

unfoldingWord® Simplified Text

v92

Judges

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Judges

1 After Joshua died, the Israelite people asked Yahweh,
"Which of our tribes should send their soldiers into the
hill country to attack the Canaanites first?"
2 Yahweh 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*."
3 Then 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.
4 So 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. 5 The 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. 6 Adoni-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.
7 Adoni-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.
8 The 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.
9 After 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. 10 The 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
Talmai. The soldiers defeated them.
11 Then 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.) 12 A 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."
13 Caleb 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.
14 Aksah 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?"
15 She 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.
16 The father-in-law of Moses was a Kenite. Some of his
descendants had been living in the area of Jericho, which
people called the City of Palms. 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.
17 The 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."* 18 The soldiers from the
tribes of Judah and Simeon also captured the cities of Gaza,
Ashkelon, and Ekron and all the land around those cities. 19 So
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.
20 The 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. 21 But the tribe of Benjamin could not
force the Jebusites 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.
22 Just 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. 23 They
sent some spies to find out everything they could about Bethel.
(People used to call that city Luz.) 24 The 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*." 25 So 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. 26 That man went to the area where the
Hittites lived. He built a city there and named it Luz. That is
still the name of that city now.
27 There were Canaanites 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. 28 Later, 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. 29 The
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. 30 There 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.
31 There 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. 32 So
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. 33 There 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. 34 The 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. 35 The 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. 36 The land where the Amorites lived extended from
the Ascent of Akrabbim *toward the west* beyond Sela, up into
the hill country.

2 An 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. 2 But 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*. 3 So 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*.”

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

6 After 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. 7 The 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.

8 Yahweh’s servant Joshua was 110 years old when he died.
Joshua’s father’s name was Nun. 9 The 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.

10 Finally, 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. 11–13 The 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. 14 This 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.
15 Whenever 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.

16 But then Yahweh brought leaders to them. These leaders
rescued the Israelites from the powerful enemies who had
been attacking them. 17 But 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.
18 The 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. 19 But
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.

20 This 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. 21 When 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. 22 Instead, 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.” 23 That 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.

3 The 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. 2 Yahweh did that in order to teach the
new generation of Israelites how to wage war, since they had
no experience fighting battles before. 3 These 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.
4 Yahweh 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. 5 That was
why the Israelites lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the
Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 6 The
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.

7 The 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. 8 This 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. 9 But 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. 10 Yahweh'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*. 11 After that, the land of Israel
was a peaceful place for the next 40 years, until Othniel son
of Kenaz died.

12 Then 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*. 13 Eglon
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 the
City of Palms. 14 Then King Eglon of Moab ruled the Israelites
for 18 years.

15 After 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.
16 Ehud 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. 17 Ehud made sure that King Eglon of Moab received all
of the goods that the Israelites had sent. (Eglon was a very fat
man.) 18 After he had delivered all of the goods, Ehud told the
men who had carried them to go back to Israel. 19 Ehud 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.

20 This 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*. 21 As
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. 22 Ehud 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. 23 Then 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.

24 Then 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." 25 So 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*.

26 The 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.
27 That 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.

28 Ehud 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. 29 At
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. 30 On
that day, the Israelites conquered the people of Moab. After
that, the land of Israel was a peaceful place for the next 80
years.

31 After 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.

4 After Ehud died, the Israelites once again did things that
Yahweh had said were very wicked. 2 A 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.
3 Sisera'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.

4 At 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. 5 She 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. 6 One 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. 7 Sisera 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."
8 Barak told her, "I will only go if you go with me. If you
do not go with me, then I will not go."
9 She 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. 10 Barak 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.
11 Now there was a man whose name was Heber who was a
Kenite. (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.
12 People told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had
assembled an army on Mount Tabor. 13 When 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*.
14 Then 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*. 15 As 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. 16 But 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.
17 But 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*.
18 Jael 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.
19 He 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.
20 He 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.'"
21 Sisera 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.
22 Meanwhile, 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.
23 And that was how God enabled the Israelites that day to
defeat the army of Jabin, one of the kings of the Canaanites.
24 The Israelites had become stronger and stronger, and finally
they completely defeated the army of Jabin, that Canaanite
king.

5 At 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.
3 Even 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.
4 Yahweh, 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.
5 The mountains shook when you came,
just as Mount Sinai shook when you appeared there,
because you are Yahweh,
the God whom we Israelites worship.
6 After 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.
7 Israelites 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.
8 When 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.
9 So I am very thankful for the Israelite leaders
and soldiers who willingly fought against Sisera.
We should all praise Yahweh for them!

10 You 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!
11 Listen 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.
12 Sing energetically, Deborah! Sing from your own vivid recollections!
Now is the time, Barak son of Abinoam, to show the prisoners that your army captured.
13 The 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.
14 Some 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.
15 Leaders 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.
16 They 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.
17 So 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*.
18 But 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.
19 Sisera 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.
20 It 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.
21 The 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.
22 Then 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.'
24 But 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.
25 Although Sisera only asked for some water, Jael gave him some milk.
She brought him some yogurt in the kind of bowl that rulers have.
26 Then*, 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.
27 As 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.
28 Sisera'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?'
29 Some tactful ladies in her household reassured her, and she told herself the same thing they told her:
30 'Sisera 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.

6 But 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. 2 The 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. 3 This 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. 4 They 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. 5 They 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. 6 The people of Midian took almost everything the Israelites owned. So finally the Israelites pleaded for Yahweh to help them.

7 When the Israelites pleaded with Yahweh to help them because of what the people from Midian were doing to them, 8 Yahweh 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. 9 I 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. 10 I 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.'"

11 One 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. 12 The angel representing Yahweh went over to Gideon and told him, "You mighty soldier, Yahweh is helping you!"

13 Gideon 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."

14 Then 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!"

15 Gideon 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!"

16 Yahweh 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."

17 Gideon 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. 18 I 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."

19 So 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.

20 But 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. 21 Then 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. 22 Then 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!*"

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

24 Then 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.

25 Then, 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 worshiping 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. 26 Build 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."

27 Then 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.

28 The 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.

29 The 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.”

30 The 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!”

31 But 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!” 32 And 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.”

33 Soon 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. 34 Then 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. 35 Gideon 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.

36 Then 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. 37 Please 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.” 38 And 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.*

39 Then 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.” 40 And 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.

7 So 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. 2 Yahweh 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. 3 So 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.

4 But 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.”

5 When 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.” 6 Now 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.

7 Then 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.” 8 So 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. 9 The 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. 10 But if you are afraid to attack the Midiantes, then go secretly to their camp with Purah, your armor-bearer. 11 Listen 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. 12 The 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.

13 But 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!”

14 His 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.”

15 When 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!” 16 Gideon 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.

17 Then 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. 18 I 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!'"

19 A 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.* 20 Then 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!" 21 Each 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.

22 While 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. 23 Then 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. 24 Gideon 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.

25 They 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.

8 Then 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.

2 But 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. 3 God 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.

4 Then Gideon and his 300 men came to the Jordan River and crossed it. They were very tired, but they continued to chase their enemies. 5 When 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."

6 But 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."

7 Gideon 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!"

8 Next 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. 9 So 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*!"

10 By 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. 11 Gideon 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. 12 When 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.

13 After 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. 14 Gideon 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. 15 Then 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.'" 16 Then 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. 17 Then Gideon and his men went to the town of Penuel. They tore down the tower and killed men in that town.

18 Then 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."

19 Gideon 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." 20 Then 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.

21 Then 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.
22 Then 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.”
23 But Gideon told them, “No, I will not be your king. My
son will not be your king either. Yahweh is your real king.”
24 But 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.)
25 They 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.
26 The 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. 27 Gideon 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 worshiping only
Yahweh. Gideon and his family had great trouble because of
this.
28 So 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.
29 Then Gideon son of Joash, whom people also called
Jerubbaal, went back home to live there. 30 Gideon had many
full legal wives, and they bore him 70 sons. 31 Gideon also had
a secondary wife in the city of Shechem. She too bore him
a son, and Gideon named him Abimelech. 32 Gideon 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.
33 But 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. 34 The 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. 35 Gideon, whom people also called
Jerubbaal, had done many good things for the Israelites. But
they did not act kindly toward his family.

9 Gideon’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!”
3 So 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. 4 So 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. 5 Abimelech 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. 6 Then 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.
7 When 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!
8 One 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.’
9 But 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.*’
10 So the trees told the fig tree, ‘Then we want you to be
our king!’
11 But 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.*’
12 So the trees told the grapevine, ‘Then we want you to be
our king!’
13 But 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.*’
14 So all of the trees finally told the thornbush, ‘Then we
want you to be our king!’
15 The 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!’”
16 After 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. 17 Remember 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.
18 But 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. 19 Now 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. 20 But 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!"
21 After 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.
22 For the next three years, Abimelech ruled as the king
of the city of Shechem. Many Israelites also accepted him as
their king. 23 Then God made Abimelech and the leaders of
Shechem hostile toward each other. The leaders of Shechem
started plotting against Abimelech. 24 The 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. 25 The 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.
26 Then 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. 27 Then 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. 28 Gaal 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 one of us! *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.
29 If 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.
30 When Zebul, the governor of Shechem, heard Gaal son of
Ebed talking *about Abimelech* this way, he became very angry.
31 But 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. 32 So you and your troops should come here at
night*, when no one will see you,* and hide in the area outside
the city. 33 That 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."
34 So 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.
36 When 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."
37 But 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."
38 Then 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!"
39 So 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*. 40 Abimelech 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. 41 Abimelech 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.
42 Then, 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. 43 So
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. 44 When 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. 45 Abimelech 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.
46 A 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. 47 Somebody told
Abimelech that the commanders of the fortress near Shechem
had all gone inside it. 48 So 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!" 49 So 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.

50 After that, Abimelech and his soldiers went to the town of Thebez*, whose people had also rebelled against him*. They surrounded it and conquered it. 51 But 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. 52 Abimelech 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. 53 But 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.

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

56 In that way, God punished Abimelech for murdering all 70 of his brothers. When Abimelech did that, he did a wicked thing to his father. 57 God 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.

10 After 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. 2 Tola was the leader of the Israelites for 23 years. When he died, his family buried him in Shamir.

3 After Tola died, Jair from the region of Gilead became a leader. He was the leader of the Israelites for 22 years. 4 He 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. 5 When Jair died, his family buried him in the town of Kamon.

6 Once 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 Ammonites and Philistines worshiped. But they did not worship Yahweh at all anymore. 7 So Yahweh became very angry with the Israelites, and he allowed the Philistines and Ammonites to conquer them. 8 For 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. 9 The 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. 10 So 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."

11 Yahweh answered them, saying, "*In the past,* the Egyptians, Amorites, Ammonites, Philistines, 12 Sidonians, Amalekites, and Maonites were treating you badly. You prayed desperately to me, and I rescued you from them. 13 But even after that, you stopped worshiping me. You worshiped other gods instead. So I am not going to keep rescuing you. 14 See whether the gods you are worshiping can rescue you now that you are in trouble again!"

15 But 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!" 16 Then 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.

17 Ammonite soldiers 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. 18 The 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."

11 There 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. 2 Gilead 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." 3 So 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.

4 Some time later, the soldiers of the Ammon people group attacked the people of Israel. 5 The 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*. 6 They said to him, "Come back with us and lead our army. That way we will be able to defeat the Ammonite army."

7 But 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."

8 The 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."

9 Jephthah 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."

10 The 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!" 11 So 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.

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

13 The 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.”

14 But Jephthah sent his messengers back to the Ammonite king. 15 They said to him, “Jephthah told us to tell you: ‘Israel did not take any land that belonged to the Moabites or the Ammonites. 16 Here 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*. 17 From there the Israelites sent messengers to the king of the Edomites. 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. 18 Then 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.

19 Then the leaders of Israel sent a message to the king of the Amorites. 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.” 20 But 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. 21 But 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. 22 Yes, 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.

23 So 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. 24 You 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! 25 You 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*. 26 The 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. 27 So 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.’”

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

29 Then 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. 30 There Jephthah made a solemn promise to Yahweh. He said, “If you will enable my army to defeat the Ammonites, 31 when 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.”

32 Then Jephthah and his soldiers went from Mizpah to attack the Ammonites. Yahweh enabled his army to defeat them. 33 Jephthah 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.

34 When 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. 35 When 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.”

36 His 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.” 37 But 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.”

38 Jephthah 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. 39 After 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. 40 The 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.

12 The 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!"

2 Jephthah 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. 3 When 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!"

4 The 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. 5 The
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," 6 the
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. 7 Jephthah,
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.

8 After Jephthah died, a man whose name was Ibzan became
the next leader of Israel. Ibzan was from the town of Bethlehem.
9 Ibzan 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. 10 Then Ibzan died, and people buried him in the town
of Bethlehem.

11 After 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. 12 Then 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.

13 After 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. 14 Abdon 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. 15 Then 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.

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

2 There 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. 3 One 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. 4 Please
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. 5 You 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."

6 The 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. 7 But 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.'"

8 Then 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."

9 God 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. 10 The woman
ran quickly and told her husband, "Listen to this! The man
who appeared to me the other day has come back!"

11 Manoah 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."

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

13 The angel representing Yahweh said to Manoah, "Your
wife must be careful to do everything I told her. 14 She 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."

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

16 The 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.

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

18 The angel told him, "You should not ask me my name. It
is a mysterious name that I do not tell other people." 19 Then
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. 20 As 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*.
21 The angel did not appear to Manoah and his wife again.
Then Manoah realized that the angel had been representing
Yahweh.

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

23 But 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.”
24 Then 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*. 25 Samson 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.

14 Samson went to the town of Timnah. There he saw
a young Philistine woman. 2 Samson 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.”
3 His 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.” 4 His 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. 5 Samson 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*. 6 The 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. 7 When they arrived in Timnah, Samson talked with the
young woman, and he liked her very much. *So his father made
arrangements for the wedding.*
8 Later, 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.
9 Samson 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.
10 Samson’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. 11 The 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.
12 Samson 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. 13 But 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.”
14 He 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.
15 On 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!”
16 So 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.” 17 But 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.
18 Before 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!”
19 Then 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.
20 So her father had her marry instead the Philistine young
man who had been a special helper to Samson at the wedding
feast.

15 Some 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.
2 Her 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.”
3 Samson refused, and he said to everyone who was listening,
“Now I have a good reason to hurt the Philistines!” 4 Then
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. 5 He 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.
6 The 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.
7 Samson 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.” 8 Samson

attacked the Philistines furiously and killed many of them. Then he went and hid in a cave in the rock of Etam.

9 Then 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. 10 The 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."

11 Then 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."

12 The 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."

13 They 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. 14 When 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. 15 Then 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. 16 Then 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."

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

18 Samson 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!" 19 Then 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.

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

16 Samson 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*. 2 People 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.

3 But 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.

4 Later Samson fell in love with a woman who lived in the Valley of Sorek. Her name was Delilah. 5 The 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."

6 So 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."

7 Samson 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."

8 So *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. 9 Some 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.

10 Then 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."

11 Samson 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."

12 So 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.

13 Then 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." 14 So 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.

15 After 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!" 16 Day after day she nagged him relentlessly to tell her his secret. He felt as if he was going to die from her nagging.

17 So 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."

18 Delilah 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. 19 Then 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.

20 Then 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.

21 Instead, 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. 22 But his hair started to grow again after the man had cut it.

23 Then 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!"

24 When 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!"

25 The 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. 26 Samson 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." 27 All 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. 28 Samson 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!" 29 Then 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. 30 Then 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.

31 Later 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.

17 There was a man whose name was Micah who lived in the hilly area that belongs to the tribe of Ephraim. 2 One 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*!"

3 Micah 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."

4 When 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.

5 Micah 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. 6 At that time, Israel did not have a king, so everyone did what they thought they should do.

7 There 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. 8 Then 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.

9 Micah 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." 10 Micah 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. 11 The Levite agreed to live with Micah. He became like one of his own sons. 12 Micah appointed the Levite to be his priest, and he lived on Micah's property. 13 Then Micah said, "Now I know that Yahweh will do good things for me, because I have a Levite as my priest."

18 At 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. 2 So 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. 3 Since 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?"

4 He answered, "Let me explain exactly what Micah has done for me. He has given me the job of being his priest."

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

6 The young man replied, "You should not worry. Yahweh will make you successful in what you are trying to do on your journey."

7 Then 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.

8 When those five men returned to their tribe in Zorah and Eshtaol, the other Danites asked them "What do you have to report?"

9 They 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! 10 When 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."

11 So 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*. 12 On 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. 13 From there, they went to the hilly area where the people of the tribe of Ephraim live. And they arrived at Micah's house.

14 The 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." 15 So 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. 16 The 600 soldiers from the tribe of Dan stood outside the gate to the compound, holding their weapons. 17 The 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.

18 He 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.

19 They 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." 20 The 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. 21 When 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.*

22 Micah 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. 23 Micah 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?"

24 Micah 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."

25 The 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!" 26 Then 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.

27 The 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. 28 There 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. 29 They 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. 30 The 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. 31 Even 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.

19 At 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. 2 But 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. 3 Then 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. 4 The 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.

5 On 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*."
6 So 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." 7 The Levite wanted to leave, but his
wife's father finally persuaded him to stay again that night.
8 On 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.
9 Then 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*." 10 But 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.
11 It was late in the afternoon by the time they got to Jebus.
So the servant said to his master, "I know that the Jebusites
live in this city, but I think we need to stop and stay here for
the night."
12 But 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." 13 He 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." 14 So they continued walking. By
the time they reached Gibeah, where people from the tribe of
Benjamin live, the sun was setting. 15 So 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.
16 But 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. 17 When 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?"
18 The 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."
20 The 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." 21 Then 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.
22 While 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!"
23 The 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!
24 Listen, 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!"
25 But 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. 26 The 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.
27 That 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. 28 He 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.
29 When 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*. 30 Then 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."

20 Then 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. 2 The 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. 3 The 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. 4 The 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. 5 That 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. 6 I
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. 7 So now, all you
Israelites, talk together here and decide what you should do
about this!"

8 Then 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! 9 This is what
we must do to the people of Gibeah. First, we will cast lots to
choose an army of soldiers to attack them. 10 Then, 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."
11 And all the Israelite people agreed that they had to punish
the people of Gibeah. They would all work together to do that.

12 The 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! 13 Those 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. 14 The men
who lived in other cities in the territory of Benjamin gathered
at Gibeah to defend it against the other Israelites when they
attacked. 15 When 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. 16 Among those soldiers
there were 700 skilled warriors who were left-handed. They
could all sling stones and hit targets with great accuracy.

17 The 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.

18 Those 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."

19 So the next morning the Israelite soldiers went and set up
a military camp near Gibeah. 20 After 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. 21 The soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin came out of
Gibeah and fought against them. They killed 22,000 soldiers
from Israel in that battle. 22 But 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. 23 Some 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!" 24 So the
next day the Israelite soldiers once again advanced against the
Benjaminite army. 25 The 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.

26 That 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. 27 The people of Israel asked Yahweh to guide them.
The sacred chest of God was in Bethel at that time. 28 Phinehas
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." 29 The Israelites had many of their soldiers hide in the
fields around Gibeah. 30 The 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. 31 Then 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.

32 The 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.

33 All 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.
34 There 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. 35 Yahweh 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. 36 Finally 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*.
37 Those soldiers who had been hiding came out and rushed
quickly into Gibeah. They killed everyone who lived in the
city. 38 The 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.

39 That 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. 40 But 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. 41 The 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. 42 So 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. 43 The 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. 44 The Israelites killed 18,000 soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin who were all great warriors. 45 Those 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.

46 Altogether 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. 47 But 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. 48 Then 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.

21 (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. 3 They 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!”

4 Early 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.

5 Then 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.

6 The 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. 7 Let 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.” 8 That 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. 9 So 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.*

10 So 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. 11 They 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.

13 Then 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. 14 So 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.

15 So 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. 16 The 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?” 17 They 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. 18 But 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.” 19 Then 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.)

20 So 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. 21 Keep 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. 22 If

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.’”

23 So 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.

24 Then 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.

25 At that time, Israel did not have a king, and everyone did what they thought they should do.