine to eat and drink. So we do not need anything else." ²⁰The old man said, "I will take care of you. I will provide you with a place to stay. I do not want you to have to spend the night in the open square." ²¹Then the old man took them to his house. He gave food to their donkeys. He gave the man and the woman and the servant water so they could wash the dust from the road off their feet. Then the old man served them a meal. ²²While they were having a good time together, a group of very wicked men from that city surrounded the house and started to bang on the door. They shouted to the old man whose house it was, "Bring out the man who has come to your house! We are all going to rape him!" ²³The old man whose house it was went outside to talk to them. He told them, "Please do not commit such a crime against this man! We are all members of the same community. I have offered this man shelter and safety in my home. You should {respect that and} not do such a terrible thing to him!" ²⁴Listen, I have an unmarried daughter living with me in my home. This man's wife is also here. I will bring them out to you, and you can have sex with them and do whatever you want to them. But do not do such a terrible thing to this man!" ²⁵But the men did not agree to do what he had said. So the man pushed his wife outside the house where those men were. They forced her to have sex with them. They abused her all night long. At dawn, they finally let her go. ²⁶The sun was rising when the woman got back to the old man's house, where her husband was staying. But she collapsed at the doorway and remained there until it became light. ²⁷That morning, her husband got up and unlocked the doors and left the house to continue his journey. But he saw his wife lying there at the doorway of the house. Her hands were on the doorsill. ²⁸He said to her, "Come on, we can go now." But she did not answer{, because she was dead}. He put her body on one of the donkeys, and he {and his servant} traveled back to his home. ²⁹When he arrived at his home, he took a knife and cut his wife's body into twelve pieces. Then he sent one piece into the territory of each of the tribes of Israel{, along with a messenger to tell what had happened}. ³⁰Then everyone who saw a piece of the body {and

heard the message} said, "Nothing like this has happened since our ancestors came here from Egypt! No one has heard of such a terrible thing! We all need to think carefully about this, and people should say what they think we should do in response."

Chapter 20

¹Then many people from throughout Israel traveled to Mizpah so they could meet together there and talk about what to do. They came from as far north as the city of Dan and from as far south as the city of Beersheba. They also came from the region of Gilead east of the Jordan River. They asked Yahweh to be present with them and guide their discussion. ²The leaders who had come from various tribes of Israel met together with all the other Israelite people. There were 400,000 men there who had learned how to fight well on foot with a sword. ³The people of the tribe of Benjamin heard that the other Israelites were meeting in Mizpah. But no one from the tribe of Benjamin joined them there.

The other Israelites who had gathered asked to hear how this horrible crime had happened. ⁴The Levite whose wife the men of Gibeah had murdered spoke up. He said, "My wife and I were traveling, and we needed a place to stay for the night. We went to the city whose name is Gibeah that is in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin. ⁵That evening, a gang of men who seem to be able to do whatever they want in that city surrounded the house where we were staying. They wanted to rape me, and they would have killed me afterwards. {I know that because} they raped my wife all night so that she died. ⁶I took her body home and cut it into pieces. Then I sent one piece into the territory of each of the tribes of Israel. I did that because I wanted you all to know about this terrible, wicked thing that those men did right here in Israel. ⁷So now, all you Israelites, talk together here and decide what you should do about this!" ⁸Then all the people stood up together {to show how resolved they were} and said, "None of us will go back to where we live {until we make sure that those men will be punished}! ⁹This is what we must do to the people of Gibeah. First, we will cast lots to choose an army of soldiers to attack them. ¹⁰Then, we will have one tenth of our people get supplies for those soldiers. That way they will have what they need to go to Gibeah in the territory of Benjamin and punish the people who are responsible for doing this terrible thing in the land of Israel." ¹¹And all the Israelite people agreed that they had to punish the people of Gibeah. They would all work together to do that. ¹²The assembly of Israelites also agreed to send messengers throughout the tribe of Benjamin. They told these messengers to say, "Some of your men have done a very wicked thing in your territory! ¹³Those wicked men live in the city of Gibeah. Surrender them to us so that we can execute them. That way we can get rid of the influence that the wicked thing they did is having on the people of Israel."

But the people of the tribe of Benjamin refused to surrender the men as the other Israelites had demanded. ¹⁴The men who lived in other cities in the territory of Benjamin gathered at Gibeah to defend it against the other Israelites when they attacked. ¹⁵When they did that, a total of 26,000 fighting men came from those cities to fight. Another 700 skilled warriors who lived in Gibeah joined them. ¹⁶Among those soldiers there were 700 skilled warriors who were left-handed. They could all sling stones and hit targets with great accuracy. ¹⁷The people of all the tribes of Israel except Benjamin formed an army of 400,000 men. Those men had learned how to fight with a sword. They were all experienced soldiers. ¹⁸Those other Israelites wanted to ask God for advice. So they went to Bethel {where the sacred chest was at that time}. They asked, "Which tribe's soldiers should lead the attack when we go and fight against the tribe of Benjamin?"

Yahweh answered, "The soldiers from the tribe of Judah should lead the attack." ¹⁹So the next morning the Israelite soldiers went and set up a military camp near Gibeah. ²⁰After that, the Israelite soldiers went to fight against the men from the tribe of Benjamin. They got into positions near Gibeah where they could fight a battle. ²¹The soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and fought against them. They killed 22,000 soldiers from Israel in that battle. ²²But the soldiers of Israel did not give up. They got ready to fight the next day in the same battle lines as on the first day. ²³Some of them had gone {to Bethel} and mourned in Yahweh's presence until the end of that day. They had asked Yahweh what they should do. They had said, "Should we fight another battle with the soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin, even though they are Israelites just as we are?" Yahweh had answered, "Yes, attack

them!" ²⁴So the next day the Israelite soldiers once again advanced against the Benjaminite army. ²⁵The soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin came out from Gibeah to fight another battle. They attacked them, and they killed 18,000 more Israelite soldiers who had all learned how to fight well with a sword. ²⁶That afternoon, the soldiers who had survived went to Bethel. All the other Israelites who had come to support the army went with them. They sat there in Yahweh's presence and mourned. They ate nothing that day until the sun set. At the sacred tent the priests made sacrifices for them that they burned completely on the altar, and they also made fellowship sacrifices. ²⁷The people of Israel asked Yahweh to guide them. The sacred chest of God was in Bethel at that time. ²⁸Phinehas son of Eleazar, the grandson of Aaron, was serving as the high priest at the sacred tent at that time. The Israelites asked, "Should we fight another battle with the soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin, even though they are Israelites just as we are? Or should we not fight any more battles?" Yahweh said, "Attack them, because tomorrow I will enable you to defeat them." ²⁹The Israelites had many of their soldiers hide in the fields around Gibeah. ³⁰The other Israelite soldiers advanced against Gibeah for a third time. They stood in their positions for fighting a battle against the Benjaminite army just as they had done on the previous days. ³¹Then the soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin came out of the city to fight against them. The Israelite soldiers retreated so that they would chase them and go away from the city. The Benjaminite soldiers were able to kill some of them as they had done before. They killed them on the roads {that they were using to retreat}. (One of those roads went to Bethel, and the other road went through the countryside to Gibeah.) They killed about 30 Israelite soldiers. ³²The men of the tribe of Benjamin thought, "We are defeating them as we did before!" But the Israelite soldiers had only retreated in order to trick the soldiers from Benjamin into leaving the city and going down the roads. ³³All at once, the soldiers in the main Israelite army stopped running away and came together into battle positions at a place that people call Baal Tamar. The other Israelite soldiers ran out from where they had been hiding in Maareh Gibeah. ³⁴There were 10,000 of those soldiers, and the Israelites had selected them for this mission from throughout their army. They advanced against the Benjaminite soldiers from the direction of the city. There was a very big battle. The soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin did not yet realize that the Israelites were going to defeat them badly. ³⁵Yahweh enabled the Israelite soldiers to defeat the soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin. That day the Israelites killed 25,100 Benjaminites who had all learned how to fight well with a sword. ³⁶Finally the soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin recognized that they were going to lose the battle. {They realized that} the Israelite soldiers had only retreated because they knew they had other soldiers hiding around Gibeah {who would come and attack them from behind}. ³⁷Those soldiers who had been hiding came out and rushed quickly into Gibeah. They killed everyone who lived in the city. ³⁸The main group of Israelite soldiers {knew when to stop fleeing and turn around and attack because they} had arranged for the soldiers who were hiding to give them a signal. They told them to {set the city on fire once they had entered it so that} a great cloud of smoke would rise from it into the sky. ³⁹That was why the main group of Israelite soldiers had fled from the battle. They wanted the soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin to think that they were winning the battle, just as they had before. The soldiers from Benjamin were able to kill about 30 Israelite soldiers. ⁴⁰But then a cloud of smoke began to rise up from the city because the Israelite soldiers who had been hiding were setting fires as a signal. The soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin turned around and saw a great cloud of smoke going up into the sky because fires were burning throughout the city. ⁴¹The main group of Israelite men also saw the smoke, and so they turned around {and began to attack the Benjaminites}. The soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin became very afraid, because they realized that they were going to be badly defeated. ⁴²So the soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin tried to run away toward the desolate area outside the city to escape from the Israelite soldiers. But they were not able to escape, because the rest of the Israelite soldiers were coming at them from the other direction. They were caught between the two groups. ⁴³The Israelite soldiers surrounded many of the soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin, chasing them into an area east of Gibeah. The Israelite soldiers easily killed many of them there. ⁴⁴The Israelites killed 18,000 soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin who were all great warriors. ⁴⁵Those who were still alive tried to run to the rock of Rimmon in a desolate area {where they could protect themselves}. But the Israelite soldiers killed 5,000 more soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin on the roads as they were trying to run away. The Israelites chased other soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin who were fleeing towards the city of Gidom. The Israelites killed 2,000 of them. ⁴⁶Altogether 25,000 soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin who had learned how to fight well with a sword died that day. They were all great warriors. ⁴⁷But 600 soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin escaped into a desolate area. They got safely to the rock of Rimmon, and they stayed there for four months. ⁴⁸Then the Israelite soldiers went throughout the territory that belonged to the tribe of Benjamin and

slaughtered everyone. They killed all the people in each city. They also killed all the animals and destroyed everything else that was in those cities. They also burned all of the cities in that territory to the ground.

Chapter 21

¹(When the Israelites gathered at Mizpah before they started to fight the tribe of Benjamin, all of the men made a solemn promise. They had declared, "None of us will ever allow one of our daughters to marry a man from the tribe of Benjamin!") ²{After destroying the people, animals, and property throughout the territory of Benjamin,} the Israelites went to Bethel where God's sacred tent was. They sat down and wept very loudly and sadly all day. ³They kept saying, "Yahweh, you are the God of us Israelite people. But one of our Israelite tribes does not exist anymore! This should not have happened to us!" ⁴Early the next morning, the people built an altar at Bethel. The priests made sacrifices for them that they burned completely on the altar, and they also made fellowship sacrifices. ⁵Then the Israelites started asking whether the people of any city in one of the tribes of Israel had not come when they met to ask Yahweh for guidance. They were asking this because they had all sworn very solemnly that they would kill any group that did not come when they met with Yahweh at Mizpah. ⁶The Israelites {were asking about this because they} felt sorry for their fellow Israelites from the tribe of Benjamin. They said, "Now one of our Israelite tribes no longer exists. ⁷Let us think about what we can do to make sure that the surviving men from the tribe of Benjamin have wives. {This is a difficult problem, because} all of us here made a solemn promise to Yahweh that we would not allow any of our daughters to marry a man from the tribe of Benjamin." ⁸That is why the people were asking whether the people from any city in one of the tribes of Israel had not sent anyone to Mizpah when the Israelites met with Yahweh there. They thought they recalled that no one had come from the city of Jabesh Gilead to the meeting at Mizpah. ⁹So they checked everyone who was there in Bethel, and they found that no one who lived in the city of Jabesh Gilead was there. {This seemed to prove that none of them had come to Mizpah.} ¹⁰So all the Israelites chose 12,000 experienced soldiers and gave them orders to go and kill all of the people who lived in Jabesh Gilead, including the women and the children. ¹¹They told those soldiers: "This is what we want you to do: kill all of the men in Jabesh Gilead. You must also kill every married woman. {But do not kill the unmarried women.}" ¹²{So those soldiers went to Jabesh Gilead and killed all the men, married women, and children.} But in that city they found 400 young women there who had never been married. So they brought them to Shiloh{, where they had all gone by then}. That city was across the river from the region where the city of Jabesh Gilead was. ¹³Then all the Israelites who had gathered sent a message to the men from the tribe of Benjamin who had gone to the rock of Rimmon {where they could protect themselves}. The Israelites said that they would not try to kill them. ¹⁴So the Benjaminites then came back from the rock of Rimmon. The Israelites allowed them to marry the young women from Jabesh Gilead whom they had not killed. But {there were only 400 women.} That was not enough women for those 600 men. ¹⁵So the Israelites still felt sorry for the men of the tribe of Benjamin. It seemed that one of the Israelite tribes would not exist any more because Yahweh had told the other Israelites to fight against that tribe. ¹⁶The Israelite leaders said, "We have killed all the women of the tribe of Benjamin. So where can we get women to be wives of the men who are still alive?" ¹⁷They continued, "These surviving Benjaminites must have wives {who will give birth to children so that their family lines can continue}. Otherwise, the tribe of Benjamin will no longer exist in Israel. ¹⁸But we Israelites all solemnly asked Yahweh to curse anyone who gave one of his daughters to any man of the tribe of Benjamin as a wife. So we cannot allow our daughters to marry these men." ¹⁹Then they had an idea. They remembered, "Every year there is a festival to honor Yahweh at Shiloh." (That city is north of Bethel and east of the road that extends from Bethel to Shechem. It is south of the city of Lebonah.) ²⁰So the Israelite leaders told the surviving men of the tribe of Benjamin {who did not yet have wives}, "When it is the time for that festival, go to Shiloh and hide in the vineyards around the city. ²¹Keep watching for the young women to come out of Shiloh to dance. When they come out, run out from the vineyards. Each of you men can seize one of the young women of Shiloh. Then you can all return to your homes in the territory of Benjamin with those women as your wives. ²²If their fathers or brothers come to us and demand that you give the women back, we will say to them, 'Please allow us to give your young women to the men of Benjamin as wives. Do this because, when we fought them, we did not leave any women alive who could be their wives. And you are not giving your young women now to the men from the tribe of Benjamin as wives. They stole them. So you will not be guilty of breaking the oath that we all swore not to give any of our daughters as a wife to any of them.'" ²³So that is what the men of

the tribe of Benjamin did. They went to Shiloh at the time of the festival. When the young women came out of the city to dance, each man grabbed one of them and took her away and married her. Then they took their wives back to the land that the Israelite leaders had assigned to them. They rebuilt their cities that the other Israelites had burned down, and they lived there. ²⁴Then the other Israelites left Shiloh and all went back to where their families and tribes lived. They returned to the areas that the Israelite leaders had assigned to their tribes. ²⁵At that time, Israel did not have a king, and everyone did what they thought they should do.

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