

Judges

BEREAN STANDARD BIBLE

Chapter 1

THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN PROCEEDS

¹After the death of Joshua, the Israelites inquired of the LORD, “Who will be the first to go up and fight for us against the Canaanites?” ²“Judah shall go up,” answered the LORD. “Indeed, I have delivered the land into their hands.” ³Then the men of Judah said to their brothers the Simeonites, “Come up with us to our allotted territory, and let us fight against the Canaanites. And we likewise will go with you to your territory.” So the Simeonites went with them. ⁴When Judah attacked, the LORD delivered the Canaanites and Perizzites into their hands, and they struck down ten thousand men at Bezek. ⁵And there they found Adoni-bezek and fought against him, striking down the Canaanites and Perizzites. ⁶As Adoni-bezek fled, they pursued him, seized him, and cut off his thumbs and big toes. ⁷Then Adoni-bezek said, “Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off have gathered the scraps under my table. As I have done to them, so God has repaid me.” And they brought him to Jerusalem, where he died.

THE CAPTURE OF JERUSALEM AND HEBRON

⁸Then the men of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it. They put the city to the sword and set it on fire. ⁹Afterward, the men of Judah marched down to fight against the Canaanites living in the hill country, in the Negev, and in the foothills. ¹⁰Judah also marched against the Canaanites who were living in Hebron (formerly known as Kiriath-arba), and they struck down Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai. ¹¹From there they marched against the inhabitants of Debir (formerly known as Kiriath-sepher). ¹²And Caleb said, “To the man who strikes down Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will give my daughter Acsah in marriage.” ¹³So Othniel son of Caleb’s younger brother Kenaz captured the city, and Caleb gave his daughter Acsah to him in marriage. ¹⁴One day Acsah came to Othniel and urged him to ask her father for a field. When she got off her donkey, Caleb asked her, “What do you desire?” ¹⁵“Give me a blessing,” she answered. “Since you have given me land in the Negev, give me springs of water as well.” So Caleb gave her both the upper and lower springs. ¹⁶Now the descendants of Moses’ father-in-law, the Kenite, went up with the men of Judah from the City of Palms to the Wilderness of Judah

in the Negev near Arad. They went to live among the people. ¹⁷Then the men of Judah went with their brothers the Simeonites, attacked the Canaanites living in Zephath, and devoted the city to destruction. So it was called Hormah. ¹⁸And Judah also captured Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron—each with its territory. ¹⁹The LORD was with Judah, and they took possession of the hill country; but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the plains because they had chariots of iron. ²⁰Just as Moses had promised, Judah gave Hebron to Caleb, who drove out the descendants of the three sons of Anak. ²¹The Benjamites, however, failed to drive out the Jebusites living in Jerusalem. So to this day the Jebusites live there among the Benjamites. ²²The house of Joseph also attacked Bethel, and the LORD was with them. ²³They sent spies to Bethel (formerly known as Luz), ²⁴and when the spies saw a man coming out of the city, they said to him, “Please show us how to get into the city, and we will treat you kindly.” ²⁵So the man showed them the entrance to the city, and they put the city to the sword but released that man and all his family. ²⁶And the man went to the land of the Hittites, built a city, and called it Luz, which is its name to this day.

THE FAILURE TO COMPLETE THE CONQUEST

²⁷At that time Manasseh failed to drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, Megiddo, and their villages; for the Canaanites were determined to dwell in that land. ²⁸When Israel became stronger, they pressed the Canaanites into forced labor, but they never drove them out completely. ²⁹Ephraim also failed to drive out the Canaanites living in Gezer; so the Canaanites continued to dwell among them in Gezer. ³⁰Zebulun failed to drive out the inhabitants of Kitron and Nahalol; so the Canaanites lived among them and served as forced laborers. ³¹Asher failed to drive out the inhabitants of Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik, and Rehob. ³²So the Asherites lived among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land, because they did not drive them out. ³³Naphtali failed to drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath. So the Naphtalites also lived among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land, but the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath served them as forced laborers. ³⁴The Amorites forced the Danites into the hill country and did not allow them to come down into the plain. ³⁵And the Amorites

were determined to dwell in Mount Heres, Aijalon, and Shaalbim. But when the house of Joseph grew in strength, they pressed the Amorites into forced labor. ³⁶And the border of the Amorites extended from the Ascent of Akrabbim to Sela and beyond.

Chapter 2

ISRAEL REBUKED AT BOCHIM

¹Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim and said, “I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I had promised to your fathers, and I said, ‘I will never break My covenant with you, ²and you are not to make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall tear down their altars.’ Yet you have not obeyed My voice. What is this you have done? ³So now I tell you that I will not drive out these people before you; they will be thorns in your sides, and their gods will be a snare to you.” ⁴When the angel of the LORD had spoken these words to all the Israelites, the people lifted up their voices and wept. ⁵So they called that place Bochim and offered sacrifices there to the LORD.

JOSHUA’S DEATH AND BURIAL

⁶After Joshua had dismissed the people, the Israelites went out to take possession of the land, each to his own inheritance. ⁷And the people served the LORD throughout the days of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him, who had seen all the great works that the LORD had done for Israel. ⁸And Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110. ⁹They buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath-heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

ISRAEL’S UNFAITHFULNESS

¹⁰After that whole generation had also been gathered to their fathers, another generation rose up who did not know the LORD or the works that He had done for Israel. ¹¹And the Israelites did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. ¹²Thus they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and they followed after various gods of the peoples around them. They bowed down to them and provoked the LORD to anger, ¹³for they forsook Him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. ¹⁴Then the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of those who plundered them. He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. ¹⁵Wherever Israel marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them to bring calamity, just as He had sworn to them. So they were greatly distressed.

JUDGES RAISED UP

¹⁶Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them from the hands of those who plundered them. ¹⁷Israel, however, did not listen to their judges. Instead, they prostituted themselves with other gods and bowed down to them. They quickly turned from the way of their fathers, who had walked in obedience to the LORD’s commandments; they did not do as their fathers had done. ¹⁸Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for the Israelites, He was with that judge and saved them from the hands of their enemies while the judge was still alive; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning under those who oppressed them and afflicted them. ¹⁹But when the judge died, the Israelites became even more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods to serve them and bow down to them. They would not give up their evil practices and stubborn ways. ²⁰So the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He said, “Because this nation has transgressed the covenant I laid down for their fathers and has not heeded My voice, ²¹I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. ²²In this way I will test whether Israel will keep the way of the LORD by walking in it as their fathers did.” ²³That is why the LORD had left those nations in place and had not driven them out immediately by delivering them into the hand of Joshua.

Chapter 3

NATIONS LEFT TO TEST ISRAEL

¹These are the nations that the LORD left to test all the Israelites who had not known any of the wars in Canaan, ²if only to teach warfare to the subsequent generations of Israel, especially to those who had not known it formerly: ³the five rulers of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites who lived in the mountains of Lebanon from Mount Baal-hermon to Lebo-hamath. ⁴These nations were left to test the Israelites, to find out whether they would keep the commandments of the LORD, which He had given their fathers through Moses. ⁵Thus the Israelites continued to live among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. ⁶And they took the daughters of these people in marriage, gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

OTHNIEL

⁷So the Israelites did evil in the sight of the LORD; they forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs. ⁸Then the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim king of Aram-naharaim, and the Israelites

served him eight years. ⁹But when the Israelites cried out to the LORD, He raised up Othniel son of Caleb's younger brother Kenaz as a deliverer to save them. ¹⁰The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he became Israel's judge and went out to war. And the LORD delivered Cushan-rishathaim king of Aram into the hand of Othniel, who prevailed against him. ¹¹So the land had rest for forty years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died.

EHUD

¹²Once again the Israelites did evil in the sight of the LORD. So He gave Eglon king of Moab power over Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD. ¹³After enlisting the Ammonites and Amalekites to join forces with him, Eglon attacked and defeated Israel, taking possession of the City of Palms. ¹⁴The Israelites served Eglon king of Moab eighteen years. ¹⁵And again they cried out to the LORD, and He raised up Ehud son of Gera, a left-handed Benjamite, as their deliverer. So they sent him with tribute to Eglon king of Moab. ¹⁶Now Ehud had made for himself a double-edged sword a cubit long. He strapped it to his right thigh under his cloak ¹⁷and brought the tribute to Eglon king of Moab, who was an obese man. ¹⁸After Ehud had finished presenting the tribute, he ushered out those who had carried it. ¹⁹But upon reaching the idols near Gilgal, he himself turned back and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." "Silence," said the king, and all his attendants left him. ²⁰Then Ehud approached him while he was sitting alone in the coolness of his upper room. "I have a word from God for you," Ehud said, and the king rose from his seat. ²¹And Ehud reached with his left hand, pulled the sword from his right thigh, and plunged it into Eglon's belly. ²²Even the handle sank in after the blade, and Eglon's fat closed in over it, so that Ehud did not withdraw the sword from his belly. And Eglon's bowels emptied. ²³Then Ehud went out through the porch, closing and locking the doors of the upper room behind him. ²⁴After Ehud was gone, Eglon's servants came in and found the doors of the upper room locked. "He must be relieving himself in the cool room," they said. ²⁵So they waited until they became worried and saw that he had still not opened the doors of the upper room. Then they took the key and opened the doors—and there was their lord lying dead on the floor. ²⁶Ehud, however, had escaped while the servants waited. He passed by the idols and escaped to Seirah. ²⁷On arriving in Seirah, he blew the ram's horn throughout the hill country of Ephraim. The Israelites came down with him from the hills, and he became their leader. ²⁸"Follow me," he told them, "for the LORD has delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand." So they

followed him down and seized the fords of the Jordan leading to Moab, and they did not allow anyone to cross over. ²⁹At that time they struck down about ten thousand Moabites, all robust and valiant men. Not one of them escaped. ³⁰So Moab was subdued under the hand of Israel that day, and the land had rest for eighty years.

SHAMGAR

³¹After Ehud came Shamgar son of Anath. And he too saved Israel, striking down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad.

Chapter 4

DEBORAH AND BARAK

¹After Ehud died, the Israelites again did evil in the sight of the LORD. ²So the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his forces was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. ³Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD, because Jabin had nine hundred chariots of iron, and he had harshly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years. ⁴Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. ⁵And she would sit under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, where the Israelites would go up to her for judgment. ⁶She summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "Surely the LORD, the God of Israel, is commanding you: 'Go and march to Mount Tabor, taking with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun. ⁷And I will draw out Sisera the commander of Jabin's army, his chariots, and his troops to the River Kishon, and I will deliver him into your hand.'" ⁸Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go." ⁹"I will certainly go with you," Deborah replied, "but the road you are taking will bring you no honor, because the LORD will be selling Sisera into the hand of a woman." So Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh, ¹⁰where he summoned Zebulun and Naphtali. Ten thousand men followed him, and Deborah also went with him. ¹¹Now Heber the Kenite had moved away from the Kenites, the descendants of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent by the great tree of Zaanannim, which was near Kedesh. ¹²When Sisera was told that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up Mount Tabor, ¹³he summoned all nine hundred of his iron chariots and all the men with him, from Harosheth-hagoyim to the River Kishon. ¹⁴Then Deborah said to Barak, "Arise, for this is the day that the LORD has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the LORD gone before you?" So Barak came

down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. ¹⁵And in front of him the LORD routed with the sword Sisera, all his charioteers, and all his army. Sisera abandoned his chariot and fled on foot. ¹⁶Then Barak pursued the chariots and army as far as Harosheth-hagoyim, and the whole army of Sisera fell by the sword; not a single man was left.

Jael Kills Sisera

¹⁷Meanwhile, Sisera had fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was peace between Jabin king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. ¹⁸Jael went out to greet Sisera and said to him, “Come in, my lord. Come in with me. Do not be afraid.” So he entered her tent, and she covered him with a blanket. ¹⁹Sisera said to her, “Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.” So she opened a container of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him again. ²⁰“Stand at the entrance to the tent,” he said, “and if anyone comes and asks you, ‘Is there a man here?’ say, ‘No.’” ²¹But as he lay sleeping from exhaustion, Heber’s wife Jael took a tent peg, grabbed a hammer, and went silently to Sisera. She drove the peg through his temple and into the ground, and he died. ²²When Barak arrived in pursuit of Sisera, Jael went out to greet him and said to him, “Come, and I will show you the man you are seeking.” So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera dead, with a tent peg through his temple. ²³On that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the Israelites. ²⁴And the hand of the Israelites grew stronger and stronger against Jabin king of Canaan until they destroyed him.

Chapter 5

The Song of Deborah and Barak

¹On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song: ²“When the princes take the lead in Israel, when the people volunteer, bless the LORD. ³Listen, O kings! Give ear, O princes! I will sing to the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD, the God of Israel. ⁴O LORD, when You went out from Seir, when You marched from the land of Edom, the earth trembled, the heavens poured out rain, and the clouds poured down water. ⁵The mountains quaked before the LORD, the One of Sinai, before the LORD, the God of Israel. ⁶In the days of Shamgar son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were deserted and the travelers took the byways. ⁷Life in the villages ceased; it ended in Israel, until I, Deborah, arose, a mother in Israel. ⁸When they chose new gods, then war came to their gates. Not a shield or spear was found among forty thousand in Israel. ⁹My heart

is with the princes of Israel, with the volunteers among the people. Bless the LORD! ¹⁰You who ride white donkeys, who sit on saddle blankets, and you who travel the road, ponder ¹¹the voices of the singers at the watering places. There they shall recount the righteous acts of the LORD, the righteous deeds of His villagers in Israel. Then the people of the LORD went down to the gates: ¹²“Awake, awake, O Deborah! Awake, awake, sing a song! Arise, O Barak, and take hold of your captives, O son of Abinoam!” ¹³Then the survivors came down to the nobles; the people of the LORD came down to me against the mighty. ¹⁴Some came from Ephraim, with their roots in Amalek; Benjamin came with your people after you. The commanders came down from Machir, the bearers of the marshal’s staff from Zebulun. ¹⁵The princes of Issachar were with Deborah, and Issachar was with Barak, rushing into the valley at his heels. In the clans of Reuben there was great indecision. ¹⁶Why did you sit among the sheepfolds to hear the whistling for the flocks? In the clans of Reuben there was great indecision. ¹⁷Gilead remained beyond the Jordan. Dan, why did you linger by the ships? Asher stayed at the coast and remained in his harbors. ¹⁸Zebulun was a people who risked their lives; Naphtali, too, on the heights of the battlefield. ¹⁹Kings came and fought; then the kings of Canaan fought at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo, but they took no plunder of silver. ²⁰From the heavens the stars fought; from their courses they fought against Sisera. ²¹The River Kishon swept them away, the ancient river, the River Kishon. March on, O my soul, in strength! ²²Then the hooves of horses thundered—the mad galloping of his stallions. ²³“Curse Meroz,” says the angel of the LORD. “Bitterly curse her inhabitants; for they did not come to help the LORD, to help the LORD against the mighty.” ²⁴Most blessed among women is Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, most blessed of tent-dwelling women. ²⁵He asked for water, and she gave him milk. In a magnificent bowl she brought him curds. ²⁶She reached for the tent peg, her right hand for the workman’s hammer. She struck Sisera and crushed his skull; she shattered and pierced his temple. ²⁷At her feet he collapsed, he fell, there he lay still; at her feet he collapsed, he fell; where he collapsed, there he fell dead. ²⁸Sisera’s mother looked through the window; she peered through the lattice and lamented: “Why is his chariot so long in coming? What has delayed the clatter of his chariots?” ²⁹Her wisest ladies answer; indeed she keeps telling herself, ³⁰“Are they not finding and dividing the spoil—a girl or two for each warrior, a plunder of dyed garments for Sisera, the spoil of embroidered garments for the neck of the looter?” ³¹So may all Your enemies perish, O

LORD! But may those who love You shine like the sun at its brightest.” And the land had rest for forty years.

Chapter 6

MIDIAN OPPRESSES ISRAEL

¹Again the Israelites did evil in the sight of the LORD; so He delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years, ²and the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of the Midianites, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in the mountains, caves, and strongholds. ³Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites, and other people of the east would come up and invade them, ⁴encamping against them as far as Gaza and destroying the produce of the land. They left Israel with no sustenance, neither sheep nor oxen nor donkeys. ⁵For the Midianites came with their livestock and their tents like a great swarm of locusts. They and their camels were innumerable, and they entered the land to ravage it. ⁶Israel was greatly impoverished by Midian, and the Israelites cried out to the LORD. ⁷Now when the Israelites cried out to the LORD because of Midian, ⁸He sent them a prophet, who told them, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ⁹I delivered you out of the hands of Egypt and all your oppressors. I drove them out before you and gave you their land. ¹⁰And I said to you: ‘I am the LORD your God. You must not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell.’ But you did not obey Me.”

THE CALL OF GIDEON

¹¹Then the angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to hide it from the Midianites. ¹²And the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon and said, “The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor.” ¹³“Please, my Lord,” Gideon replied, “if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all His wonders of which our fathers told us, saying, ‘Has not the LORD brought us up out of Egypt?’ But now the LORD has forsaken us and delivered us into the hand of Midian.” ¹⁴The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel from the hand of Midian. Am I not sending you?” ¹⁵“Please, my Lord,” Gideon replied, “how can I save Israel? Indeed, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father’s house.” ¹⁶“Surely I will be with you,” the LORD replied, “and you will strike down all the Midianites as one man.” ¹⁷Gideon answered, “If I have found favor in Your

sight, give me a sign that it is You speaking with me. ¹⁸Please do not depart from this place until I return to You. Let me bring my offering and set it before You.” And the LORD said, “I will stay until you return.” ¹⁹So Gideon went in and prepared a young goat and unleavened bread and an ephah of flour. He placed the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot and brought them out to present to Him under the oak. ²⁰And the angel of God said to him, “Take the meat and the unleavened bread, lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth.” And Gideon did so. ²¹Then the angel of the LORD extended the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread. And fire flared from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. ²²When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he said, “Oh no, Lord GOD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!” ²³But the LORD said to him, “Peace be with you. Do not be afraid, for you will not die.” ²⁴So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it The LORD Is Peace. To this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

GIDEON DESTROYS BAAL’S ALTAR

²⁵On that very night the LORD said to Gideon, “Take your father’s young bull and a second bull seven years old, tear down your father’s altar to Baal, and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. ²⁶Then build a proper altar to the LORD your God on the top of this stronghold. And with the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down, take the second bull and offer it as a burnt offering.” ²⁷So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD had told him. But because he was too afraid of his father’s household and the men of the city, he did it by night rather than in the daytime. ²⁸When the men of the city got up in the morning, there was Baal’s altar torn down, with the Asherah pole cut down beside it and the second bull offered up on the newly built altar. ²⁹“Who did this?” they said to one another. And after they had investigated thoroughly, they were told, “Gideon son of Joash did it.” ³⁰Then the men of the city said to Joash, “Bring out your son. He must die, because he has torn down Baal’s altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it.” ³¹But Joash said to all who stood against him, “Are you contending for Baal? Are you trying to save him? Whoever pleads his case will be put to death by morning! If Baal is a god, let him contend for himself with the one who has torn down his altar.” ³²So on that day Gideon was called Jerubbaal, that is to say, “Let Baal contend with him,” because he had torn down Baal’s altar.

THE SIGN OF THE FLEECE

³³Then all the Midianites, Amalekites, and other people of the east gathered together, crossed over the Jordan, and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. ³⁴So the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, who blew the ram's horn and rallied the Abiezrites behind him. ³⁵Calling them to arms, Gideon sent messengers throughout Manasseh, as well as Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, so that they came up to meet him. ³⁶Then Gideon said to God, "If You are going to save Israel by my hand, as You have said, ³⁷then behold, I will place a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that You are going to save Israel by my hand, as You have said." ³⁸And that is what happened. When Gideon arose the next morning, he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water. ³⁹Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me; let me speak one more time. Please allow me one more test with the fleece. This time let it be dry, and the ground covered with dew." ⁴⁰And that night God did so. Only the fleece was dry, and dew covered the ground.

Chapter 7

GIDEON'S ARMY OF THREE HUNDRED

¹Early in the morning Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the men with him camped beside the spring of Harod. And the camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. ²Then the LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many men for Me to deliver Midian into their hands, lest Israel glorify themselves over Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' ³Now, therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the men: 'Whoever is fearful and trembling may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand of them turned back, but ten thousand remained. ⁴Then the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go. But if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." ⁵So Gideon brought the men down to the water, and the LORD said to him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel to drink." ⁶And the number of those who lapped the water with their hands to their mouths was three hundred men; all the others knelt to drink. ⁷Then the LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men who lapped the water I will save you and deliver the Midianites into your hand. But all the others are to go home." ⁸So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred men, who took charge of the provisions and rams'

horns of the others. And the camp of Midian lay below him in the valley.

THE SWORD OF GIDEON

⁹That night the LORD said to Gideon, "Get up and go down against the camp, for I have delivered it into your hand. ¹⁰But if you are afraid to do so, then go down to the camp with your servant Purah ¹¹and listen to what they are saying. Then your hands will be strengthened to attack the camp." So he went with Purah his servant to the outposts where armed men were guarding the camp. ¹²Now the Midianites, Amalekites, and all the other people of the east had settled in the valley like a swarm of locusts, and their camels were as countless as the sand on the seashore. ¹³And as Gideon arrived, a man was telling his friend about a dream. "Behold, I had a dream," he said, "and I saw a loaf of barley bread come tumbling into the Midianite camp. It struck the tent so hard that the tent overturned and collapsed." ¹⁴His friend replied: "This is nothing less than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has delivered Midian and the whole camp into his hand."

GIDEON DEFEATS MIDIAN

¹⁵When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship. He returned to the camp of Israel and said, "Get up, for the LORD has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand." ¹⁶And he divided the three hundred men into three companies and gave each man a ram's horn in one hand and a large jar in the other, containing a torch. ¹⁷"Watch me and do as I do," Gideon said. "When I come to the outskirts of the camp, do exactly as I do. ¹⁸When I and all who are with me blow our horns, then you are also to blow your horns from all around the camp and shout, 'For the LORD and for Gideon!'" ¹⁹Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after the changing of the guard. They blew their horns and broke the jars that were in their hands. ²⁰The three companies blew their horns and shattered their jars. Holding the torches in their left hands and the horns in their right hands, they shouted, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" ²¹Each Israelite took his position around the camp, and the entire Midianite army fled, crying out as they ran. ²²And when the three hundred rams' horns sounded, the LORD set all the men in the camp against one another with their swords. The army fled to Beth-shittah toward Zererah as far as the border of Abel-meholah near Tabbath. ²³Then the men of Israel were called out from Naphtali, Asher, and all Manasseh, and they pursued the Midianites. ²⁴Gideon sent messengers throughout the hill country of Ephraim to say, "Come down against the Midianites and seize the waters of

the Jordan ahead of them as far as Beth-barah.” So all the men of Ephraim were called out, and they captured the waters of the Jordan as far as Beth-barah. ²⁵They also captured Oreb and Zeeb, the two princes of Midian; and they killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb and Zeeb at the winepress of Zeeb. So they pursued the Midianites and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side of the Jordan.

Chapter 8

GIDEON DEFEATS ZEBAH AND ZALMUNNA

¹Then the men of Ephraim said to Gideon, “Why have you done this to us? Why did you fail to call us when you went to fight against Midian?” And they contended with him violently. ²But Gideon answered them, “Now what have I accomplished compared to you? Are not the gleanings of Ephraim better than the grape harvest of Abiezer? ³God has delivered Oreb and Zeeb, the two princes of Midian, into your hand. What was I able to do compared to you?” When he had said this, their anger against him subsided. ⁴Then Gideon and his three hundred men came to the Jordan and crossed it, exhausted yet still in pursuit. ⁵So Gideon said to the men of Succoth, “Please give my troops some bread, for they are exhausted, and I am still pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian.” ⁶But the leaders of Succoth asked, “Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your possession, that we should give bread to your army?” ⁷“Very well,” Gideon replied, “when the LORD has delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will tear your flesh with the thorns and briers of the wilderness!” ⁸From there he went up to Penuel and asked the same from them, but the men of Penuel gave the same response as the men of Succoth. ⁹So Gideon told the men of Penuel, “When I return in triumph, I will tear down this tower!” ¹⁰Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with their army of about fifteen thousand men—all that were left of the armies of the people of the east. A hundred and twenty thousand swordsmen had already fallen. ¹¹And Gideon went up by way of the caravan route east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and he attacked their army, taking them by surprise. ¹²When Zebah and Zalmunna fled, Gideon pursued and captured these two kings of Midian, routing their entire army. ¹³After this, Gideon son of Joash returned from the battle along the Ascent of Heres. ¹⁴There he captured a young man of Succoth and interrogated him. The young man wrote down for him the names of the seventy-seven leaders and elders of Succoth. ¹⁵And Gideon went to the men of Succoth and said, “Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me, saying, ‘Are the

hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your possession, that we should give bread to your weary men?’” ¹⁶Then he took the elders of the city, and using the thorns and briers of the wilderness, he disciplined the men of Succoth. ¹⁷He also pulled down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city. ¹⁸Next, Gideon asked Zebah and Zalmunna, “What kind of men did you kill at Tabor?” “Men like you,” they answered, “each one resembling the son of a king.” ¹⁹“They were my brothers,” Gideon replied, “the sons of my mother! As surely as the LORD lives, if you had let them live, I would not kill you.” ²⁰So he said to Jether, his firstborn, “Get up and kill them.” But the young man did not draw his sword; he was fearful because he was still a youth. ²¹Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, “Get up and kill us yourself, for as the man is, so is his strength.” So Gideon got up and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and he took the crescent ornaments from the necks of their camels.

GIDEON’S EPHOD

²²Then the Israelites said to Gideon, “Rule over us—you and your son and grandson—for you have saved us from the hand of Midian.” ²³But Gideon replied, “I will not rule over you, nor will my son. The LORD shall rule over you.” ²⁴Then he added, “Let me make a request of you, that each of you give me an earring from his plunder.” (For the enemies had gold earrings because they were Ishmaelites.) ²⁵“We will give them gladly,” they replied. So they spread out a garment, and each man threw an earring from his plunder onto it. ²⁶The weight of the gold earrings he had requested was 1,700 shekels, in addition to the crescent ornaments, the pendants, the purple garments of the kings of Midian, and the chains from the necks of their camels. ²⁷From all this Gideon made an ephod, which he placed in Ophrah, his hometown. But soon all Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his household.

FORTY YEARS OF PEACE

²⁸In this way Midian was subdued before the Israelites and did not raise its head again. So the land had rest for forty years in the days of Gideon, ²⁹and he—Jerubbaal son of Joash—returned home and settled down. ³⁰Gideon had seventy sons of his own, since he had many wives. ³¹His concubine, who dwelt in Shechem, also bore him a son, and he named him Abimelech.

GIDEON’S DEATH

³²Later, Gideon son of Joash died at a ripe old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. ³³And as soon as Gideon was dead, the Israelites turned and prostituted themselves with the

Baals, and they set up Baal-berith as their god. ³⁴The Israelites failed to remember the LORD their God who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side. ³⁵They did not show kindness to the house of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) for all the good things he had done for Israel.

Chapter 9

ABIMELECH'S CONSPIRACY

¹Now Abimelech son of Jerubbaal went to his mother's brothers at Shechem and said to them and to all the clan of his mother, ²"Please ask all the leaders of Shechem, 'Is it better for you that seventy men, all the sons of Jerubbaal, rule over you, or just one man?' Remember that I am your own flesh and blood." ³And when his mother's brothers spoke all these words about him in the presence of all the leaders of Shechem, their hearts were inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our brother." ⁴So they gave him seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-berith, with which Abimelech hired some worthless and reckless men to follow him. ⁵He went to his father's house in Ophrah, and on one stone murdered his seventy brothers, the sons of Jerubbaal. But Jotham, the youngest son of Jerubbaal, survived, because he hid himself. ⁶Then all the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo gathered beside the oak at the pillar in Shechem and proceeded to make Abimelech their king.

JOTHAM'S PARABLE

⁷When this was reported to Jotham, he climbed to the top of Mount Gerizim, raised his voice, and cried out: "Listen to me, O leaders of Shechem, and may God listen to you. ⁸One day the trees set out to anoint a king for themselves. They said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us.' ⁹But the olive tree replied, 'Should I stop giving my oil that honors both God and man, to hold sway over the trees?' ¹⁰Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'Come and reign over us.' ¹¹But the fig tree replied, 'Should I stop giving my sweetness and my good fruit, to hold sway over the trees?' ¹²Then the trees said to the grapevine, 'Come and reign over us.' ¹³But the grapevine replied, 'Should I stop giving my wine that cheers both God and man, to hold sway over the trees?' ¹⁴Finally all the trees said to the thornbush, 'Come and reign over us.' ¹⁵But the thornbush replied, 'If you really are anointing me as king over you, come and find refuge in my shade. But if not, may fire come out of the thornbush and consume the cedars of Lebanon.' ¹⁶Now if you have acted faithfully and honestly in making Abimelech king, if you have done well by Jerubbaal and his family, and if you

have done to him as he deserves— ¹⁷for my father fought for you and risked his life to deliver you from the hand of Midian, ¹⁸but you have risen up against my father's house this day and killed his seventy sons on a single stone, and you have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the leaders of Shechem because he is your brother— ¹⁹if you have acted faithfully and honestly toward Jerubbaal and his house this day, then may you rejoice in Abimelech, and he in you. ²⁰But if not, may fire come from Abimelech and consume the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo, and may fire come from the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo and consume Abimelech." ²¹Then Jotham ran away, escaping to Beer, and he lived there for fear of his brother Abimelech.

GAAL CONSPIRES WITH THE SHECHEMITES

²²After Abimelech had reigned over Israel for three years, ²³God sent a spirit of animosity between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem and caused them to treat Abimelech deceitfully, ²⁴in order that the crime against the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come to justice and their blood be avenged on their brother Abimelech and on the leaders of Shechem, who had helped him murder his brothers. ²⁵The leaders of Shechem set up an ambush against Abimelech on the hilltops, and they robbed all who passed by them on the road. So this was reported to Abimelech. ²⁶Meanwhile, Gaal son of Ebed came with his brothers and crossed into Shechem, and the leaders of Shechem put their confidence in him. ²⁷And after they had gone out into the fields, gathered grapes from their vineyards, and trodden them, they held a festival and went into the house of their god; and as they ate and drank, they cursed Abimelech. ²⁸Then Gaal son of Ebed said, "Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal, and is not Zebul his officer? You are to serve the men of Hamor, the father of Shechem. Why should we serve Abimelech? ²⁹If only this people were under my authority, I would remove Abimelech; I would say to him, 'Mustering your army and come out!'"

THE FALL OF SHECHEM

³⁰When Zebul the governor of the city heard the words of Gaal son of Ebed, he burned with anger. ³¹So he covertly sent messengers to Abimelech to say, "Look, Gaal son of Ebed and his brothers have come to Shechem and are stirring up the city against you. ³²Now then, tonight you and the people with you are to come and lie in wait in the fields. ³³And in the morning at sunrise, get up and advance against the city. When Gaal and his men come out against you, do to them whatever you are able." ³⁴So Abimelech and all his troops set out by night and lay in wait against

Shechem in four companies. ³⁵Now Gaal son of Ebed went out and stood at the entrance of the city gate just as Abimelech and his men came out from their hiding places. ³⁶When Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the mountains!" But Zebul replied, "The shadows of the mountains look like men to you." ³⁷Then Gaal spoke up again, "Look, people are coming down from the center of the land, and one company is coming by way of the Diviners' Oak." ³⁸"Where is your gloating now?" Zebul replied. "You said, 'Who is Abimelech that we should serve him?' Are these not the people you ridiculed? Go out now and fight them!" ³⁹So Gaal went out before the leaders of Shechem and fought against Abimelech, ⁴⁰but Abimelech pursued him, and Gaal fled before him. And many Shechemites fell wounded all the way to the entrance of the gate. ⁴¹Abimelech stayed in Arumah, and Zebul drove Gaal and his brothers out of Shechem. ⁴²The next day the people of Shechem went out into the fields, and this was reported to Abimelech. ⁴³So he took his men, divided them into three companies, and lay in wait in the fields. When he saw the people coming out of the city, he rose up against them and attacked them. ⁴⁴Then Abimelech and the companies with him rushed forward and took their stand at the entrance of the city gate. The other two companies rushed against all who were in the fields and struck them down. ⁴⁵And all that day Abimelech fought against the city until he had captured it and killed its people. Then he demolished the city and sowed it with salt. ⁴⁶On hearing of this, all the leaders in the tower of Shechem entered the inner chamber of the temple of El-berith. ⁴⁷And when Abimelech was told that all the leaders in the tower of Shechem were gathered there, ⁴⁸he and all his men went up to Mount Zalmon. Abimelech took his axe in his hand and cut a branch from the trees, which he lifted to his shoulder, saying to his men, "Hurry and do what you have seen me do." ⁴⁹So each man also cut his own branch and followed Abimelech. Then they piled the branches against the inner chamber and set it on fire above them, killing everyone in the tower of Shechem, about a thousand men and women.

ABIMELECH'S PUNISHMENT

⁵⁰Then Abimelech went to Thebez, encamped against it, and captured it. ⁵¹But there was a strong tower inside the city, and all the men, women, and leaders of the city fled there. They locked themselves in and went up to the roof of the tower. ⁵²When Abimelech came to attack the tower, he approached its entrance to set it on fire. ⁵³But a woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech's head, crushing his skull. ⁵⁴He quickly called his armor-bearer, saying,

"Draw your sword and kill me, lest they say of me, 'A woman killed him.'" So Abimelech's armor-bearer ran his sword through him, and he died. ⁵⁵And when the Israelites saw that Abimelech was dead, they all went home. ⁵⁶In this way God repaid the wickedness that Abimelech had done to his father in murdering his seventy brothers. ⁵⁷And God also brought all the wickedness of the men of Shechem back upon their own heads. So the curse of Jotham son of Jerubbaal came upon them.

Chapter 10

TOLA

¹After the time of Abimelech, a man of Issachar, Tola son of Puah, the son of Dodo, rose up to save Israel. He lived in Shamir, in the hill country of Ephraim. ²Tola judged Israel twenty-three years, and when he died, he was buried in Shamir.

JAIR

³Tola was followed by Jair the Gileadite, who judged Israel twenty-two years. ⁴He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys. And they had thirty towns in the land of Gilead, which to this day are called Havvoth-jair. ⁵When Jair died, he was buried in Kamon.

OPPRESSION BY THE PHILISTINES AND AMMONITES

⁶And again the Israelites did evil in the sight of the LORD. They served the Baals, the Ashtoreths, the gods of Aram, Sidon, and Moab, and the gods of the Ammonites and Philistines. Thus they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him. ⁷So the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and Ammonites, ⁸who that very year harassed and oppressed the Israelites, and they did so for eighteen years to all the Israelites on the other side of the Jordan in Gilead, the land of the Amorites. ⁹The Ammonites also crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah, Benjamin, and the house of Ephraim, and Israel was in deep distress. ¹⁰Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD, saying, "We have sinned against You, for we have indeed forsaken our God and served the Baals." ¹¹The LORD replied, "When the Egyptians, Amorites, Ammonites, Philistines, ¹²Sidonians, Amalekites, and Maonites oppressed you and you cried out to Me, did I not save you from their hands? ¹³But you have forsaken Me and served other gods, so I will no longer save you. ¹⁴Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you in your time of trouble." ¹⁵"We have sinned," the Israelites said to the LORD. "Deal with us as You see fit; but please deliver us today!" ¹⁶So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD, and He

could no longer bear the misery of Israel. ¹⁷Then the Ammonites were called to arms and camped in Gilead, and the Israelites assembled and camped at Mizpah. ¹⁸And the rulers of Gilead said to one another, “Whoever will launch the attack against the Ammonites will be the head of all who live in Gilead.”

Chapter 11

JEPHTHAH DELIVERS ISRAEL

¹Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor; he was the son of a prostitute, and Gilead was his father. ²And Gilead’s wife bore him sons who grew up, drove Jephthah out, and said to him, “You shall have no inheritance in our father’s house, because you are the son of another woman.” ³So Jephthah fled from his brothers and settled in the land of Tob, where worthless men gathered around him and traveled with him. ⁴Some time later, when the Ammonites fought against Israel ⁵and made war with them, the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. ⁶“Come,” they said, “be our commander, so that we can fight against the Ammonites.” ⁷Jephthah replied to the elders of Gilead, “Did you not hate me and expel me from my father’s house? Why then have you come to me now, when you are in distress?” ⁸They answered Jephthah, “This is why we now turn to you, that you may go with us, fight the Ammonites, and become leader over all of us who live in Gilead.” ⁹But Jephthah asked them, “If you take me back to fight the Ammonites and the LORD gives them to me, will I really be your leader?” ¹⁰And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, “The LORD is our witness if we do not do as you say.” ¹¹So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him their leader and commander. And Jephthah repeated all his terms in the presence of the LORD at Mizpah. ¹²Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites, saying, “What do you have against me that you have come to fight against my land?” ¹³The king of the Ammonites answered Jephthah’s messengers, “When Israel came up out of Egypt, they seized my land, from the Arnon to the Jabbok and all the way to the Jordan. Now, therefore, restore it peaceably.” ¹⁴Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites ¹⁵to tell him, “This is what Jephthah says: Israel did not take away the land of Moab or of the Ammonites. ¹⁶But when Israel came up out of Egypt, they traveled through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh. ¹⁷Then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, ‘Please let us pass through your land,’ but the king of Edom would not listen. They also sent messengers to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel stayed in Kadesh.

¹⁸Then Israel traveled through the wilderness and bypassed the lands of Edom and Moab. They came to the east side of the land of Moab and camped on the other side of the Arnon. But they did not enter the territory of Moab, since the Arnon was its border. ¹⁹And Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon, and said to him, ‘Please let us pass through your land into our own place.’ ²⁰But Sihon would not trust Israel to pass through his territory. So he gathered all his people, encamped in Jahaz, and fought with Israel. ²¹Then the LORD, the God of Israel, delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, who defeated them. So Israel took possession of all the land of the Amorites who inhabited that country, ²²seizing all the land from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. ²³Now since the LORD, the God of Israel, has driven out the Amorites from before His people Israel, should you now possess it? ²⁴Do you not possess whatever your god Chemosh grants you? So also, we possess whatever the LORD our God has granted us. ²⁵Are you now so much better than Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever contend with Israel or fight against them? ²⁶For three hundred years Israel has lived in Heshbon, Aroer, and their villages, as well as all the cities along the banks of the Arnon. Why did you not take them back during that time? ²⁷I have not sinned against you, but you have done me wrong by waging war against me. May the LORD, the Judge, decide today between the Israelites and the Ammonites.” ²⁸But the king of the Ammonites paid no heed to the message Jephthah sent him.

JEPHTHAH’S TRAGIC VOW

²⁹Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, then through Mizpah of Gilead. And from there he advanced against the Ammonites. ³⁰Jephthah made this vow to the LORD: “If indeed You will deliver the Ammonites into my hand, ³¹then whatever comes out the door of my house to greet me on my triumphant return from the Ammonites will belong to the LORD, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.” ³²So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them, and the LORD delivered them into his hand. ³³With a great blow he devastated twenty cities from Aroer to the vicinity of Minnith, as far as Abel-keramim. So the Ammonites were subdued before the Israelites. ³⁴And when Jephthah returned home to Mizpah, there was his daughter coming out to meet him with tambourines and dancing! She was his only child; he had no son or daughter besides her. ³⁵As soon as Jephthah saw her, he tore his clothes and said, “No! Not my daughter! You have brought

me to my knees! You have brought great misery upon me, for I have given my word to the LORD and cannot take it back.” ³⁶“My father,” she replied, “you have given your word to the LORD. Do to me as you have said, for the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the Ammonites.” ³⁷She also said to her father, “Let me do this one thing: Let me wander for two months through the mountains with my friends and mourn my virginity.” ³⁸“Go,” he said. And he sent her away for two months. So she left with her friends and mourned her virginity upon the mountains. ³⁹After two months, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed. And she had never had relations with a man. So it has become a custom in Israel ⁴⁰that each year the young women of Israel go out for four days to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

Chapter 12

JEPHTHAH DEFEATS EPHRAIM

¹Then the men of Ephraim assembled and crossed the Jordan to Zaphon. They said to Jephthah, “Why have you crossed over to fight the Ammonites without calling us to go with you? We will burn your house down with you inside!” ²But Jephthah replied, “My people and I had a serious conflict with the Ammonites, and when I called, you did not save me out of their hands. ³When I saw that you would not save me, I risked my life and crossed over to the Ammonites, and the LORD delivered them into my hand. Why then have you come today to fight against me?” ⁴Jephthah then gathered all the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. And the men of Gilead struck them down because the Ephraimites had said, “You Gileadites are fugitives in Ephraim, living in the territories of Ephraim and Manasseh.” ⁵The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan leading to Ephraim, and whenever a fugitive from Ephraim would say, “Let me cross over,” the Gileadites would ask him, “Are you an Ephraimite?” If he answered, “No,” ⁶they told him, “Please say Shibboleth.” If he said, “Sibboleth,” because he could not pronounce it correctly, they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. So at that time 42,000 Ephraimites were killed. ⁷Jephthah judged Israel six years, and when he died, he was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.

IBZAN, ELON, AND ABDON

⁸After Jephthah, Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel. ⁹He had thirty sons, as well as thirty daughters whom he gave in marriage to men outside his clan; and for his sons he brought back thirty wives from elsewhere. Ibzan judged Israel seven years. ¹⁰Then Ibzan died, and he was buried in

Bethlehem. ¹¹After Ibzan, Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel ten years. ¹²Then Elon the Zebulunite died, and he was buried in Aijalon in the land of Zebulun. ¹³After Elon, Abdon son of Hillel, from Pirathon, judged Israel. ¹⁴He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy donkeys. And he judged Israel eight years. ¹⁵Then Abdon son of Hillel, from Pirathon, died, and he was buried at Pirathon in Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites.

Chapter 13

THE BIRTH OF SAMSON

¹Again the Israelites did evil in the sight of the LORD, so He delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years. ²Now there was a man from Zorah named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, whose wife was barren and had no children. ³The angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, “It is true that you are barren and have no children; but you will conceive and give birth to a son. ⁴Now please be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, and not to eat anything unclean. ⁵For behold, you will conceive and give birth to a son. And no razor shall touch his head, because the boy will be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hand of the Philistines.” ⁶So the woman went and told her husband, “A man of God came to me. His appearance was like the angel of God, exceedingly awesome. I did not ask him where he came from, and he did not tell me his name. ⁷But he said to me, ‘Behold, you will conceive and give birth to a son. Now, therefore, do not drink wine or strong drink, and do not eat anything unclean, because the boy will be a Nazirite to God from the womb until the day of his death.’” ⁸Then Manoah prayed to the LORD, “Please, O Lord, let the man of God You sent us come to us again to teach us how to raise the boy who is to be born.” ⁹And God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the angel of God returned to the woman as she was sitting in the field; but her husband Manoah was not with her. ¹⁰The woman ran quickly to tell her husband, “Behold, the man who came to me the other day has reappeared!” ¹¹So Manoah got up and followed his wife. When he came to the man, he asked, “Are you the man who spoke to my wife?” “I am,” he said. ¹²Then Manoah asked, “When your words come to pass, what will be the boy’s rule of life and mission?” ¹³So the angel of the LORD answered Manoah, “Your wife is to do everything I told her. ¹⁴She must not eat anything that comes from the vine, nor drink any wine or strong drink, nor eat anything unclean. She must do everything I have commanded her.” ¹⁵“Please stay here,” Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, “and we will prepare a young goat for

you.” ¹⁶And the angel of the LORD replied, “Even if I stay, I will not eat your food. But if you prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the LORD.” For Manoah did not know that it was the angel of the LORD. ¹⁷Then Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, “What is your name, so that we may honor you when your word comes to pass?” ¹⁸“Why do you ask my name,” said the angel of the LORD, “since it is beyond comprehension?” ¹⁹Then Manoah took a young goat and a grain offering and offered them on a rock to the LORD. And as Manoah and his wife looked on, the LORD did a marvelous thing. ²⁰When the flame went up from the altar to the sky, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell facedown to the ground. ²¹And when the angel of the LORD did not appear again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized that it had been the angel of the LORD. ²²“We are going to die,” he said to his wife, “for we have seen God!” ²³But his wife replied, “If the LORD had intended to kill us, He would not have accepted the burnt offering and the grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these things or spoken to us this way.” ²⁴So the woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson. The boy grew, and the LORD blessed him. ²⁵And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him at Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

Chapter 14

SAMSON’S MARRIAGE

¹One day Samson went down to Timnah, where he saw a young Philistine woman. ²So he returned and told his father and mother, “I have seen a daughter of the Philistines in Timnah. Now get her for me as a wife.” ³But his father and mother replied, “Can’t you find a young woman among your relatives or among any of our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?” But Samson told his father, “Get her for me, for she is pleasing to my eyes.” ⁴(Now his father and mother did not know this was from the LORD, who was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines; for at that time the Philistines were ruling over Israel.) ⁵Then Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother and came to the vineyards of Timnah. Suddenly a young lion came roaring at him, ⁶and the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him, and he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as one would tear a young goat. But he did not tell his father or mother what he had done. ⁷Then Samson continued on his way down and spoke to the woman, because she was pleasing to his eyes.

SAMSON’S RIDDLE

⁸When Samson returned later to take her, he left the road to see the lion’s carcass, and in it was a swarm of bees, along with their honey. ⁹So he scooped some honey into his hands and ate it as he went along. And when he returned to his father and mother, he gave some to them and they ate it. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the lion’s carcass. ¹⁰Then his father went to visit the woman, and Samson prepared a feast there, as was customary for the bridegroom. ¹¹And when the Philistines saw him, they selected thirty men to accompany him. ¹²“Let me tell you a riddle,” Samson said to them. “If you can solve it for me within the seven days of the feast, I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes. ¹³But if you cannot solve it, you must give me thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes.” “Tell us your riddle,” they replied. “Let us hear it.” ¹⁴So he said to them: “Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet.” For three days they were unable to explain the riddle. ¹⁵So on the fourth day they said to Samson’s wife, “Entice your husband to explain the riddle to us, or we will burn you and your father’s household to death. Did you invite us here to rob us?” ¹⁶Then Samson’s wife came to him, weeping, and said, “You hate me! You do not really love me! You have posed to my people a riddle, but have not explained it to me.” “Look,” he said, “I have not even explained it to my father or mother, so why should I explain it to you?” ¹⁷She wept the whole seven days of the feast, and finally on the seventh day, because she had pressed him so much, he told her the answer. And in turn she explained the riddle to her people. ¹⁸Before sunset on the seventh day, the men of the city said to Samson: “What is sweeter than honey? And what is stronger than a lion?” So he said to them: “If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have solved my riddle!” ¹⁹Then the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, killed thirty of their men, took their apparel, and gave their clothes to those who had solved the riddle. And burning with anger, Samson returned to his father’s house, ²⁰and his wife was given to one of the men who had accompanied him.

Chapter 15

SAMSON’S REVENGE

¹Later on, at the time of the wheat harvest, Samson took a young goat and went to visit his wife. “I want to go to my wife in her room,” he said. But her father would not let him enter. ²“I was sure that you thoroughly hated her,” said her father, “so I gave her to one of the men who accompanied

you. Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please take her instead.” ³Samson said to them, “This time I will be blameless in doing harm to the Philistines.” ⁴Then Samson went out and caught three hundred foxes. And he took torches, turned the foxes tail-to-tail, and fastened a torch between each pair of tails. ⁵Then he lit the torches and released the foxes into the standing grain of the Philistines, burning up the piles of grain and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards and olive groves. ⁶“Who did this?” the Philistines demanded. “It was Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite,” they were told. “For his wife was given to his companion.” So the Philistines went up and burned her and her father to death. ⁷And Samson told them, “Because you have done this, I will not rest until I have taken vengeance upon you.” ⁸And he struck them ruthlessly with a great slaughter, and then went down and stayed in the cave at the rock of Etam. ⁹Then the Philistines went up, camped in Judah, and deployed themselves near the town of Lehi. ¹⁰“Why have you attacked us?” said the men of Judah. The Philistines replied, “We have come to arrest Samson and pay him back for what he has done to us.” ¹¹In response, three thousand men of Judah went to the cave at the rock of Etam, and they asked Samson, “Do you not realize that the Philistines rule over us? What have you done to us?” “I have done to them what they did to me,” he replied. ¹²But they said to him, “We have come down to arrest you and hand you over to the Philistines.” Samson replied, “Swear to me that you will not kill me yourselves.” ¹³“No,” they answered, “we will not kill you, but we will tie you up securely and hand you over to them.” So they bound him with two new ropes and led him up from the rock. ¹⁴When Samson arrived in Lehi, the Philistines came out shouting against him. And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him. The ropes on his arms became like burnt flax, and the bonds broke loose from his hands. ¹⁵He found the fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and struck down a thousand men. ¹⁶Then Samson said: “With the jawbone of a donkey I have piled them into heaps. With the jawbone of a donkey I have slain a thousand men.” ¹⁷And when Samson had finished speaking, he cast the jawbone from his hand; and he named that place Ramath-lehi. ¹⁸And being very thirsty, Samson cried out to the LORD, “You have accomplished this great deliverance through Your servant. Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?” ¹⁹So God opened up the hollow place in Lehi, and water came out of it. When Samson drank, his strength returned, and he was revived. That is why he named it En-hakkore, and it remains in Lehi to this day. ²⁰And Samson judged Israel for twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

Chapter 16

SAMSON ESCAPES GAZA

¹One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute and went in to spend the night with her. ²When the Gazites heard that Samson was there, they surrounded that place and lay in wait for him all night at the city gate. They were quiet throughout the night, saying, “Let us wait until dawn; then we will kill him.” ³But Samson lay there only until midnight, when he got up, took hold of the doors of the city gate and both gateposts, and pulled them out, bar and all. Then he put them on his shoulders and took them to the top of the mountain overlooking Hebron.

SAMSON AND DELILAH

⁴Some time later, Samson fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. ⁵The lords of the Philistines went to her and said, “Entice him and find out the source of his great strength and how we can overpower him to tie him up and subdue him. Then each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver.” ⁶So Delilah said to Samson, “Please tell me the source of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued.” ⁷Samson told her, “If they tie me up with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, I will become as weak as any other man.” ⁸So the lords of the Philistines brought her seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried, and she tied him up with them. ⁹While the men were hidden in her room, she called out, “Samson, the Philistines are here!” But he snapped the bowstrings like a strand of yarn seared by a flame. So the source of his strength remained unknown. ¹⁰Then Delilah said to Samson, “You have mocked me and lied to me! Now please tell me how you can be tied up.” ¹¹He replied, “If they tie me up with new ropes that have never been used, I will become as weak as any other man.” ¹²So Delilah took new ropes, tied him up with them, and called out, “Samson, the Philistines are here!” But while the men were hidden in her room, he snapped the ropes off his arms like they were threads. ¹³Then Delilah said to Samson, “You have mocked me and lied to me all along! Tell me how you can be tied up.” He told her, “If you weave the seven braids of my head into the web of a loom and tighten it with a pin, I will become as weak as any other man.” ¹⁴So while he slept, Delilah took the seven braids of his hair and wove them into the web. Then she tightened it with a pin and called to him, “Samson, the Philistines are here!” But he awoke from his sleep and pulled out the pin with the loom and the web.

DELILAH LEARNS THE SECRET

¹⁵“How can you say, ‘I love you,’” she asked, “when your heart is not with me? This is the third time you have mocked me and failed to reveal to me the source of your great strength!” ¹⁶Finally, after she had pressed him daily with her words and pleaded until he was sick to death, ¹⁷Samson told her all that was in his heart: “My hair has never been cut, because I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother’s womb. If I am shaved, my strength will leave me, and I will become as weak as any other man.” ¹⁸When Delilah realized that he had revealed to her all that was in his heart, she sent this message to the lords of the Philistines: “Come up once more, for he has revealed to me all that is in his heart.” Then the lords of the Philistines came to her, bringing the money in their hands. ¹⁹And having lulled him to sleep on her lap, she called a man to shave off the seven braids of his head. In this way she began to subdue him, and his strength left him. ²⁰Then she called out, “Samson, the Philistines are here!” When Samson awoke from his sleep, he thought, “I will escape as I did before and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him. ²¹Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, where he was bound with bronze shackles and forced to grind grain in the prison. ²²However, the hair of his head began to grow back after it had been shaved.

SAMSON’S VENGEANCE AND DEATH

²³Now the lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon. They rejoiced and said, “Our god has delivered Samson our enemy into our hands.” ²⁴And when the people saw him, they praised their god, saying: “Our god has delivered into our hands our enemy who destroyed our land and multiplied our dead.” ²⁵And while their hearts were merry, they said, “Call for Samson to entertain us.” So they called Samson out of the prison to entertain them. And they stationed him between the pillars. ²⁶Samson said to the servant who held his hand, “Lead me where I can feel the pillars supporting the temple, so I can lean against them.” ²⁷Now the temple was full of men and women; all the lords of the Philistines were there, and about three thousand men and women were on the roof watching Samson entertain them. ²⁸Then Samson called out to the LORD: “O Lord GOD, please remember me. Strengthen me, O God, just once more, so that with one vengeful blow I may pay back the Philistines for my two eyes.” ²⁹And Samson reached out for the two central pillars supporting the temple. Bracing himself against them with his right hand on one pillar and his left hand on the other, ³⁰Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines.” Then he

pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people in it. So in his death he killed more than he had killed in his life. ³¹Then Samson’s brothers and his father’s family came down, carried him back, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. And he had judged Israel twenty years.

Chapter 17

MICAH’S IDOLATRY

¹Now a man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim ²said to his mother, “The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you and about which I heard you utter a curse—I have the silver here with me; I took it.” Then his mother said, “Blessed be my son by the LORD!” ³And when he had returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, she said, “I wholly dedicate the silver to the LORD for my son’s benefit, to make a graven image and a molten idol. Therefore I will now return it to you.” ⁴So he returned the silver to his mother, and she took two hundred shekels of silver and gave them to a silversmith, who made them into a graven image and a molten idol. And they were placed in the house of Micah. ⁵Now this man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and some household idols, and ordained one of his sons as his priest. ⁶In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes. ⁷And there was a young Levite from Bethlehem in Judah who had been residing within the clan of Judah. ⁸This man left the city of Bethlehem in Judah to settle where he could find a place. And as he traveled, he came to Micah’s house in the hill country of Ephraim. ⁹“Where are you from?” Micah asked him. “I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah,” he replied, “and I am on my way to settle wherever I can find a place.” ¹⁰“Stay with me,” Micah said to him, “and be my father and priest, and I will give you ten shekels of silver per year, a suit of clothes, and your provisions.” So the Levite went in ¹¹and agreed to stay with him, and the young man became like a son to Micah. ¹²Micah ordained the Levite, and the young man became his priest and lived in his house. ¹³Then Micah said, “Now I know that the LORD will be good to me, because a Levite has become my priest.”

Chapter 18

THE DANITES SETTLE IN LAISH

¹In those days there was no king in Israel, and the tribe of the Danites was looking for territory to occupy. For up to that time they had not come into an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. ²So the Danites sent out five men from

their clans, men of valor from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and explore it. “Go and explore the land,” they told them. The men entered the hill country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah, where they spent the night. ³And while they were near Micah’s house, they recognized the voice of the young Levite; so they went over and asked him, “Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? Why are you here?” ⁴“Micah has done this and that for me,” he replied, “and he has hired me to be his priest.” ⁵Then they said to him, “Please inquire of God to determine whether we will have a successful journey.” ⁶And the priest told them, “Go in peace. The LORD is watching over your journey.” ⁷So the five men departed and came to Laish, where they saw that the people were living securely, like the Sidonians, quiet and unsuspecting. There was nothing lacking in the land and no oppressive ruler. And they were far away from the Sidonians and had no alliance with anyone. ⁸When the men returned to Zorah and Eshtaol, their brothers asked them, “What did you find?” ⁹They answered, “Come on, let us go up against them, for we have seen the land, and it is very good. Why would you fail to act? Do not hesitate to go there and take possession of the land!” ¹⁰When you enter, you will come to an unsuspecting people and a spacious land, for God has delivered it into your hand. It is a place where nothing on earth is lacking.” ¹¹So six hundred Danites departed from Zorah and Eshtaol, armed with weapons of war. ¹²They went up and camped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. That is why the place west of Kiriath-jearim is called Mahanehdan to this day. ¹³And from there they traveled to the hill country of Ephraim and came to Micah’s house.

THE DANITES TAKE MICAH’S IDOLS

¹⁴Then the five men who had gone to spy out the land of Laish said to their brothers, “Did you know that one of these houses has an ephod, household gods, a graven image, and a molten idol? Now think about what you should do.” ¹⁵So they turned aside there and went to the home of the young Levite, the house of Micah, and greeted him. ¹⁶The six hundred Danites stood at the entrance of the gate, armed with their weapons of war. ¹⁷And the five men who had gone to spy out the land went inside and took the graven image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molten idol, while the priest stood at the entrance of the gate with the six hundred armed men. ¹⁸When they entered Micah’s house and took the graven image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molten idol, the priest said to them, “What are you doing?” ¹⁹“Be quiet,” they told him. “Put your hand over your mouth and come with us and be a father and a priest to us. Is it better for you to be a priest

for the house of one person or a priest for a tribe and family in Israel?” ²⁰So the priest was glad and took the ephod, the household idols, and the graven image, and went with the people. ²¹Putting their small children, their livestock, and their possessions in front of them, they turned and departed. ²²After they were some distance from Micah’s house, the men in the houses near Micah’s house mobilized and overtook the Danites. ²³When they called out after them, the Danites turned to face them and said to Micah, “What is the matter with you that you have called out such a company?” ²⁴He replied, “You took the gods I had made, and my priest, and went away. What else do I have? How can you say to me, ‘What is the matter with you?’” ²⁵The Danites said to him, “Do not raise your voice against us, or angry men will attack you, and you and your family will lose your lives.” ²⁶So the Danites went on their way, and Micah turned to go back home, because he saw that they were too strong for him. ²⁷After they had taken Micah’s idols and his priest, they went to Laish, to a quiet and unsuspecting people, and they struck them with their swords and burned down the city. ²⁸There was no one to deliver them, because the city was far from Sidon and had no alliance with anyone; it was in a valley near Beth-rehob. And the Danites rebuilt the city and lived there. ²⁹They named it Dan, after their forefather Dan, who was born to Israel—though the city was formerly named Laish. ³⁰The Danites set up idols for themselves, and Jonathan son of Gershom, the son of Moses, and his sons were priests for the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. ³¹So they set up for themselves Micah’s graven image, and it was there the whole time the house of God was in Shiloh.

Chapter 19

THE CRIME OF THE BENJAMITES

¹Now in those days, when there was no king in Israel, a Levite who lived in the remote hill country of Ephraim took for himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. ²But she was unfaithful to him and left him to return to her father’s house in Bethlehem in Judah. After she had been there four months, ³her husband got up and went after her to speak kindly to her and bring her back, taking his servant and a pair of donkeys. So the girl brought him into her father’s house, and when her father saw him, he gladly welcomed him. ⁴His father-in-law, the girl’s father, persuaded him to stay, so he remained with him three days, eating, drinking, and lodging there. ⁵On the fourth day, they got up early in the morning and prepared to depart, but the girl’s father said to his son-in-law, “Refresh your heart with a morsel of bread, and then you can go.” ⁶So they sat down

and the two of them ate and drank together. Then the girl's father said to the man, "Please agree to stay overnight and let your heart be merry." ⁷The man got up to depart, but his father-in-law persuaded him, so he stayed there that night. ⁸On the fifth day, he got up early in the morning to depart, but the girl's father said, "Please refresh your heart." So they waited until late afternoon and the two of them ate. ⁹When the man got up to depart with his concubine and his servant, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said to him, "Look, the day is drawing to a close. Please spend the night. See, the day is almost over. Spend the night here, that your heart may be merry. Then you can get up early tomorrow for your journey home." ¹⁰But the man was unwilling to spend the night. He got up and departed, and arrived opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem), with his two saddled donkeys and his concubine. ¹¹When they were near Jebus and the day was almost gone, the servant said to his master, "Please, let us stop at this Jebusite city and spend the night here." ¹²But his master replied, "We will not turn aside to the city of foreigners, where there are no Israelites. We will go on to Gibeah." ¹³He continued, "Come, let us try to reach one of these towns to spend the night in Gibeah or Ramah." ¹⁴So they continued on their journey, and the sun set as they neared Gibeah in Benjamin. ¹⁵They stopped to go in and lodge in Gibeah. The Levite went in and sat down in the city square, but no one would take them into his home for the night. ¹⁶That evening an old man from the hill country of Ephraim, who was residing in Gibeah (the men of that place were Benjamites), came in from his work in the field. ¹⁷When he looked up and saw the traveler in the city square, the old man asked, "Where are you going, and where have you come from?" ¹⁸The Levite replied, "We are traveling from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote hill country of Ephraim, where I am from. I went to Bethlehem in Judah, and now I am going to the house of the LORD; but no one has taken me into his home, ¹⁹even though there is both straw and feed for our donkeys, and bread and wine for me and the maidservant and young man with me. There is nothing that we, your servants, lack." ²⁰"Peace to you," said the old man. "Let me supply everything you need. Only do not spend the night in the square." ²¹So he brought him to his house and fed his donkeys. And they washed their feet and ate and drank. ²²While they were enjoying themselves, suddenly the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they said to the old man who owned the house, "Bring out the man who came to your house, so we can have relations with him!" ²³The owner of the house went out and said to them, "No, my brothers, do not do this wicked thing! After all, this man is a guest in my house. Do not commit this outrage. ²⁴Look,

let me bring out my virgin daughter and the man's concubine, and you can use them and do with them as you wish. But do not do such a vile thing to this man." ²⁵But the men would not listen to him. So the Levite took his concubine and sent her outside to them, and they raped her and abused her throughout the night, and at dawn they let her go. ²⁶Early that morning, the woman went back to the house where her master was staying, collapsed at the doorway, and lay there until it was light. ²⁷In the morning, when her master got up and opened the doors of the house to go out on his journey, there was his concubine, collapsed in the doorway of the house, with her hands on the threshold. ²⁸"Get up," he told her. "Let us go." But there was no response. So the man put her on his donkey and set out for home. ²⁹When he reached his house, he picked up a knife, took hold of his concubine, cut her limb by limb into twelve pieces, and sent her throughout the territory of Israel. ³⁰And everyone who saw it said, "Nothing like this has been seen or done from the day the Israelites came out of the land of Egypt until this day. Think it over, take counsel, and speak up!"

Chapter 20

THE DECREE OF THE ASSEMBLY

¹Then all the Israelites from Dan to Beersheba and from the land of Gilead came out, and the congregation assembled as one man before the LORD at Mizpah. ²The leaders of all the people and all the tribes of Israel presented themselves in the assembly of God's people: 400,000 men on foot, armed with swords. ³(Meanwhile the Benjamites heard that the Israelites had gone up to Mizpah.) And the Israelites asked, "Tell us, how did this wicked thing happen?" ⁴So the Levite, the husband of the murdered woman, answered: "I and my concubine came to Gibeah in Benjamin to spend the night. ⁵And during the night, the men of Gibeah rose up against me and surrounded the house. They intended to kill me, but they abused my concubine, and she died. ⁶Then I took my concubine, cut her into pieces, and sent her throughout the land of Israel's inheritance, because they had committed a lewd and disgraceful act in Israel. ⁷Behold, all you Israelites, give your advice and verdict here and now." ⁸Then all the people stood as one man and said, "Not one of us will return to his tent or to his house. ⁹Now this is what we will do to Gibeah: We will go against it as the lot dictates. ¹⁰We will take ten men out of every hundred from all the tribes of Israel, and a hundred out of every thousand, and a thousand out of every ten thousand, to supply provisions for the army when they go to Gibeah in Benjamin to punish them

for the atrocity they have committed in Israel.” ¹¹So all the men of Israel gathered as one man, united against the city. ¹²And the tribes of Israel sent men throughout the tribe of Benjamin, saying, “What is this wickedness that has occurred among you? ¹³Hand over the wicked men of Gibeah so we can put them to death and purge Israel of this evil.” But the Benjamites refused to heed the voice of their fellow Israelites. ¹⁴And from their cities they came together at Gibeah to go out and fight against the Israelites. ¹⁵On that day the Benjamites mobilized 26,000 swordsmen from their cities, in addition to the 700 select men of Gibeah. ¹⁶Among all these soldiers there were 700 select left-handers, each of whom could sling a stone at a hair without missing. ¹⁷The Israelites, apart from Benjamin, mobilized 400,000 swordsmen, each one an experienced warrior.

CIVIL WAR AGAINST BENJAMIN

¹⁸The Israelites set out, went up to Bethel, and inquired of God, “Who of us shall go up first to fight against the Benjamites?” “Judah will be first,” the LORD replied. ¹⁹The next morning the Israelites set out and camped near Gibeah. ²⁰And the men of Israel went out to fight against Benjamin and took up their battle positions at Gibeah. ²¹And the Benjamites came out of Gibeah and cut down 22,000 Israelites on the battlefield that day. ²²But the Israelite army took courage and again took their battle positions in the same place where they had arrayed themselves on the first day. ²³They went up and wept before the LORD until evening, inquiring of Him, “Should we again draw near for battle against our brothers the Benjamites?” And the LORD answered, “Go up against them.” ²⁴On the second day the Israelites advanced against the Benjamites. ²⁵That same day the Benjamites came out against them from Gibeah and cut down another 18,000 Israelites, all of them armed with swords. ²⁶Then the Israelites, all the people, went up to Bethel, where they sat weeping before the LORD. That day they fasted until evening and presented burnt offerings and peace offerings to the LORD. ²⁷And the Israelites inquired of the LORD. (In those days the ark of the covenant of God was there, ²⁸and Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, served before it.) The Israelites asked, “Should we again go out to battle against our brothers the Benjamites, or should we stop?” The LORD answered, “Fight, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand.” ²⁹So Israel set up an ambush around Gibeah. ³⁰On the third day the Israelites went up against the Benjamites and arrayed themselves against Gibeah as they had done before. ³¹The Benjamites came out against them and were drawn away from the city. They began to attack the people as before, killing about thirty men of Israel in the fields and

on the roads, one of which led up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah. ³²“We are defeating them as before,” said the Benjamites. But the Israelites said, “Let us retreat and draw them away from the city onto the roads.” ³³So all the men of Israel got up from their places and arrayed themselves at Baal-tamar, and the Israelites in ambush charged from their positions west of Gibeah. ³⁴Then 10,000 select men from all Israel made a frontal assault against Gibeah, and the battle was fierce. But the Benjamites did not realize that disaster was upon them. ³⁵The LORD defeated Benjamin in the presence of Israel, and on that day the Israelites slaughtered 25,100 Benjamites, all armed with swords. ³⁶Then the Benjamites realized they had been defeated. Now the men of Israel had retreated before Benjamin because they were relying on the ambush they had set against Gibeah. ³⁷The men in ambush rushed suddenly against Gibeah; they advanced and put the whole city to the sword. ³⁸The men of Israel had arranged a signal with the men in ambush: When they sent up a great cloud of smoke from the city, ³⁹the men of Israel would turn in the battle. When the Benjamites had begun to strike them down, killing about thirty men of Israel, they said, “They are defeated before us as in the first battle.” ⁴⁰But when the column of smoke began to go up from the city, the Benjamites looked behind them and saw the whole city going up in smoke. ⁴¹Then the men of Israel turned back on them, and the men of Benjamin were terrified when they realized that disaster had come upon them. ⁴²So they fled before the men of Israel toward the wilderness, but the battle overtook them, and the men coming out of the cities struck them down there. ⁴³They surrounded the Benjamites, pursued them, and easily overtook them in the vicinity of Gibeah on the east. ⁴⁴And 18,000 Benjamites fell, all men of valor. ⁴⁵Then the Benjamites turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and Israel cut down 5,000 men on the roads. And they overtook them at Gidom and struck down 2,000 more. ⁴⁶That day 25,000 Benjamite swordsmen fell, all men of valor. ⁴⁷But 600 men turned and fled into the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, where they stayed four months. ⁴⁸And the men of Israel turned back against the other Benjamites and put to the sword all the cities, including the animals and everything else they found. And they burned down all the cities in their path.

Chapter 21

WIVES FOR THE BENJAMITES

¹Now the men of Israel had sworn an oath at Mizpah, saying, “Not one of us will give his daughter in marriage to a

Benjamite.” ²So the people came to Bethel and sat there before God until evening, lifting up their voices and weeping bitterly. ³“Why, O LORD God of Israel,” they cried out, “has this happened in Israel? Today in Israel one tribe is missing!” ⁴The next day the people got up early, built an altar there, and presented burnt offerings and peace offerings. ⁵The Israelites asked, “Who among all the tribes of Israel did not come to the assembly before the LORD?” For they had taken a solemn oath that anyone who failed to come up before the LORD at Mizpah would surely be put to death. ⁶And the Israelites grieved for their brothers, the Benjamites, and said, “Today a tribe is cut off from Israel. ⁷What should we do about wives for the survivors, since we have sworn by the LORD not to give them our daughters in marriage?” ⁸So they asked, “Which one of the tribes of Israel failed to come up before the LORD at Mizpah?” And, in fact, no one from Jabesh-gilead had come to the camp for the assembly. ⁹For when the people were counted, none of the residents of Jabesh-gilead were there. ¹⁰So the congregation sent 12,000 of their most valiant men and commanded them: “Go and put to the sword those living in Jabesh-gilead, including women and children. ¹¹This is what you are to do: Devote to destruction every male, as well as every female who has had relations with a man.” ¹²So they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead four hundred young women who had not had relations with a man, and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh in the land of Canaan. ¹³Then the whole congregation sent a message of peace to the Benjamites who were at the rock of Rimmon. ¹⁴And at that time the Benjamites returned

and were given the women who were spared from Jabesh-gilead. But there were not enough women for all of them. ¹⁵The people grieved for Benjamin, because the LORD had made a void in the tribes of Israel. ¹⁶Then the elders of the congregation said, “What should we do about wives for those who remain, since the women of Benjamin have been destroyed?” ¹⁷They added, “There must be heirs for the survivors of Benjamin, so that a tribe of Israel will not be wiped out. ¹⁸But we cannot give them our daughters as wives.” For the Israelites had sworn, “Cursed is he who gives a wife to a Benjamite.” ¹⁹“But look,” they said, “there is a yearly feast to the LORD in Shiloh, which is north of Bethel east of the road that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah.” ²⁰So they commanded the Benjamites: “Go, hide in the vineyards ²¹and watch. When you see the daughters of Shiloh come out to perform their dances, each of you is to come out of the vineyards, catch for himself a wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin. ²²When their fathers or brothers come to us to complain, we will tell them, ‘Do us a favor by helping them, since we did not get wives for each of them in the war. Since you did not actually give them your daughters, you have no guilt.’” ²³The Benjamites did as instructed and carried away the number of women they needed from the dancers they caught. They went back to their own inheritance, rebuilt their cities, and settled in them. ²⁴And at that time, each of the Israelites returned from there to his own tribe and clan, each to his own inheritance. ²⁵In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.