

Bookmarks

- [Judges 1](#)
- [Judges 2](#)
- [Judges 3](#)
- [Judges 4](#)
- [Judges 5](#)
- [Judges 6](#)
- [Judges 7](#)
- [Judges 8](#)
- [Judges 9](#)
- [Judges 10](#)
- [Judges 11](#)
- [Judges 12](#)
- [Judges 13](#)
- [Judges 14](#)
- [Judges 15](#)
- [Judges 16](#)
- [Judges 17](#)
- [Judges 18](#)
- [Judges 19](#)
- [Judges 20](#)
- [Judges 21](#)

Book of Judges

I. ATTITUDE OF ISRAEL TOWARDS THE CANAANITES, AND TOWARDS JEHOVAH ITS GOD.

Ch. 1-3:6.

*Hostilities between Israel and the Canaanites after Joshua's Death.
Ch. 1:1-2:5.*

After the death of Joshua the tribes of Israel resolved to continue the war with the Canaanites, that they might exterminate them altogether from the land that had been given them for an inheritance. In accordance with the divine command, Judah commenced the strife in association with Simeon, smote the king of Bezek, conquered Jerusalem, Hebron and Debir upon the mountains, Zephath in the south land, and three of the chief cities of the Philistines, and took possession of the mountains; but was unable to exterminate the inhabitants of the plain, just as the Benjaminites were unable to drive the Jebusites out of Jerusalem (vv. 1-21). The tribe of Joseph also conquered the city of Bethel (vv. 22-26); but from the remaining towns of the land neither the Manassites, nor the Ephraimites, nor the tribes of Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali expelled the Canaanites: all that they did was to make them tributary (vv. 27-33).

The Danites were actually forced back by the Amorites out of the plain into the mountains, because the latter maintained their hold of the towns of the plain, although the house of Joseph conquered them and made them tributary (vv. 34-36). The angel of the Lord therefore appeared at Bochim, and declared to the Israelites, that because they had not obeyed the command of the Lord, to make no covenant

with the Canaanites, the Lord would no more drive out these nations, but would cause them and their gods to become a snare to them (Judg 2:1-5). From this divine revelation it is evident, on the one hand, that the failure to exterminate the Canaanites had its roots in the negligence of the tribes of Israel; and on the other hand, that the accounts of the wars of the different tribes, and the enumeration of the towns in the different possessions out of which the Canaanites were not expelled, were designed to show clearly the attitude of the Israelites to the Canaanites in the age immediately following the death of Joshua, or to depict the historical basis on which the development of Israel rested in the era of the judges.

Judges 1:1-2

Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?

Verse 1-2. With the words "*Now, after the death of Joshua, it came to pass,*" the book of Judges takes up the thread of the history where the book of Joshua had dropped it, to relate the further development of the covenant nation. A short time before his death, Joshua had gathered the elders and heads of the people around him, and set before them the entire destruction of the Canaanites through the omnipotent help of the Lord, if they would only adhere with fidelity to the Lord; whilst, at the same time, he also pointed out to them the dangers of apostasy from the Lord (Josh 23). Remembering this admonition and warning, the Israelites inquired, after Joshua's death, who

[First](#) [Next ->](#)

should begin the war against the Canaanites who still remained to be destroyed; and the Lord answered, "*Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand*" (vv. 1, 2). *bayhaaowh* (OT:3068) *shaa'al* (OT:7592), to ask with Jehovah for the purpose of obtaining a declaration of the divine will, is substantially the same as *haa'uwriym b^amish^apaT shaa'al* (Num 27:21), to inquire the will of the Lord through the Urim and Thummim of the high priest.

From this time forward inquiring of the Lord occurs with greater frequency (vid., Judg 20:23,27; 1 Sam 10:22; 22:10; 23:2, etc.), as well as the synonymous expression "ask of *Elohim*" in Judg 18:5; 20:18; 1 Sam 14:37; 22:13; 1 Chron 14:10; whereas Moses and Joshua received direct revelations from God. The phrase '*el-hak^ana`aniy ya`aleh* , "go up to the Canaanites," is defined more precisely by the following words, "to fight against them;" so that *aalaah* (OT:5927) is used here also to denote the campaign against a nation (see at Josh 8:1), without there being any necessity, however, for us to take '*el* (OT:413) in the sense of *al* (OT:5921). *bat^achilaah* (OT:8462) *aalaah* (OT:5927) signifies "to go up in the beginning," i.e., to open or commence the war; not to hold the commandership in the war, as the *Sept.*, *Vulgate* , and others render it (see Judg 10:18, where *hilaacheem* (OT:3898) *yaacheel* (OT:2490) is expressly distinguished from being the chief or leader).

Moreover, *miy* (OT:4310) does not mean who? i.e., what person, but, as the answer clearly shows, what tribe? Now a tribe could open the war, and take the lead at the head of the other tribes, but could not be the commander-in-chief. In the present instance, however, Judah did not even enter upon the war at the head of all the tribes, but simply joined with the tribe of Simeon to make a common attack upon the Canaanites in their inheritance. The promise in v. 2b is the same as that in Josh 6:2; 8:1, etc. "*The land*" is not merely the land allotted to the tribe of Judah, or Judah's inheritance, as *Bertheau* supposes, for Judah conquered Jerusalem (v. 8), which had been allotted to the tribe of Benjamin (Josh 18:28), but the land of Canaan generally, so far as it was still in the possession of the Canaanites and was

to be conquered by Judah. The reason why Judah was to commence the hostilities is not to be sought for in the fact that Judah was the most numerous of all the tribes (*Rosenmüller*), but rather in the fact that Judah had already been appointed by the blessing of Jacob (Gen 49:8ff.) to be the champion of his brethren.

Judges 1:3

And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him.

Judah invited Simeon his brother, i.e., their brother tribe, to take part in the contest. The epithet is applied to Simeon, not because Simeon and Judah, the sons of Jacob, were the children of the same mother, Leah (Gen 29:33,35), but because Simeon's inheritance was within the territory of Judah (Josh 19:1ff.), so that Simeon was more closely connected with Judah than any of the other tribes. "*Come up with me into my lot* (into the inheritance that has fallen to me by lot), *that we may fight against the Canaanites, and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him,*" i.e., joined with Judah in making war upon the Canaanites. This request shows that Judah's principal intention was to make war upon and exterminate the Canaanites who remained in his own and Simeon's inheritance. The different expressions employed, *come up* and *go*, are to be explained from the simple fact that the whole of Simeon's territory was in the *shephelah* and *Negeb*, whereas Judah had received the heart of his possessions upon the mountains.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 1:4-7

And Judah went up; and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men.

"**And Judah went up,**" sc., against the Canaanites, to make war upon them. The completion of the sentence is supplied by the context, more especially by v. 2. So far as the sense is concerned, *Rosenmüller* has given the correct explanation of *waya`al* (OT:5927), "Judah entered upon the expedition along with Simeon." "*And they smote the Canaanites and the Perizzites in Bezek, 10,000 men.*" The result of the war is summed up briefly in these words; and then in vv. 5-7 the capture and punishment of the hostile king *Adoni-bezek* is specially mentioned as being the most important event in the war. The foe is described as consisting of Canaanites and Perizzites, two tribes which have been already named in Gen 13:7 and 34:30 as representing the entire population of Canaan, "*the Canaanites*" comprising principally those in the lowlands by the Jordan and the Mediterranean (vid., Num 13:29; Josh 11:3), and "*the Perizzites*" the tribes who dwelt in the mountains (Josh 17:15).

On the **Perizzites**, see Gen 13:7. The place mentioned, *Bezek*, is only mentioned once more, namely in 1 Sam 11:8, where it is described as being situated between Gibeah of Saul (see at Josh 18:28) and Jabesh in Gilead. According to the *Onom.* (s. v. *Bezek*), there were at that time two places very near together both named *Bezek*, seventeen Roman miles from Neapolis on the road to *Scythopolis*, i.e., about seven hours to the north of Nabulus on the road to Beisan. This description is perfectly reconcilable with 1 Sam 11:8. On the other hand, *Clericus* (*ad h. l.*), *Rosenmüller*, and v. *Raumer* suppose the *Bezek* mentioned here to have been situated in the territory of Judah; though this cannot be proved, since it is merely based upon an inference drawn from v. 3, viz., that Judah and Simeon simply attacked the Canaanites in their own allotted territories—an assumption

which is very uncertain.

There is no necessity, however, to adopt the opposite and erroneous opinion of *Bertheau*, that the tribes of Judah and Simeon commenced their expedition to the south from the gathering-place of the united tribes at Shechem, and fought the battle with the Canaanitish forces in that region upon this expedition; since Shechem is not described in Josh 24 as the gathering-place of the united tribes, i.e., of the whole of the military force of Israel, and the battle fought with Adoni-bezek did not take place at the time when the tribes prepared to leave Shiloh and march to their own possessions after the casting of the lots was over. The simplest explanation is, that when the tribes of Judah and Simeon prepared to make war upon the Canaanites in the possessions allotted to them, they were threatened or attacked by the forces of the Canaanites collected together by Adoni-bezek, so that they had first of all to turn their arms against this king before they could attack the Canaanites in their own tribe-land.

As the precise circumstances connected with the occasion and course of this war have not been recorded, there is nothing to hinder the supposition that Adoni-bezek may have marched from the north against the possession of Benjamin and Judah, possibly with the intention of joining the Canaanites in Jebus, and the Anakim in Hebron and upon the mountains in the south, and then making a combined attack upon the Israelites. This might induce or even compel Judah and Simeon to attack this enemy first of all, and even to pursue him till they overtook him at his capital Bezek, and smote him with all his army. *Adoni-bezek*, i.e., lord of Bezek, is the official title of this king, whose proper name is unknown.

In the principal engagement, in which 10,000 Canaanites fell, Adoni-bezek escaped; but he was overtaken in his flight (vv. 6, 7), and so mutilated, by the cutting off of his thumbs and great toes, that he could neither carry arms

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

nor flee. With this cruel treatment, which the Athenians are said to have practised upon the capture Aegynetes (*Aelian, var. hist. ii. 9*), the Israelites simply executed the just judgment of retribution, as Adoni-bezek was compelled to acknowledge, for the cruelties which he had inflicted upon captives taken by himself. *"Seventy kings,"* he says in v. 7, *"with the thumbs of their hands and feet cut off, were gathering under my table. As I have done, so God hath requited me."*

m^aqutsaatsiym (OT:7112) ... *b^ahonowt* (OT:931), *lit.* "cut in the thumbs of their hands and feet" (see *Ewald*, *Lehrb.* §284 *c.*). The object to *m^alaq^aTiym* (OT:3950), "gathering up" (*viz.*, crumbs), is easily supplied from the idea of the verb itself.

Gathering up crumbs under the table, like the dogs in Matt 15:27, is a figurative representation of the most shameful treatment and humiliation. "Seventy" is a round number, and is certainly an exaggerated hyperbole here. For even if every town of importance in Canaan had its own king, the fact that, when Joshua conquered the land, he only smote thirty-one kings, is sufficient evidence that there can hardly have been seventy kings to be found in all Canaan. It appears strange, too, that the king of Bezek is not mentioned in connection with the conquest of Canaan under Joshua. Bezek was probably situated more on the side towards the valley of the Jordan, where the Israelites under Joshua did not go. Possibly, too, the culminating point of Adoni-bezek's power, when he conquered so many kings, was before the arrival of the Israelites in Canaan, and it may at that time have begun to decline; so that he did not venture to undertake anything against the combined forces of Israel under Joshua, and it was not till the Israelitish tribes separated to go to their own possessions, that he once more tried the fortunes of war and was defeated. The children of Judah took him with them to Jerusalem, where he died.

Judges 1:8-15

Now the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and had taken it, and smitten it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire.

After his defeat, Judah and Simeon went against Jerusalem, and conquered this city and smote it, i.e., its inhabitants, with the edge of the sword, or without quarter (see Gen 34:26), and set the city on fire. *baa'eesh shileeach* , to set on fire, to give up to the flames, only occurs again in Judg 20:48; 2 Kings 8:12, and Ps 74:7. Joshua had already slain the king of Jerusalem and his four allies after the battle at Gibeon (Josh 10:3,18-26), but had not conquered Jerusalem, his capital. This was not done till after Joshua's death, when it was taken by the tribes of Judah and Simeon. But even after this capture, and notwithstanding the fact that it had been set on fire, it did not come into the sole and permanent possession of the Israelites. After the conquerors had advanced still farther, to make war upon the Canaanites in the mountains, in the *Negeb* , and in the *shephelah* (vv. 9ff.), the Jebusites took it again and rebuilt it, so that in the following age it was regarded by the Israelites as a foreign city (Judg 19:11-12). The Benjaminites, to whom Jerusalem had fallen by lot, were no more able to drive out the Jebusites than the Judaeans had been. Consequently they continued to live by the side of the Benjaminites (Judg 1:21) and the Judaeans (Josh 15:63), who settled, as time rolled on, in this the border city of their possessions; and in the upper town especially, upon the top of Mount Zion, they established themselves so firmly, that they could not be dislodged until David succeeded in wresting this fortress from them, and make the city of Zion the capital of his kingdom (2 Sam 5:6ff.).

(Note: In this way we may reconcile in a very simple manner the different accounts concerning Jerusalem in Josh 15:63; Judg 1:8,21; 19:11ff., 1 Sam 17:54, and 2 Sam 5-6, without there being the slightest necessity to restrict the conquest mentioned in this verse to the city that was built round Mount Zion, as *Josephus* does, to the exclusion of the citadel upon Zion itself; or to follow

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Bertheau , and refer the account of the Jebusites dwelling by the children of Judah in Jerusalem (Josh 15:63) to a time subsequent to the conquest of the citadel of Zion by David-an interpretation which is neither favoured by the circumstance that the Jebusite Araunah still held some property there in the time of David (2 Sam 24:21ff.), nor by the passage in 1 Kings 9:20ff., according to which the descendants of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites who still remained in the land were made into tributary bondmen by Solomon, and set to work upon the buildings that he had in hand.)

Verse 9-15. After the conquest of Jerusalem, the children of Judah (together with the Simeonites, v. 3) went down to their own possessions, to make war upon the Canaanites in the mountains, the *Negeb* , and the *shephelah* (see at Josh 15:48; 21:33), and to exterminate them. They first of all conquered Hebron and Debir upon the mountains

(vv. 10-15), as has already been related in Josh 15:14-19 (see the commentary on this passage). The forms *`iliyt* (OT:5942) and *tach^atiyt* (OT:8482) (v. 15), instead of *`iliyowt* (OT:5942) and *tach^atiyowt* (OT:8482) (Josh 15:19), are in the singular, and are construed with the plural form of the feminine *gulowt* (OT:1543), because this is used in the sense of the singular, "a spring" (see *Ewald* , §318, *a.*).

Judges 1:16

And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father in law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which lieth in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people.

The notice respecting the Kenites, that they went up out of the palm-city with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah in the south of Arad, and dwelt there with the Judaeans, is introduced here into the account of the wars of the tribe of Judah, because this migration of the Kenites belonged to the time between the conquest of Debir (vv. 12ff.) and Zephath (v. 17); and the notice itself was of importance, as forming the intermediate link between Num 10:29ff., and the later

allusions to the Kenites in Judg 4:11; 5:24; 1 Sam 15:6; 27:10; 30:29. "*The children of the Kenite*," i.e., the descendants of Hobab, the brother-in-law of Moses (compare Judg 4:11, where the name is given, but *qayin* (OT:7014) occurs instead of *qeeyniy* (OT:7017), with Num 10:29), were probably a branch of the Kenites mentioned in Gen 15:19 along with the other tribes of Canaan, which had separated from the other members of its own tribe before the time of Moses and removed to the land of Midian, where Moses met with a hospitable reception from their chief Reguel on his flight from Egypt. These Kenites had accompanied the Israelites to Canaan at the request of Moses (Num 10:29ff.); and when the Israelites advanced into Canaan itself, they had probably remained as nomads in the neighbourhood of the Jordan near to Jericho, without taking any part in the wars of Joshua. But when the tribe of Judah had exterminated the Canaanites out of Hebron, Debir, and the neighbourhood, after the death of Joshua, they went into the desert of Judah with the Judaeans as they moved farther towards the south; and going to the south-western edge of this desert, to the district on the south of Arad (Tell Arad, see at Num 21:1), they settled there on the border of the steppes of the Negeb (Num 33:40). "*The palm-city*" was a name given to the city of Jericho, according to Judg 3:13; Deut 34:3; 2 Chron 28:15.

There is no ground whatever for thinking of some other town of this name in the desert of Arabia, near the palm-forest, *foinikoo'n* (NT:5404), of *Diod. Sic.* (iii. 42) and *Strabo* (p. 776), as *Clericus* and *Bertheau* suppose, even if it could be proved that there was any such town in the neighbourhood. *wayeelek*^a (OT:3212), "*then he went* (the branch of the Kenites just referred to) *and dwelt with the people*" (of the children of Judah), that is to say, with the people of Israel in the desert of Judah. The subject to *wayeelek*^a (OT:3212) is *qeeyniy*

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

(OT:7017), the Kenite, as a tribe.

Judges 1:17-21

And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they slew the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. And the name of the city was called Hormah.

Remaining Conquests of the Combined Tribes of Judah and Simeon. - V. 17. *Zephath* was in the territory of Simeon. This is evident not only from the fact that *Hormah* (*Zephath*) had been allotted to the tribe of Simeon (compare Josh 19:4 with Judg 15:30), but also from the words, "Judah went with Simeon his brother," which point back to v. 3, and express the thought that Judah went with Simeon into his territory to drive out the Canaanites who were still to be found there. Going southwards from *Debir*, Judah and Simeon smote the Canaanites at *Zephath* on the southern boundary of Canaan, and executed the ban upon this town, from which it received the name of *Hormah* , i.e., banning. The town has been preserved in the ruins of *Sepâta* , on the south of *Khalasa* or *Elusa* (see at Josh 12:14). In the passage mentioned, the king of *Hormah* or *Zephath* is named among the kings who were slain by Joshua. It does not follow from this, however, that Joshua must necessarily have conquered his capital *Zephath*; the king of Jerusalem was also smitten by Joshua and slain, without Jerusalem itself being taken at that time.

But even if *Zephath* were taken by the Israelites, as soon as the Israelitish army had withdrawn, the Canaanites there might have taken possession of the town again; so that, like many other Canaanitish towns, it had to be conquered again after Joshua's death (see the commentary on Num 21:2-3). There is not much probability in this conjecture, however, for the simple reason that the ban pronounced by Moses upon the country of the king of *Arad* (Num 21:2) was carried out now for the first time by Judah and Simeon upon the town of *Zephath*, which formed a part of it. If

Joshua had conquered it, he would certainly have executed the ban upon it. The name *Hormah*, which was already given to Zephath in Josh 15:30 and 19:4, is no proof to the contrary, since it may be used proleptically there. In any case, the infliction of the ban upon this town can only be explained from the fact that Moses had pronounced the ban upon all the towns of the king of Arad.

Verse 18-21. From the *Negeb* Judah turned into the *shephelah*, and took the three principal cities of the Philistines along the line of coast, viz., Gaza, Askelon, and Ekron, with their territory. The order in which the names of the captured cities occur is a proof that the conquest took place from the south. First of all Gaza, the southernmost of all the towns of the Philistines, the present *Guzzeh*; then Askelon (*Ashkulân*), which is five hours to the north of Gaza; and lastly Ekron, the most northerly of the five towns of the Philistines, the present *Akîr* (see at Josh 13:3). The other two, Ashdod and Gath, do not appear to have been conquered at that time. And even those that were conquered, the Judaeans were unable to hold long. In the time of Samson they were all of them in the hands of the Philistines again (see Judg 14:19; 16:1ff.; 1 Sam 5:10, etc.). - In v. 19 we have a brief summary of the results of the contests for the possession of the land. "*Jehovah was with Judah;*" and with His help they took possession of the mountains.

And they did nothing more; "*for the inhabitants of the plain they were unable to exterminate, because they had iron chariots.*" *howriysh* (OT:3423) has two different meanings in the two clauses: first (*wayoresh* (OT:3423)), to seize upon a possession which has been vacated by the expulsion or destruction of its former inhabitants; and secondly (*l'howriysh* (OT:3423), with the accusative, of the inhabitants), to drive or exterminate

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

them out of their possessions—a meaning which is derived from the earlier signification of making it an emptied possession (see Ex 34:24; Num 32:21, etc.). "*The mountain*" here includes the south-land (the *Negeb*), as the only distinction is between mountains and plain. "*The valley*" is the *shephelah* (v. 9). *l^howriysh* (OT:3423) *lo'* (OT:3808), he was not (able) to drive out. The construction may be explained from the fact that *lo'* (OT:3808) is to be taken independently here as in Amos 6:10, in the same sense in which *'ayin* (OT:369) before the infinitive is used in later writings (2 Chron 5:11; Est 4:2; 8:8; Eccl 3:14: see *Ges.* §132-3, anm. 1; *Ewald*, §237, e.).

On the iron chariots, i.e., the chariots tipped with iron, see at Josh 17:16. - To this there is appended, in v. 20, the statement that "*they gave Hebron unto Caleb,*" etc., which already occurred in Josh 15:13-14, and was there explained; and also in v. 12 the remark, that the Benjaminites did not drive out the Jebusite who dwelt in Jerusalem, which is so far in place here, that it shows, on the one hand, that the children of Judah did not bring Jerusalem into the undisputed possession of the Israelites through this conquest, and, on the other hand, that it was not their intention to diminish the inheritance of Benjamin by the conquest of Jerusalem, and they had not taken the city for themselves. For further remarks, see at v. 8.

The hostile attacks of the other tribes upon the Canaanites who remained in the land are briefly summed up in vv. 22-36. Of these the taking of Bethel is more fully described in vv. 22-26. Besides this, nothing more is given than the list of the towns in the territories of western Manasseh (vv. 27, 28), Ephraim (v. 29), Zebulun (v. 30), Asher (vv. 31, 32), Naphtali (v. 33), and Dan (vv. 34, 35), out of which the Canaanites were not exterminated by these tribes. Issachar is omitted; hardly, however, because that tribe made no attempt to disturb the Canaanites, as *Bertheau* supposes, but rather because none of its towns remained in the hands of the Canaanites.

Judges 1:22-23

And the house of Joseph, they also went up against Bethel: and the LORD was with them.

Like Judah, so also ("they also," referring back to vv. 2, 3) did the house of Joseph (Ephraim and western Manasseh) renew the hostilities with the Canaanites who were left in their territory after the death of Joshua. The children of Joseph went up against Bethel, and Jehovah was with them, so that they were able to conquer the city. *Bethel* had indeed been assigned to the tribe of Benjamin (Josh 18:22), but it was situated on the southern boundary of the tribe-land of Ephraim (Josh 16:2; 18:13); so that the tribe of Joseph could not tolerate the Canaanites in this border town, if it would defend its own territory against them, and purge it entirely of them. This is a sufficient explanation of the fact that this one conquest is mentioned, and this only, without there being any necessity to seek for the reason, as *Bertheau* does, in the circumstance that the town of Bethel came into such significant prominence in the later history of Israel, and attained the same importance in many respects in relation to the northern tribes, as that which Jerusalem attained in relation to the southern. For the fact that nothing more is said about the other conquests of the children of Joseph, may be explained simply enough on the supposition that they did not succeed in rooting out the Canaanites from the other fortified towns in their possessions; and therefore there was nothing to record about any further conquests, as the result of their hostilities was merely this, that they did not drive the Canaanites out of the towns named in vv. 27, 29, but simply made them tributary. *yaatiyruw* (OT:8446), they had it explored, or spied out. *tuwr* (OT:2905) is construed with *b^a* here, because the spying laid hold, as it were, of its object. *Bethel*, formerly Luz, now *Beitin*: see at Gen 28:19 and Josh 7:2.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 1:24-25

And the spies saw a man come forth out of the city, and they said unto him, Shew us, we pray thee, the entrance into the city, and we will shew thee mercy.

And **the watchmen** (i.e., the spies sent out to explore Bethel) saw a man coming out of the town, and got him to show them the entrance into it, under a promise that they would show him favour, i.e., would spare the lives of himself and his family (see Josh 2:12-13); whereupon they took the town and smote it without quarter, according to the law in Deut 20:16-17, letting none but the man and his family go. By "*the entrance into the city*" we are not to understand the gate of the town, but the way or mode by which they could get into the town, which was no doubt fortified.

Judges 1:26

And the man went into the land of the Hittites, and built a city, and called the name thereof Luz: which is the name thereof unto this day.

The man whom they had permitted to go free, went with his family into the land of the Hittites, and there built a town, to which he gave the name of his earlier abode, viz., *Luz*. The situation of this *Luz* is altogether unknown. Even the situation of the land of the Hittites cannot be more precisely determined; for we find Hittites at Hebron in the times of Abraham and Moses (Gen 23), and also upon the mountains of Palestine (Num 13:29), and at a later period on the north-east of Canaan on the borders of Syria (1 Kings 10:29). That the Hittites were one of the most numerous and widespread of the tribes of the Canaanites, is evident from the fact that, in Josh 1:4, the Canaanites generally are described as Hittites.

Judges 1:27,28

Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Bethshean and her towns, nor Taanach and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Dor and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Ibleam and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns: but the Canaanites would dwell in that land.

Manasseh did not root out the Canaanites from the towns which had been allotted to it in the territory of Asher and Issachar (Josh 17:11), but simply made them tributary. *wgw' 'et-beeyt-sh^aaan howriysh lo'*, considered by itself, might be rendered: "*Manasseh did not take possession of Bethshean,*" etc. But as we find, in the further enumeration, the inhabitants of the towns mentioned instead of the towns themselves, we must take *howriysh* (OT:3423) in the sense of rooting out, driving out of their possessions, which is the only rendering applicable in v. 28; and thus, according to a very frequent metonymy, must understand by the towns the inhabitants of the towns.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

"*Manasseh did not exterminate Bethshean,*" i.e., the inhabitants of Bethshean, etc. All the towns mentioned here have already been mentioned in Josh 17:11, the only difference being, that they are not placed in exactly the same order, and that *Endor* is mentioned there after *Dor*; whereas here it has no doubt fallen out through a copyist's error, as the Manassites, according to Josh 17:12-13, did not exterminate the Canaanites from all the towns mentioned there.

The change in the order in which the towns occur-Taanach being placed next to Bethshean, whereas in Joshua Bethshean is followed by Ibleam, which is placed last but one in the present list-may be explained on the supposition, that in Josh 17:11, Endor, Taanach, and Megiddo are placed together, as forming a triple league, of which the author of our book has taken no notice. Nearly all these towns were in the plain of Jezreel, or in the immediate neighbourhood of the great commercial roads which ran from the coast of the Mediterranean to Damascus and central Asia. The Canaanites no doubt brought all their strength to bear upon the defence of these roads; and in this their war-chariots, against which Israel could do nothing in the plain of Jezreel, were of the greatest service (see v. 19; Josh 17:16). For further particulars respecting the situation of the different towns, see at Josh 17:11. *Dor* only was on the coast of the Mediterranean (see at Josh 11:2), and being a commercial emporium of the Phoenicians, would certainly be strongly fortified, and very difficult to conquer.

Verse 28. As the Israelites grew strong, they made serfs of the Canaanites (see at Gen 49:15). When this took place is not stated; but at all events, it was only done gradually in the course of the epoch of the judges, and not for the first time during the reign of Solomon, as *Bertheau* supposes on the ground of 1 Kings 9:20-22 and 4:12, without considering that even in the time of David the Israelites had already attained the highest power they ever possessed, and that there is nothing at variance with this in 1 Kings 4:12 and 9:20-22. For it by no means follows, from the appointment of a prefect by Solomon over the districts of Taanach, Megiddo, and Bethshean (1 Kings 4:12), that these districts had only been conquered by Solomon

a short time before, when we bear in mind that Solomon appointed twelve such prefects over all Israel, to remit in regular order the national payments that were required for the maintenance of the regal court. Nor does it follow, that because Solomon employed the descendants of the Canaanites who were left in the land as tributary labourers in the erection of his great buildings, therefore he was the first who succeeded in compelling those Canaanites who were not exterminated when the land was conquered by Joshua, to pay tribute to the different tribes of Israel.

Judges 1:29-35

Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them.

Ephraim did not root out the Canaanites in *Gezer* (v. 29), as has already been stated in Josh 16:10.

Verse 30. Zebulun did not root out the Canaanites in *Kitron* and *Nahalol*.

Verse 31-32. Asher did not root out those in *Acco*, etc. *Acco*: a seaport town to the north of Carmel, on the bay which is called by its name; it is called *Ake* by *Josephus*, *Diod. Sic.*, and *Pliny*, and was afterwards named *Ptolemais* from one of the Ptolemys (1 Macc. 5:15, 21; 10:1, etc.; Acts 21:7). The Arabs called it *Akka*, and this was corrupted by the crusaders into *Acker* or *Acre*. During the crusades it was a very flourishing maritime and commercial town; but it subsequently fell into decay, and at the present time has a population of about 5000,

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

composed of Mussulmans, Druses, and Christians (see *C. v. Raumer* , Pal. p. 119; *Rob. Bibl. Res.*; and *Ritter* , Erdk. xvi. pp. 725ff.). *Sidon* , now *Saida*: see at Josh 11:8. *Achlab* is only mentioned here, and is not known. *Achzib* , i.e., *Ecdippa*: see at Josh 19:29. *Helbah* is unknown. *Aphek* is the present *Afkah*: see Josh 13:4; 19:30. *Rehob* is unknown: see at Josh 19:28,30. As seven out of the twenty-two towns of Asher (Josh 19:30) remained in the hands of the Canaanites, including such important places as Acco and Sidon, it is not stated in v. 32, as in vv. 29, 30, that "the Canaanites dwelt among them," but that "*the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites*," to show that the Canaanites held the upper hand. And for this reason the expression "they became tributaries" (vv. 30, 35, etc.) is also omitted.

Verse 33. Naphtali did not root out the inhabitants of *Beth-shemesh* and *Beth-anath* , two fortified towns, the situation of which is still unknown (see at Josh 19:38); so that this tribe also dwelt among the Canaanites, but did not make them tributary.

Verse 34-35. Still less were the Danites able to drive the Canaanites out of their inheritance. On the contrary, the Amorites forced Dan up into the mountains, and would not suffer them to come down into the plain. But the territory allotted to the Danites was almost all in the plain (see at Josh 19:40). If, therefore, they were forced out of that, they were almost entirely excluded from their inheritance. The Amorites emboldened themselves (see at Deut 1:5) to dwell in *Har-cheres*, *Ajalon* , and *Shaalbim*. On the last two places see Josh 19:42, where *Ir-shemesh* is also mentioned. This combination, and still more the meaning of the names *Har-cheres* , i.e., sun-mountain, and *Ir-shemesh* , i.e., sun-town, make the conjecture a very probable one, that *Har-cheres* is only another name for *Ir-shemesh* , i.e., the present *Ain Shems* (see at Josh 15:10, and *Rob. Pal.* iii. pp. 17, 18). This pressure on the part of the Amorites induced a portion of the Danites to emigrate, and seek for an inheritance in the north of Palestine (see ch. 18). On the other hand, the Amorites were gradually made tributary by the powerful tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, who bounded Dan on the north. "*The hand of the house of Joseph lay heavy*," sc., upon the Amorites in the towns already named on the borders of

Ephraim. For the expression itself, comp. 1 Sam 5:6; Ps 32:4.

Judges 1:36

And the coast of the Amorites was from the going up to Akrabbim, from the rock, and upward.

In order to explain the supremacy of the Amorites in the territory of Dan, a short notice is added concerning their extension in the south of Palestine. "*The territory of the Amorites was,*" i.e., extended (viz., at the time of the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites), "*from the ascent of Akrabbim, from the rock onwards and farther up.*" *Maaleh-Akrabbim* (*ascensus scorpiorum*) was the sharply projecting line of cliffs which intersected the Ghor below the Dead Sea, and formed the southern boundary of the promised land (see at Num 34:4 and Josh 15:2-3). *meehacela`* (OT:5553), from the rock, is not doubt given as a second point upon the boundary of the Amoritish territory, as the repetition of the *min* (OT:4480) clearly shows, notwithstanding the omission of the copula *w^a*. *hacela`* (OT:5553), the rock, is supposed by the majority of commentators to refer to the city of *Petra*, the ruins of which are still to be seen in the *Wady Musa* (see *Burckhardt*, Syr. pp. 703ff.; *Rob. Pal.* ii. pp. 573ff., iii. 653), and which is distinctly mentioned in 2 Kings 14:7 under the name of *hacela`* (OT:5553), and in Isa 16:1 is called simply *cela`* (OT:5553).

Petra is to the southeast of the Scorpion heights. Consequently, with this rendering the following word

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

waamaa`alah (OT:4605) (and upward) would have to be taken in the sense of *ulterius* (and beyond), and *Rosenmüller's* explanation would be the correct one: "The Amorites not only extended as far as the town of Petra, or inhabited it, but they even carried their dwellings beyond this towards the tops of those southern mountains." But a description of the territory of the Amorites in its southern extension into Arabia Petraea does not suit the context of the verse, the object of which is to explain how it was that the Amorites were in a condition to force back the Danites out of the plain into the mountains, to say nothing of the fact that it is questionable whether the Amorites ever really spread so far, for which we have neither scriptural testimony nor evidence of any other kind.

On this ground even *Bertheau* has taken *waamaa`alah* (OT:4605) as denoting the direction upwards, i.e., towards the north, which unquestionably suits the usage of *maa`alah* (OT:4605) as well as the context of the passage. But it is by no means in harmony with this to understand *hacela`* (OT:5553) as referring to *Petra*; for in that case we should have two boundary points mentioned, the second of which was farther south than the first. Now a historian who had any acquaintance with the topography, would never have described the extent of the Amoritish territory from south to north in such a way as this, commencing with the Scorpion heights on the north, then passing to Petra, which was farther south, and stating that from this point the territory extended farther towards the north. If *waamaa`alah* (OT:4605) therefore refers to the extension of the territory of the Amorites in a northerly direction, the expression "from the rock" cannot be understood as relating to the city of Petra, but must denote some other locality well known to the Israelites by that name.

Such a locality there undoubtedly was in the rock in the desert of Zin, which had become celebrated through the events that took place at the water of strife (Num 20:8,10), and to which in all probability this expression refers. The rock in question was at the south-west corner of Canaan, on the southern edge of the *Rakhma* plateau, to which the mountains of the Amorites extended on the south-west

(comp. Num 14:25,44-45, with Deut 1:44). And this would be very appropriately mentioned here as the south-western boundary of the Amorites, in connection with the Scorpion heights as their south-eastern boundary, for the purpose of giving the southern boundary of the Amorites in its full extent from east to west.

Judges 2:1-2

And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you.

The Angel of the Lord at Bochim. - To the cursory survey of the attitude which the tribes of Israel assumed towards the Canaanites who still remained in their inheritances, there is appended an account of the appearance of the angel of the Lord, who announced to the people the punishment of God for their breach of the covenant, of which they had been guilty through their failure to exterminate the Canaanites. This theophany is most intimately connected with the facts grouped together in ch. 1, since the design and significance of the historical survey given there are only to be learned from the reproof of the angel; and since both of them have the same aphoristic character, being restricted to the essential facts without entering minutely into any of the attendant details, very much is left in obscurity. This applies more particularly to the statement in v. 1a, "Then the angel of Jehovah came up from Gilgal to Bochim." The "angel of Jehovah" is not a prophet, or some other earthly messenger of Jehovah, either Phinehas or Joshua, as the *Targums*, the *Rabbins*, *Bertheau*, and others assume, but the angel of the Lord who is of one essence with God. In the simple historical narrative a prophet is never called *Maleach Jehovah*. The

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

prophets are always called either *naabiy'* (OT:5030) or *naabiy'* (OT:5030) *'iysh* (OT:376), as in Judg 6:8, or else "man of God," as in 1 Kings 12:22; 13:1, etc.; and Hag 1:13 and Mal 3:1 cannot be adduced as proofs to the contrary, because in both these passages the purely appellative meaning of the word *Maleach* is established beyond all question by the context itself.

Moreover, no prophet ever identifies himself so entirely with God as the angel of Jehovah does here. The prophets always distinguish between themselves and Jehovah, by introducing their words with the declaration "thus saith Jehovah," as the prophet mentioned in Judg 6:8 is said to have done. On the other hand, it is affirmed that no angel mentioned in the historical books is ever said to have addressed the whole nation, or to have passed from one place to another. But even if it had been a prophet who was speaking, we could not possibly understand his speaking to the whole nation, or "to all the children of Israel," as signifying that he spoke directly to the 600,000 men of Israel, but simply as an address delivered to the whole nation in the persons of its heads or representatives. Thus Joshua spoke to "all the people" (Josh 24:2), though only the elders of Israel and its heads were assembled round him (Josh 24:1).

And so an angel, or "the angel of the Lord," might also speak to the heads of the nation, when his message had reference to all the people. And there was nothing in the fact of his coming up from Gilgal to Bochim that was at all at variance with the nature of the angel. When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, it is stated in Judg 6:11 that he came and sat under the terebinth at Ophra; and in the same way the appearance of the angel of the Lord at Bochim might just as naturally be described as coming up to Bochim. The only thing that strikes us as peculiar is his coming up "from Gilgal." This statement must be intimately connected with the mission of the angel, and therefore must contain something more than a simply literal notice concerning his travelling from one place to another. We are not to conclude, however, that the angel of the Lord came from Gilgal, because this town was the gathering-place of the congregation in Joshua's time. Apart altogether from

the question discussed in pp. 68ff. as to the situation of Gilgal in the different passages of the book of Joshua, such a view as this is overthrown by the circumstance that after the erection of the tabernacle at Shiloh, and during the division of the land, it was not Gilgal but Shiloh which formed the gathering-place of the congregation when the casting of the lots was finished (Josh 18:1,10).

We cannot agree with *H. Witsius*, therefore, who says in his *Miscell. ss.* (i. p. 170, ed. 1736) that "he came from that place, where he had remained for a long time to guard the camp, and where he was thought to be tarrying still;" but must rather assume that his coming up from Gilgal is closely connected with the appearance of the angel-prince, as described in Josh 5:13, to announce to Joshua the fall of Jericho after the circumcision of the people at Gilgal. Just as on that occasion, when Israel had just entered into the true covenant relation to the Lord by circumcision, and was preparing for the conquest of Canaan, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joshua as the prince of the army of Jehovah, to ensure him of the taking of Jericho; so here after the entrance of the tribes of Israel into their inheritances, when they were beginning to make peace with the remaining Canaanites, and instead of rooting them out were content to make them tributary, the angel of the Lord appeared to the people, to make known to all the children of Israel that by such intercourse with the Canaanites they had broken the covenant of the Lord, and to foretell the punishment which would follow this transgression of the covenant.

By the fact, therefore, that he came up from Gilgal, it is distinctly shown that the same angel who gave the whole of Canaan into the hands of the Israelites when Jericho fell, had appeared to them again at Bochim, to make known to them the purposes of God in consequence of their disobedience to the commands of the Lord. How very far it was from being the author's intention to give simply a geographical notice, is also evident from the fact that he merely describes the place where this appearance occurred by the name which was given to it in consequence of the event, viz., *Bochim*, i.e., weepers. The situation of this place is altogether unknown. The rendering of the LXX, *epi' to'n Klauthmoo'na kai' epi' Baithee'l kai' epi' to'n oi'kon Israee'l*, gives no clue whatever; for *to'n*

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Klauthmoo'na merely arises from a confusion of *bokiym* (OT:1058) with *b^akaa'iym* (OT:1057) in 2 Sam 5:23, which the LXX have also rendered *Clauthmoo'n*, and *epi' to'n Baithee'l k.t.l* is an arbitrary interpolation of the translators themselves, who supposed *Bochim* to be in the neighbourhood of Bethel, "in all probability merely because they thought of *Allon-bachuth*, the oak of weeping, at Bethel, which is mentioned in Gen 35:8" (*Bertheau*).

With regard to the *piska* in the middle of the verse, see the remarks on Josh 4:1. In his address the angel of the Lord identifies himself with Jehovah (as in Josh 5:14 compared with 6:2), by describing himself as having made them to go up out of Egypt and brought them into the land which He swore unto their fathers. There is something very striking in the use of the imperfect '*a`aleh* (OT:5921) in the place of the perfect (cf. Judg 6:8), as the substance of the address and the continuation of it in the historical tense *waa'aabiy'* (OT:935) and *waa'omar* (OT:559) require the preterite. The imperfect is only to be explained on the supposition that it is occasioned by the *imperf. consec.* which follows immediately afterwards and reacts through its proximity. "*I will not break my covenant for ever,*" i.e., will keep what I promised when making the covenant, viz., that I would endow Israel with blessings and salvation, if they for their part would observe the covenant duties into which they had entered (see Ex 19:5ff.), and obey the commandments of the Lord. Among these was the commandment to enter into no alliance with the inhabitants of that land, viz., the Canaanites (see Ex 23:32-33; 34:12-13,15-16; Deut 7:2ff.; Josh 23:12). "*Destroy their altars:*" taken verbatim from Ex 34:13; Deut 7:5. The words "*and ye have not hearkened to my voice*" recall to mind Ex 19:5. "*What have ye done*" (*maah-zo't*, literally "what is this that ye have done") sc., in sparing the Canaanites and tolerating their altars?

Judges 2:3

Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.

"And I also have said to you:" these words point to the threat already expressed in Num 33:55; Josh 23:13, in the event of their not fulfilling the command of God, which threat the Lord would now fulfil. From the passages mentioned, we may also explain the expression *l^atsidiym* (OT:6654) *laakem* (OT:3807a) *w^ahaayuw* (OT:1961), they shall be in your sides, i.e., thorns in your sides. *l^atsidiym* (OT:6654) is an abbreviated expression for *b^atsideeykem lits^aniyniym* in Num 33:55, so that there is no necessity for the conjecture that it stands for *l^atsaariym* . The last clause of v. 3 is formed after Ex 23:33.

Judges 2:4-5

And it came to pass, when the angel of the LORD spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept.

The people broke out into loud weeping on account of this reproof. And since the weeping, from which the place received the name of *Bochim* , was a sign of their grief on account of their sin, this grief led on to such repentance

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

that *"they sacrificed there unto the Lord,"* no doubt presenting sin-offerings and burnt-offerings, that they might obtain mercy and the forgiveness of their sins. It does not follow from this sacrifice, however, that the tabernacle or the ark of the covenant was to be found at Bochim. In any place where the Lord appeared to His people, sacrifices might be offered to Him (see Judg 6:20,26,28; 13:16ff.; 2 Sam 24:25, and the commentary of Deut 12:5). On the other hand, it does follow from the sacrifice at Bochim, where there was no sanctuary of Jehovah, that the person who appeared to the people was not a prophet, nor even an ordinary angel, but *the angel of the Lord*, who is essentially one with Jehovah.

Conduct of Israel towards the Lord, and Treatment of Israel by the Lord, in the Time of the Judges. Ch. 2:6-3:6.

The attitude which the Israelites assumed towards the Canaanites who were left in their possessions, contained the germ of the peculiar direction given to the development of the nation of God in the times of the judges. To exhibit the course of this development in its most general principles, the age which commenced after Joshua's death is characterized as a period of constant alternation between idolatry and consequent subjugation by foreign nations as a punishment from God for the transgression of His covenant on the one hand, and return to God after receiving chastisement and consequent deliverance by judges expressly raised up by God for that purpose on the other. In this way the righteousness of the holy God is displayed so clearly in the punishment of the rebellious, and the mercy of the faithful covenant God in His forgiveness of the penitent, that the history of Israel at that time exhibits to us an example of the divine holiness and righteousness on the one hand, and of His grace and mercy on the other, as displayed in the church of God of all times, as a warning for the ungodly and for the consolation of the righteous.

Judges 2:6-10

And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man

unto his inheritance to possess the land.

Verse 6-10. The account of this development of the covenant nation, which commenced after the death of Joshua and his contemporaries, is attached to the book of Joshua by a simple repetition of the closing verses of that book (Josh 24:28-31) in vv. 6-10, with a few unimportant differences, not only to form a link between Josh 24 and Judg 2:11, and to resume the thread of the history which was broken off by the summary just given of the results of the wars between the Israelites and Canaanites (*Bertheau*), but rather to bring out sharply and clearly the contrast between the age that was past and the period of the Israelitish history that was just about to commence. The *vav consec.* attached to **way^ashalach** (OT:7971) expresses the order of thought and not of time. The apostasy of the new generation from the Lord (vv. 10ff.) was a necessary consequence of the attitude of Israel to the Canaanites who were left in the land, as described in Judg 1:1-2:5 . This thought is indicated by the *vav consec.* in **way^ashalach** (OT:7971); so that the meaning of vv. 6ff. as expressed in our ordinary phraseology would be as follows: Now when Joshua had dismissed the people, and the children of Israel had gone every one to his own inheritance to take possession of the land, the people served the Lord as long as Joshua and the elders who survived him were alive; but when Joshua was dead, and that generation (which was contemporaneous with him) had been gathered to its fathers, there rose up another generation after them which knew not the Lord, and also (knew not) the work which He had done to Israel. On the death and burial of Joshua, see at Josh 24:29-30. "*Gathered unto their fathers*" corresponds to "gathered to his people" in the Pentateuch (Gen 25:8,17; 35:29;

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

49:29,33, etc.: see at Gen 25:8). They "*knew not the Lord,*" sc., from seeing or experiencing His wonderful deeds, which the contemporaries of Joshua and Moses had seen and experienced.

In the general survey of the times of the judges, commencing at v. 11, the falling away of the Israelites from the Lord is mentioned first of all, and at the same time it is distinctly shown how neither the chastisements inflicted upon them by God at the hands of hostile nations, nor the sending of judges to set them free from the hostile oppression, availed to turn them from their idolatry (vv. 11-19). This is followed by the determination of God to tempt and chastise the sinful nation by not driving away the remaining Canaanites (vv. 20-23); and lastly, the account concludes with an enumeration of the tribes that still remained, and the attitude of Israel towards them (Judg 3:1-6).

Judges 2:11-12

And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:

Repeated Falling Away of the People from the Lord. - Vv. 11-13. The Israelites did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord (what was displeasing to the Lord); they served *Baalim*. The plural *Baalim* is a general term employed to denote all false deities, and is synonymous with the expression "other gods" in the clause "other gods of the gods of the nations round about them" (the Israelites). This use of the term *Baalim* arose from the fact that Baal was the chief male deity of the Canaanites and all the nations of Hither Asia, and was simply worshipped by the different nations with peculiar modifications, and therefore designated by various distinctive epithets. In v. 12 this apostasy is more minutely described as forsaking Jehovah the God of their fathers, to whom they were indebted for the greatest blessing, viz., their deliverance out of Egypt, and following other gods of the heathen nations that were round about them (taken *verbatim* from Deut 6:14, and

13:7-8), and worshipping them. In this way they provoked the Lord to anger (cf. Deut 4:25; 9:18, etc.).

Judges 2:13

And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

Thus they forsook Jehovah, and served Baal and the Asthartes. In this case the singular *Baal* is connected with the plural *Ashtaroth*, because the male deities of all the Canaanitish nations, and those that bordered upon Canaan, were in their nature one and the same deity, viz., *Baal*, a sun-god, and as such the vehicle and source of physical life, and of the generative and reproductive power of nature, which was regarded as an effluence from its own being (see *Movers*, Relig. der Phönizier, pp. 184ff., and *J. G. Müller* in Herzog's Cyclopaedia). "*Ashtaroth*", from the singular *Ashtoreth*, which only occurs again in 1 Kings 11:5,33, and 2 Kings 23:13, in connection with the Sidonian Astharte, was the general name used to denote the leading female deity of the Canaanitish tribes, a moon-goddess, who was worshipped as the feminine principle of nature embodied in the pure moonlight, and its influence upon terrestrial life. It corresponded to the Greek *Aphrodite*, whose celebrated temple at Askalon is described in *Herod.* i. 105. In Judg 3:7, *Asheroth* is used as equivalent to *Ashtaroth*, which is used here, Judg 10:6; 1 Sam 7:4; 12:10. The name *Asheroth*

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

(Note: Rendered *groves* in the English version. - Tr.) was transferred to the deity itself from the idols of this goddess, which generally consisted of wooden columns, and are called *Asherim* in Ex 34:13; Deut 7:5; 12:3; 16:21. On the other hand, the word *Ashtoreth* is without any traceable etymology in the Semitic dialects, and was probably derived from Upper Asia, being connected with a Persian word signifying a star, and synonymous with *Astroa'rchee*, the star-queen of Sabaeism (see *Ges. Thes.* pp. 1083-4; *Movers*, p. 606; and *Müller, ut sup.*).

With regard to the nature of the Baal and Astarte worship, into which the Israelites fell not long after the death of Joshua, and in which they continued henceforth to sink deeper and deeper, it is evident from the more precise allusions contained in the history of Gideon, that it did not consist of direct opposition to the worship of Jehovah, or involve any formal rejection of Jehovah, but that it was simply an admixture of the worship of Jehovah with the heathen or Canaanitish nature-worship. Not only was the ephod which Gideon caused to be made in his native town of Ophrah, and after which all Israel went a whoring (Judg 8:27), an imitation of the high priest's ephod in the worship of Jehovah; but the worship of Baal-berith at Shechem, after which the Israelites went a whoring again when Gideon was dead (Judg 8:33), was simply a corruption of the worship of Jehovah, in which Baal was put in the place of Jehovah and worshipped in a similar way, as we may clearly see from Judg 9:27.

The worship of Jehovah could even be outwardly continued in connection with this idolatrous worship. Just as in the case of these nations in the midst of which the Israelites lived, the mutual recognition of their different deities and religions was manifested in the fact that they all called their supreme deity by the same name, *Baal*, and simply adopted some other epithet by which to define the distinctive peculiarities of each; so the Israelites also imagined that they could worship the Baals of the powerful nations round about them along with Jehovah their covenant God, especially if they worshipped them in the same manner as their covenant God. This will serve to explain the rapid and constantly repeated falling away of the Israelites from Jehovah into Baal-worship, at the very time when the worship of

Jehovah was stedfastly continued at the tabernacle in accordance with the commands of the law.

The Israelites simply followed the lead and example of their heathen neighbours. Just as the heathen were tolerant with regard to the recognition of the deities of other nations, and did not refuse to extend this recognition even to Jehovah the God of Israel, so the Israelites were also tolerant towards the Baals of the neighbouring nations, whose sensuous nature-worship was more grateful to the corrupt heart of man than the spiritual Jehovah-religion, with its solemn demands for sanctification of life. But this syncretism, which was not only reconcilable with polytheism, but actually rooted in its very nature, was altogether irreconcilable with the nature of true religion. For if Jehovah is the only true God, and there are no other gods besides or beside Him, then the purity and holiness of His nature is not only disturbed, but altogether distorted, by any admixture of His worship with the worship of idols or of the objects of nature, the true God being turned into an idol, and Jehovah degraded into Baal. Looking closely into the matter, therefore, the mixture of the Canaanitish worship of Baal with the worship of Jehovah was actually forsaking Jehovah and serving other gods, as the prophetic author of this book pronounces it. It was just the same with the worship of Baal in the kingdom of the ten tribes, which was condemned by the prophets Hosea and Amos (see *Hengstenberg* , Christology, i. pp. 168ff., Eng. trans.).

Judges 2:14-15

And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

On account of this idolatrous worship, the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, so that He gave them up into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and sold them into the hands of their enemies. *shociym* (OT:8154) from *shaacaah* (OT:8154), alternated with *shaacac* (OT:8155) in *yaashocuw* (OT:8155), to plunder. This word is not met with in the Pentateuch, whereas *maakar* (OT:4376), to sell, occurs in Deut 32:30, in the sense of giving helplessly up to the foe. "*They could no longer stand before their enemies,*" as they had done under Joshua, and in fact as long as Israel continued faithful to the Lord; so that now, instead of the promise contained in Lev 26:7-8, being fulfilled, the threat contained in Lev 26:17 was carried into execution. "*Whithersoever they went out,*" i.e., in every expedition, every attack that they made upon their enemies, "*the hand of Jehovah was against them for evil, as He had said*" (Lev 26:17,36; Deut 28:25), and "*had sworn unto them.*" There is no express oath mentioned either in Lev 26 or Deut 28; it is implied therefore in the nature of the case, or *in virtute verborum*, as *Seb. Schmidt* affirms, inasmuch as the threats themselves were words of the true and holy God. *m^aod* (OT:3966) *laahem* (OT:3807a) *wayeetser* (OT:3334), "*and it became to them very narrow,*" i.e., they came into great straits.

Judges 2:16-17

Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.

But the Lord did not rest content with this. He did still more. "*He raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of their plunderers,*" to excite them to love in return by this manifestation of His love and mercy, and to induce them to repent. But "*they did not hearken even to their judges,*" namely, so as not to fall back

again into idolatry, which the judge had endeavoured to suppress. This limitation of the words is supported by the context, viz., by a comparison of vv. 18, 19. - "*But* (*kiy* (OT:3588) after a negative clause) *they went a whoring after other gods* (for the application of this expression to the spiritual adultery of idolatrous worship, see Ex 34:15), *and turned quickly away* (vid., Ex 32:8) *from the way which their fathers walked in, to hearken to the commandments of the Lord,*" i.e., from the way of obedience to the divine commands. "*They did not so*" (or what was right) sc., as their fathers under Joshua had done (cf. v. 7).

Judges 2:18-19

And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them.

"And when the Lord raised them up judges, and was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge (i.e., as long as the judge was living), because the Lord had

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

compassion upon their sighing, by reason of them that oppressed them, and vexed them (docheeq only occurs again as a verb in Joel 2:8): it came to pass when the judge was dead, that they returned and acted more corruptly than their fathers," i.e., they turned again to idolatry even more grievously than their fathers had done under the previous judges. *"They did not let fall from their deeds,"* i.e., they did not cease from their evil deeds, and *"from their stiff-necked way."* **qaashaah** (OT:7186), hard, is to be understood as in Ex 32:9 and 33:3, where Israel is called a hard-necked people which did not bend under obedience to the commandments of God.

Judges 2:20-21

And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice;

Chastisement of the Rebellious Nation. - Vv. 20, 21. On account of this idolatry, which was not only constantly repeated, but continued to grow worse and worse, the anger of the Lord burned so fiercely against Israel, that He determined to destroy no more of the nations which Joshua had left when he died, before the people that had broken His covenant. In order to set forth this divine purpose most distinctly, it is thrown into the form of a sentence uttered by God through the expression *wgw' wayo'mer* (OT:559). The Lord said, "Because this people has transgressed my covenant,...I also will no longer keep my covenant promise (Ex 23:23,27ff., 34:10ff.), and will no more drive out any of the remaining Canaanites before them" (see Josh 23:13).

Judges 2:22

That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not.

The purpose of God in this resolution was "*to prove Israel through them* (the tribes that were not exterminated), *whether they* (the Israelites) *would keep the way of the Lord to walk therein* (cf. Deut 8:2), *as their fathers did keep it, or not.*" *nacowt* (OT:5254) *l^ama`an* (OT:4616) is not dependent upon the verb *`aazab* (OT:5800), as *Studer* supposes, which yields no fitting sense; nor can the clause be separated from the preceding one, as *Bertheau* suggests, and connected as a protasis with v. 23 (this would be a thoroughly unnatural construction, for which Isa 45:4 does not furnish any true parallel); but the clause is attached in the simplest possible manner to the main thought in vv. 20, 21, that is to say, to the words "*and He said*" in v. 20: Jehovah said, i.e., resolved, that He would not exterminate the remaining nations any further, to tempt Israel through them.

The plural *baam* (OT:871a), in the place of the singular *baah* (OT:871a), which the foregoing *derek^a* (OT:1870) requires, is to be regarded as a *constructio ad sensum*, i.e., to be attributed to the fact, that keeping the way of God really consists in observing the commandments of God, and that this was the thought which floated before the writer's mind. The thought expressed in this verse, that Jehovah would not exterminate the Canaanites before Israel any more, to try them whether they would keep His commandments, just as He had previously caused the people

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

whom He brought out of Egypt to wander in the wilderness for forty years with the very same intention (Deut 8:2), is not at variance with the design of God, expressed in Ex 23:29-30, and Deut 7:22, not to exterminate the Canaanites all at once, lest the land should become waste, and the wild beasts multiply therein, nor yet with the motive assigned in Judg 3:1-2. For the determination not to exterminate the Canaanite sin one single year, was a different thing from the purpose of God to suspend their gradual extermination altogether. The former purpose had immediate regard to the well-being of Israel; the latter, on the contrary, was primarily intended as a chastisement for its transgression of the covenants, although even this chastisement was intended to lead the rebellious nation to repentance, and promote its prosperity by a true conversion to the Lord. And the motive assigned in Judg 2:2 is in perfect harmony with this intention, as our explanation of this passage will clearly show.

Judges 2:23

Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered he them into the hand of Joshua.

In consequence of this resolution, the Lord let these tribes (those mentioned in Judg 3:3) remain at rest, i.e., quietly, in the land, without exterminating them rapidly. The expression *maheer* (OT:4116), hastily, quickly, i.e., according to the distinct words of the following clause, through and under Joshua, appears strange after what has gone before. For what is threatened in v. 21 is not the suspension of rapid extermination, but of any further extermination. This threat, therefore, is so far limited by the word "hastily," as to signify that the Lord would not exterminate any more of these nations so long as Israel persisted in its idolatry. But as soon as and whenever Israel returned to the Lord its God in true repentance, to keep His covenant, the Lord would recall His threat, and let the promised extermination of the Canaanites go forward again. Had Israel not forsaken the Lord its God so soon after Joshua's death, the Lord would have exterminated the Canaanites who were

left in the land much sooner than He did, or have carried out their gradual extermination in a much shorter time than was actually the case, in consequence of the continual idolatry of the people.

Judges 3:1-6

Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan;

Nations which the Lord left in Canaan: with a repetition of the reason why this was done.

Verse 1-2. The reason, which has already been stated in Judg 2:22, viz., "to prove Israel by them," is still further elucidated here. In the first place (v. 1), '*et-yis'raa'eel*' is more precisely defined as signifying "*all those who had not known all the wars of Canaan,*" sc., from their own observation and experience, that is to say, the generation of the Israelites which rose up after the death of Joshua. For "*the wars of Canaan*" were the wars which were carried on by Joshua with the almighty help of the Lord for the conquest of Canaan. The whole thought is then still further expanded in v. 2 as follows: "*only* (for no other purpose than) *that the succeeding generations* (the

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

generations which followed Joshua and his contemporaries) *of the children of Israel, that He (Jehovah) might teach them war, only those who had not known them* (the wars of Canaan)." The suffix attached to *y^adaa`uwm* (OT:3045) refers to "the wars of Canaan," although this is a feminine noun, the suffix in the masculine plural being frequently used in connection with a feminine noun.

At first sight it would appear as though the reason given here for the non-extermination of the Canaanites was not in harmony with the reason assigned in Judg 2:22, which is repeated in v. 4 of the present chapter. But the differences are perfectly reconcilable, if we only give a correct explanation of the two expressions, "learning war," and the "wars of Canaan." Learning war in the context before us is equivalent to learning to make war upon the nations of Canaan. Joshua and the Israelites of his time had not overcome these nations by their own human power or by earthly weapons, but by the miraculous help of their God, who had smitten and destroyed the Canaanites before the Israelites. The omnipotent help of the Lord, however, was only granted to Joshua and the whole nation, on condition that they adhered firmly to the law of God (Josh 1:7), and faithfully observed the covenant of the Lord; whilst the transgression of that covenant, even by Achan, caused the defeat of Israel before the Canaanites (Josh 7).

In the wars of Canaan under Joshua, therefore, Israel had experienced and learned, that the power to conquer its foes did not consist in the multitude and bravery of its own fighting men, but solely in the might of its God, which it could only possess so long as it continued faithful to the Lord. This lesson the generations that followed Joshua had forgotten, and consequently they did not understand how to make war. To impress this truth upon them—the great truth, upon which the very existence as well as the prosperity of Israel, and its attainment of the object of its divine calling, depended; in other words, to teach it by experience, that the people of Jehovah could only fight and conquer in the power of its God—the Lord had left the Canaanites in the land. Necessity teaches a man to pray. The distress into which the Israelites were brought by the remaining Canaanites was a chastisement from

God, through which the Lord desired to lead back the rebellious to himself, to keep them obedient to His commandments, and to train them to the fulfilment of their covenant duties.

In this respect, learning war, i.e., learning how the congregation of the Lord was to fight against the enemies of God and of His kingdom, was one of the means appointed by God to tempt Israel, or prove whether it would listen to the commandments of God (v. 4), or would walk in the ways of the Lord. If Israel should so learn to war, it would learn at the same time to keep the commandments of God. But both of these were necessary for the people of God. For just as the realization of the blessings promised to the nation in the covenant depended upon its hearkening to the voice of the Lord, so the conflicts appointed for it were also necessary, just as much for the purification of the sinful nation, as for the perpetuation and growth of the kingdom of God upon the earth.

Verse 3-4. The enumeration of the different nations rests upon Josh 13:2-6, and, with its conciseness and brevity, is only fully intelligible through the light thrown upon it by that passage. The five princes of the Philistines are mentioned singly there. According to Josh 13:4ff., "*all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites,*" are the Canaanitish tribes dwelling in northern Canaan, by the Phoenician coast and upon Mount Lebanon. "*The Canaanites:*" viz., those who dwelt along the sea-coast to the south of Sidon. *The Hivites:* those who were settled more in the heart of the country, "from the mountains of Baal-hermon up to the territory of Hamath." *Baal-hermon* is only another name for *Baal-gad*, the present *Banjas*, under the Hermon (cf. Josh 13:5). When it is stated still further in v. 4, that "they were left in existence (i.e., were not exterminated by Joshua) to prove Israel by them," we are struck with the fact, that besides the Philistines, only these northern Canaanites are mentioned; whereas, according to ch. 1, many towns in the centre of the land were also left in the hands of the Canaanites, and therefore here also the Canaanites were not yet exterminated, and became likewise a snare to the Israelites, not only according to the word of the angel of the Lord (Judg 2:3), but also because the Israelites who dwelt among these Canaanitish tribes contracted

marriages with them, and served their gods.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

This striking circumstance cannot be set aside, as *Bertheau* supposes, by the simple remark, that "the two lists (that of the countries which the tribes of Israel did not conquer after Joshua's death in ch. 1, and the one given here of the nations which Joshua had not subjugated) must correspond on the whole," since the correspondence referred to really does not exist. It can only be explained on the ground that the Canaanites who were left in the different towns in the midst of the land, acquired all their power to maintain their stand against Israel from the simple fact that the Philistines on the south-west, and several whole tribes of Canaanites in the north, had been left by Joshua neither exterminated nor even conquered, inasmuch as they so crippled the power of the Israelites by wars and invasions of the Israelitish territory, that they were unable to exterminate those who remained in the different fortresses of their own possessions. Because, therefore, the power to resist the Israelites and oppress them for a time resided not so much in the Canaanites who were dwelling in the midst of Israel, as in the Philistines and the Canaanites upon the mountains of Lebanon who had been left unconquered by Joshua, these are the only tribes mentioned in this brief survey as the nations through which the Lord would prove His people.

Verse 5-6. But the Israelites did not stand the test. Dwelling in the midst of the Canaanites, of whom six tribes are enumerated, as in Ex 3:8,17, etc. (see at Deut 7:1), they contracted marriages with them, and served their gods, contrary to the express prohibition of the Lord in Ex 34:16; 23:24, and Deut 7:3-4.

II. HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL UNDER THE JUDGES.

Ch. 3:7-16:31.

For introductory information regarding this section see

Israel under the Judges Events from the Exodus to the Building of Solomon's

Temple

1. Times of the Judges: Othniel; Ehud and Shamgar, Deborah and Barak. Ch. 3:7-5.

In this first stage of the times of the judges, which embraces a period of 206 years, the Israelites were oppressed by hostile nations on three separate occasions: first of all by the Mesopotamian king Chushan-rishathaim, whom they were obliged to serve for eighteen years, until Othniel brought them deliverance, and secured them rest for forty years (Judg 3:7-11); secondly by the Moabitish king Eglon for eighteen years, until Ehud slew this king and smote the Moabites, and so humiliated them, that the land had rest for eighty years (Judg 3:12-30), whilst Shamgar also smote a host of Philistines during the same period (Judg 3:31); and lastly by the Canaanitish king Jabin of Hazor, who oppressed them heavily for twenty years, until Barak gathered an army together at the summons of Deborah the prophetess and with her assistance, and completely defeated the foe (ch. 4). After this victory, which Deborah celebrated in a triumphal song, the land had rest again for forty years (ch. 5).

Oppression of Israel by Chushan-rishathaim, and Deliverance by Othniel. Ch. 3:7-11.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 3:7-8

And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgat the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves.

Verse 7-8. The first chastisement which the Israelites suffered for their apostasy from the Lord, is introduced with the same formula which had been used before to describe the times of the judges generally (Judg 2:11-12), except that instead of '*et-yy' waya`az`buw*' ("they forsook the Lord") we have here '*et-yy' wayish`k`chuw*' ("*they forgat the Lord their God*") from Deut 32:18 (cf. 1 Sam 12:9), and *Asheroth* (rendered "groves") instead of *Ashtaroth* (see at Judg 2:13). As a punishment for this apostasy, the Lord sold them (ch. 2:14) into the hand of *Chushan-rishathaim*, the king of Mesopotamia, whom they were obliged to serve for eight years. All that we know about this king of Mesopotamia is what is recorded here. His name, Chushan-rishathaim, is probably only a title which was given to him by the Israelites themselves. *Rishathaim* signifies "*double wickedness*," and the word was rendered as an appellative with this signification in the Targums and the Syriac and Arabic versions. *Chushan* is also formed as an adjective from *Cush*, and may denote the Cushites. According to *M. v. Niebuhr* (*Gesch. Assurs u. Babels*, p. 272), the rulers of Babylon at that time (1518-1273) were Arabs. "Arabs, however, may have included not only Shemites of the tribe of Joktan or Ishmael, but Cushites also." The invasion of Canaan by this Mesopotamian or Babylonian king has a historical analogy in the campaign of the five allied kings of Shinar in the time of Abraham (Gen 14).

Judges 3:9-11

And when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.

In this oppression the Israelites cried to the Lord for help, and He raised them up *mowshiya`* (OT:3467), a deliverer, helper, namely the Kenizzite *Othniel*, the younger brother and son-in-law of Caleb (see at Josh 15:17). "*The Spirit of Jehovah came upon him.*" The Spirit of God is the spiritual principle of life in the world of nature and man; and in man it is the principle both of the natural life which we received through birth, and also of the spiritual life which we received through regeneration (vid., *Auberlen*, Geist des Menschen, in *Herzog's Cycl.* iv. p. 731). In this sense the expressions "Spirit of God" (*Elohim*) and "Spirit of the Lord" (Jehovah) are interchanged even in Gen 1:2, compared with Gen 6:3, and so throughout all the books of the Old Testament; the former denoting the Divine Spirit generally in its supernatural causality and power, the latter the same Spirit in its operations upon human life and history in the working out of the plan of salvation.

In its peculiar operations the Spirit of Jehovah manifests itself as a spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and might, of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord (Isa 11:2). The communication of this Spirit under the Old Testament was generally made in the form of extraordinary and supernatural influence upon the human spirit. The expression employed to denote this is usually *yy' ruwach* (OT:7307) *`aalaayw* (OT:5921) *wat^ahiy* (OT:1961) ("the Spirit of Jehovah came upon him:" thus here, Judg 11:29; 1 Sam 19:20,23; 2 Chron 20:14; Num 24:2). This is varied, however, with the expressions *yy' ruwach* (OT:7307) *`aalaayw* (OT:5921) (*tsaal^achaah*) *watits^alach* (OT:6743) (Judg 14:6,19; 15:14; 1 Sam 10:10; 11:6; 16:13) and *'et-p' laab^ashaah yy' ruwach*, "the Spirit of

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Jehovah clothed the man" (Judg 6:34; 1 Chron 12:18; 2 Chron 24:20). Of these the former denotes the operations of the Divine Spirit in overcoming the resistance of the natural will of man, whilst the latter represents the Spirit of God as a power which envelopes or covers a man.

The recipients and bearers of this Spirit were thereby endowed with the power to perform miraculous deeds, in which the Spirit of God that came upon them manifested itself generally in the ability to prophesy (vid., 1 Sam 10:10; 19:20,23; 1 Chron 12:18; 2 Chron 20:14; 24:20), but also in the power to work miracles or to accomplish deeds which surpassed the courage and strength of the natural man. The latter was more especially the case with the judges; hence the *Chaldee* paraphrases "the Spirit of Jehovah" in Judg 6:34 as the spirit of might from the Lord;" though in the passage before us it gives the erroneous interpretation *n^abuw'aah* (OT:5016) *ruwach* (OT:7307), "the spirit of prophecy." *Kimchi* also understands it as signifying "the spirit of bravery, under the instigation of which he was able fearlessly to enter upon the war with Chushan." But we are hardly at liberty to split up the different powers of the Spirit of God in this manner, and to restrict its operations upon the judges to the spirit of strength and bravery alone.

The judges not only attacked the enemy courageously and with success, but they also judged the nation, for which the spirit of wisdom and understanding was indispensably necessary, and put down idolatry (Judg 2:18-19), which they could not have done without the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. "*And he judged Israel and went out to war.*" The position of *wayish^apot* (OT:8199) before *lamil^achaamaah* (OT:4421) *wayeetsee'* (OT:3318) does not warrant us in explaining *wayish^apot* (OT:8199) as signifying "he began to discharge the functions of a judge," as *Rosenmüller* has done: for *shaapaT* (OT:8199) must not be limited to a settlement of the civil disputes of the people, but means to restore *right* in Israel, whether towards its heathen oppressors, or with regard to the attitude of the nation towards the Lord. "*And the Lord gave Chushan-rishathaim into his hand* (cf. Judg 1:2; 3:28, etc.), *and his hand became strong over him;*" i.e.,

he overcame him (cf. Judg 6:2), or smote him, so that he was obliged to vacate the land. In consequence of this victory, and the land had rest from war (cf. Josh 11:23) forty years. "*And then Othniel died:*" the expression *wayaamaat* (OT:4191) with *w consec.* does not necessarily imply that Othniel did not die for forty years, but simply that he died after rest had been restored to the land.

Oppression of Israel by Eglon, and Deliverance by Ehud; Shamgar's Heroic Deeds. Ch. 3:12-31.

Judges 3:12-14

And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD.

In vv. 12-30 the subjugation of the Israelites by *Eglon*, the king of the Moabites, and their deliverance from this bondage, are circumstantially described. First of all, in vv. 12-14, *the subjugation*. When the Israelites forsook the Lord again (in the place of *wgw' 'et-haara` ... waya`asuw* (OT:6213), v. 7, we have here the appropriate expression ... *haara`* (OT:7451) *la`asowt* (OT:6213) *wayocipuw* (OT:3254), they added to do, i.e., did again, evil, etc., as in Judg 4:1; 10:6; 13:1), the Lord made Eglon the king of the Moabites strong over Israel. *`al* (OT:5921) *chizaq* (OT:2388), to give a person strength to overcome or oppress another. *kiy* (OT:3588) *`al*

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

(OT:5921), as in Deut 31:17, instead of the more usual *'asher* (OT:834) *`al* (OT:5921) (cf. Jer 4:28; Mal 2:14; Ps 139:14). Eglon allied himself with the Ammonites and Amalekites, those arch-foes of Israel, invaded the land, took the palm-city, i.e., Jericho (see at Judg 1:16), and made the Israelites tributary for eighteen years. Sixty years had passed since Jericho had been burnt by Joshua. During that time the Israelites had rebuilt the ruined city, but they had not fortified it, on account of the curse pronounced by Joshua upon any one who should restore it as a fortress; so that the Moabites could easily conquer it, and using it as a base, reduce the Israelites to servitude.

Judges 3:15

But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded: and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab.

But when the Israelites cried to the Lord for help, He set them free through the Benjaminite *Ehud*, whom He raised up as their deliverer. *Ehud* was "the son of Gera." This probably means that he was a descendant of Gera, since Gera himself, according to 1 Chron 8:3, was a son of Bela the son of Benjamin, and therefore was a grandson of Benjamin; and Shimei the contemporary of David, a man belonging to the tribe of Benjamin, is also called a son of Gera in 2 Sam 16:5; 19:17. At the same time, it is possible that the name *Gera* does not refer to the same person in these different passages, but that the name was repeated again and again in the same family. "*A man shut with regard to his right hand,*" i.e., hindered in the use of his right hand, not necessarily crippled, but in all probability disabled through want of use from his youth upwards. That the expression does not mean crippled, is confirmed by the fact that it is used again in connection with the 700 brave slingers in the army of the Benjaminites in Judg 20:16, and it certainly cannot be supposed that they were all actual cripples. So much is certain, however, that it does not mean *amfoterode'xios*, *qui utraque manu pro dextera utebatur*

(LXX, *Vulg.*), since *'aaTar* (OT:332) signifies *clausit* (shut) in Ps 69:16. It is merely with reference to what follows that this peculiarity is so distinctly mentioned. - The Israelites sent a present by him to king Eglon. *b^ayaadow* (OT:3027) does not mean *in* , but *through* , his hand, i.e., through his intervention, for others were actually employed to carry the present (v. 18), so that Ehud merely superintended the matter. *Minchah* , a gift or present, is no doubt a euphemism for tribute, as in 2 Sam 8:2,6; 1 Kings 5:1.

Judges 3:16

But Ehud made him a dagger which had two edges, of a cubit length; and he did gird it under his raiment upon his right thigh.

Ehud availed himself of the opportunity to approach the king of the Moabites and put him to death, and thus to shake off the yoke of the Moabites from his nation. To this end he provided himself with a sword, which had two edges (*peeyowt* (OT:6366) from *peh* (OT:6310), like *seeyow* (OT:7716), Deut 22:1, from *seh* (OT:7716)), a cubit long (*gomer* (OT:1586), *hap leg* , signified primarily a staff, here a cubit, according to the Syriac and Arabic; not "a span," *spithamee'* , LXX), and "*did gird it under his raiment upon his right thigh.*"

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 3:17

And he brought the present unto Eglon king of Moab: and Eglon was a very fat man.

Provided with this weapon, he brought the present to king Eglon, who-as is also mentioned as a preparation for what follows-was a very fat man.

Judges 3:18-20

And when he had made an end to offer the present, he sent away the people that bare the present.

After presenting the gift, Ehud dismissed the people who had carried the present to their own homes; namely, as we learn from v. 19, after they had gone some distance from Jericho. But he himself returned from the stone-quarries at Gilgal, sc., to Jericho to king Eglon. *hap^aciyliym* (OT:6456) *min* (OT:4480) refers to some place by Gilgal. In Deut 7:25; Isa 21:9; Jer 8:19, *pesilim* signifies idols. And if we would retain this meaning here, as the LXX, *Vulg.* , and others have done, we must assume that in the neighbourhood of Gilgal there were stone idols set up in the open air-a thing which is very improbable. The rendering "stone quarries," from *paacal* (OT:6458), to hew out stones (Ex 34:1, etc.), which is the one adopted in the *Chaldee* , and by *Rashi* and others, is more likely to be the correct one. *Gilgal* cannot be the Gilgal between Jericho and the Jordan, which was the first encampment of the Israelites in Canaan, as is commonly supposed, since Ehud passed the *Pesilim* on his flight from the king's dwelling-place to the mountains of Ephraim (vv. 26, 27); and we can neither assume, as *Bertheau* does, that Eglon did not reside in the conquered palm-city (Jericho), but in some uncultivated place in the neighbourhood of the Jordan, nor suppose that after the murder of Eglon Ehud

could possibly have gone from Jericho to the Gilgal which was half an hour's journey towards the east, for the purpose of escaping by a circuitous route of this kind to Seirah in the mountains of Ephraim, which was on the north-west of Jericho. *Gilgal* is more likely to be *Geliloth*, which was on the west of Jericho opposite to the ascent of Adummim (*Kaalat ed Dom*), on the border of Judah and Benjamin (Josh 18:17), and which was also called *Gilgal* (Josh 15:7).

Having returned to the king's palace, Ehud sent in a message to him: "***I have a secret word to thee, O king.***" The context requires that we should understand "*he said*" in the sense of "he had him told" (or bade say to him), since Ehud himself did not go in to the king, who was sitting in his room, till afterwards (v. 20). In consequence of this message the king said: *haac* (OT:2013), *lit.* be silent (the imperative of *haacaah* (OT:2013)); here it is a proclamation, Let there be quiet. Thereupon all who were standing round (viz., his attendants) left the room, and Ehud went in (v. 20). The king was sitting "in his upper room of cooling alone." The "room of cooling" (*Luther, Sommerlaube*, summer-arbour) was a room placed upon the flat roof of a house, which was open to the currents of air, and so afforded a cool retreat, such as are still met with in the East (vid., *Shaw*, pp. 188-9). Then Ehud said, "*A word of God I have to thee;*" whereupon the king rose from his seat, from reverence towards the word of God which Ehud pretended that he had to deliver to him, not to defend himself, as *Bertheau* supposes, of which there is not the slightest intimation in the text.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 3:21-22

And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly:

But when the king stood up, Ehud drew his sword from under his garment, and plunged it so deeply into his abdomen that even the hilt followed the blade, and the fat closed upon the blade (so that there was nothing to be seen of it in front, because he did not draw the sword again out of his body), and the blade came out between the legs. The last words have been rendered in various ways. *Luther* follows the Chaldee and *Vulgate*, and renders it "so that the dirt passed from him," taking the *hap leg par^ash^adonaah* (OT:6574) as a composite noun from *peresh* (OT:6570), *stercus*, and *shaadaah*, *jecit*. But this is hardly correct, as the form of the word *par^ash^adonaah* (OT:6574), and its connection with *yeetsee'* (OT:3318), rather points to a noun, *par^ash^adon* (OT:6574), with *h* local. The explanation given by *Gesenius* in his *Thes.* and *Heb. lex.* has much more in its favour, viz., *interstitium pedum*, the place between the legs, from an Arabic word signifying *pedes dissitos habuit*, used as a euphemism for *anus*, *podex*. The subject to the verb is the blade.

(Note: At any rate the rendering suggested by *Ewald*, "Ehud went into the open air, or into the enclosure, the space in front of the *Alija*," is untenable, for the simple reason that it is perfectly irreconcilable with the next clause, "Ehud went forth," etc. (consequently *Fr. Böttcher* proposes to erase this clause from the text, without any critical authority whatever). For if Ehud were the subject to the verb, the subject would necessarily have been mentioned, as it really is in the next clause, v. 23a.)

Judges 3:23

Then Ehud went forth through the porch, and shut the doors of the parlour upon

him, and locked them.

As soon as the deed was accomplished, Ehud went out into the porch or front hall, shut the door of the room behind him (*ba`adow* (OT:5774), not behind himself, but literally round him, i.e., Eglon; cf. Gen 7:16; 2 Kings 4:4) and bolted it (this is only added as a more precise explanation of the previous verb).

Judges 3:24-25

When he was gone out, his servants came; and when they saw that, behold, the doors of the parlour were locked, they said, Surely he covereth his feet in his summer chamber.

When the servants of Eglon came (to enter in to their lord) after Ehud's departure and saw the door of the upper

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

When the servants of Eglon came (to enter in to their lord) after Ehud's departure and saw the door of the upper room bolted, they thought "surely ('*ak*' (OT:389), *lit.* only, nothing but) he covers his feet" (a euphemism for performing the necessities of nature; cf. 1 Sam 24:3), and waited to shaming (cf. 2 King Judg 2:17; 8:11), i.e., till they were ashamed of their long waiting (see at Judg 5:28). At length they opened the door with the key, and found their lord lying dead upon the floor.

Ehud's conduct must be judged according to the spirit of those times, when it was thought allowable to adopt any means of destroying the enemy of one's nation. The treacherous assassination of a hostile king is not to be regarded as an act of the Spirit of God, and therefore is not set before us as an example to be imitated. Although Jehovah raised up Ehud as a deliverer to His people when oppressed by Eglon, it is not stated (and this ought particularly to be observed) that the Spirit of Jehovah came upon Ehud, and still less that Ehud assassinated the hostile king under the impulse of that Spirit. Ehud proved himself to have been raised up by the Lord as the deliverer of Israel, simply by the fact that he actually delivered his people from the bondage of the Moabites, and it by no means follows that the means which he selected were either commanded or approved by Jehovah.

Judges 3:26-28

And Ehud escaped while they tarried, and passed beyond the quarries, and escaped unto Seirath.

Ehud had escaped whilst the servants of Eglon were waiting, and had passed the stone quarries and reached Seirah. *Seirah* is a place that is never mentioned again; and, judging from the etymology (the hairy), it was a wooded region, respecting the situation of which all that can be decided is, that it is not to be sought for in the neighbourhood of Jericho, but "upon the mountains of Ephraim" (v. 27). For when Ehud had come to Seirah, he blew the trumpet "*upon the mountains of Ephraim,*"

to announce to the people the victory that was placed within their reach by the death of Eglon, and to summon them to war with the Moabites, and then went down from the mountain into the plain near Jericho; *"and he was before them,"* i.e., went in front as their leader, saying to the people, *"Follow me; for Jehovah has given your enemies the Moabites into your hand."* Then they went down and took (i.e., took possession of) the fords near Jericho (see at Josh 2:7), *l'mow'aab* (OT:4124), either *"from the Moabites"* or *"towards Moab,"* and let no one (of the Moabites) cross over, i.e., escape to their own land.

Judges 3:29

And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valour; and there escaped not a man.

Thus they smote at that time about 10,000 Moabites, all fat and powerful men, i.e., the whole army of the enemy in Jericho and on this side of the Jordan, not letting a man escape. The expression "at that time" seems to imply that they did not destroy this number in one single engagement, but during the whole course of the war.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 3:30

So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years.

Thus Moab was subdued under the hand of Israel, and the land had rest for eighty years.

Judges 3:31

And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel.

After him (Ehud) was, i.e., there rose up, *Shamgar* the son of Anath. He smote the Philistines, who had probably invaded the land of the Israelites, six hundred men, with an ox-goad, so that he also (like Othniel and Ehud, vv. 9 and 15) delivered Israel. *habaaqaar* (OT:1241) *mal^amad* (OT:4451), *hap leg*, signifies, according to the Rabbins and the ancient versions, an instrument with which they trained and drove oxen; and with this the etymology agrees, as *laamad* (OT:3925) is used in Hos 10:11 and Jer 31:18 to denote the training of the young ox. According to *Rashi*, *baaqaar* (OT:1241) *mal^amad* (OT:4451) is the same as *daar^abaan*, *bou'kentron*, in 1 Sam 13:21. According to *Maundrell* in *Paulus' Samml. der merkw. Reisen nach d. Or.* i. p. 139, the country people in Palestine and Syria use when ploughing goads about eight feet long and six inches in circumference at the thick end. At the thin end they have a sharp point to drive the oxen, and at the other end a small hoe, to scrape off any dirt that may stick to the plough. Shamgar may have smitten the Philistines with some such instrument as this, just as the Edonian prince Lycurgus is described by Homer (Il. vi. 135) as putting Dionysius and the Bacchantines to flight with a *bouplee'x*. Nothing is recorded about the descent of Shamgar, either

here or in the Song of Deborah, in Judg 5:6. The heroic deed recorded of him must be regarded, as *O. v. Gerlach* affirms, as "merely the result of a holy inspiration that suddenly burst forth within him, in which he seized upon the first weapon that came to his hand, and put to flight the enemy when scared by a terror for God, just as Samson did on a later occasion." For he does not seem to have secured for the Israelites any permanent victory over the Philistines. Moreover, he is not called judge, nor is the period of his labours taken into account, but in Judg 4:1 the renewed apostasy of Israel from the Lord is dated from the death of Ehud.

Oppression of Israel by Jabin, and Deliverance by Deborah and Barak. Ch. 4 and 5.

This fresh oppression of the Israelites, and the glorious victory which they obtained over Sisera, Jabin's general, through the judge Deborah and the heroic warrior Barak, are so fully described in Deborah's triumphal song in ch. 5, that this song may be regarded as a poetical commentary upon that event. It by no means follows from this fact, however, that the historical account in ch. 4 was first of all founded upon the ode, and was merely intended to furnish an explanation of the song itself. Any such assumption is overthrown by the fact that the prose account in ch.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

4, contains, as even *Bertheau* acknowledges, some historical details which we look for in vain in the song, and which are of great assistance in the interpretation of it. All that we can infer with any probability from the internal connection between the historical narrative and the Song of Deborah is, that the author of our book took both of them from one common source; though the few expressions and words which they contain, such as *s^amiykaah* (OT:8063) in v. 18, *tits^anach* (OT:6795) in v. 21, *maashak^ataa* (OT:4900) in v. 6, and *wayaahaam* (OT:2000) in v. 15, do not throw any light upon the source from which they were derived.

For, with the exception of the first, which is not met with again, the whole of them occur in other passages-the second in Judg 1:14 and Josh 15:18, the third in the same sense in Judg 20:37, and the fourth in Ex 14:24 and Josh 10:10. And it by no means follows, that because in the passages referred to, "*yaahom* is found in close association with songs or poetical passages" (*Bertheau*), the word itself must be borrowed from the same source as the songs, viz., from the book of Jasher (Josh 10:13). For *haamam* (OT:2000) is found in the same signification in 1 Sam 7:10; Ex 23:27, and Deut 2:15, where we look in vain for any songs; whilst it always occurs in connection with the account of a miraculous overthrow of the foe by the omnipotent power of God.

Judges 4:1-3

And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead.

Verse 1-3. The Victory over Jabin and His General Sisera. - Vv. 1-3. As the Israelites fell away from the Lord again when Ehud was dead, the Lord gave them into the hand of the Canaanitish king *Jabin*, who oppressed them severely for twenty years with a powerful army under *Sisera* his general. The circumstantial clause, "when Ehud was dead," places the falling away of the Israelites from God

in direct causal connection with the death of Ehud on the one hand, and the deliverance of Israel into the power of Jabin on the other, and clearly indicates that as long as Ehud lived he kept the people from idolatry (cf. Judg 2:18-19), and defended Israel from hostile oppressions. Joshua had already conquered one king, *Jabin of Hazor* , and taken his capital (Josh 11:1,10). The king referred to here, who lived more than a century later, bore the same name. The name *Jabin* , "the discerning," may possibly have been a standing name or title of the Canaanitish kings of Hazor, as Abimelech was of the kings of the Philistines (see at Gen 26:8).

He is called "king of Canaan," in distinction from the kings of other nations and lands, such as Moab, Mesopotamia, etc. (Judg 3:8,12), into whose power the Lord had given up His sinful people. *Hazor* , once the capital of the kingdoms of northern Canaan, was situated over (above or to the north of) Lake Huleh, in the tribe of Naphtali, but has not yet been discovered (see at Josh 11:1). Sisera, the general of Jabin, dwelt in *Harosheth* of the *Goyim* , and oppressed the Israelites most tyrannically (*Mightily*: cf. Judg 7:1; 1 Sam 2:16) for twenty years with a force consisting of 900 chariots of iron (see at Josh 17:16). The situation of *Harosheth* , which only occurs here (vv. 2, 13, 16), is unknown; but it is certainly to be sought for in one of the larger plains of Galilee, possibly the plain of *Buttauf* , where Sisera was able to develop his forces, whose strength consisted chiefly in war-chariots, and to tyrannize over the land of Israel.

Judges 4:4-5

And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

At that time the Israelites were judged by *Deborah*, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, who dwelt under the Deborah-palm between Ramah (er Râm: see at Josh 18:25) and Bethel (Beitin: see at Josh 7:2) in the tribe of Benjamin, upon the mountains of Ephraim. Deborah is called *n^obiy'aah* (OT:5031) *'ishaah* (OT:802) on account of her prophetic gift, like Miriam in Ex 15:20, and Hulda the wife of Shallum in 2 Kings 22:14. This gift qualified her to judge the nation (the participle *shop^oTaah* (OT:8199) expresses the permanence of the act of judging), i.e., first of all to settle such disputes among the people themselves as the lower courts were unable to decide, and which ought therefore, according to Deut 17:8, to be referred to the supreme judge of the whole nation. The palm where she sat in judgment (cf. Ps 9:5) was called after her the *Deborah* - palm. The Israelites went up to her there to obtain justice. The expression "*came up*" is applied here, as in Deut 17:8, to the place of justice, as a spiritual height, independently of the fact that the place referred to here really stood upon an eminence.

Judges 4:6-7

And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?

But in order to secure the rights of her people against their outward foes also, she summoned *Barak* the son of Abinoam from Kedesh, in the tribe of Naphtali, on the west of the Huleh lake (see at Josh 12:22), and made known to him the commands of the Lord: "*Up and draw to Mount Tabor, and take with thee 10,000 men of the children of Naphtali and Zebulun; and I will draw to thee into the brook-valley of Kishon, Sisera the captain of Jabin's army, and his chariots, and his multitude* (his men of war), *and give him into thy hand.*" *maashak^ataa* (OT:4900) has been explained in different ways. *Seb. Schmidt, Clericus*, and others supply *haqeren* (OT:7161) or *hashowpaar* (OT:7782), draw with the trumpet (cf. Ex

19:13; Josh 6:5), i.e., blow the trumpet in long-drawn tones, upon Mount Tabor, and regard this as the signal for convening people; whilst *Hengstenberg* (Diss. ii. pp. 76, 77) refers to Num 10:9, and understands the blowing of the horn as the signal by which the congregation of the Lord made known its need to Him, and appealed to Him to come to its help.

It cannot indeed be proved that the blowing of the trumpet was merely the means adopted for convening the people together; in fact, the use of the following *maashak^atiy* (OT:4900), in the sense of draw, is to be explained on the supposition that *maashak^ataa* (OT:4900) is used in a double sense. "The long-drawn notes were to draw the Lord to them, and then the Lord would draw to them Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army. Barak first calls the helper from heaven, and then the Lord calls the enemy upon earth." Nevertheless we cannot subscribe to this explanation, *first* of all because the supposed ellipsis cannot be sustained in this connection, when nothing is said about the blowing of a trumpet either in what precedes or in what follows; and *secondly*, because Num 10:9 cannot be appealed to in explanation, for the simple reason that it treats of the blowing of the *silver trumpets* on the part of the priests, and they must not be confounded with the *shopharoth*. And the use made of the trumpets at Jericho cannot be transferred to the passage before us without some further ground.

We are disposed therefore to take the word *maashak^a* (OT:4900) in the sense of *draw* (intransitive), i.e., proceed one after another in a long-drawn train (as in Judg 20:37 and Ex 12:21), referring to the captain and the warriors drawing after him; whilst in v. 7 it is to be translated in the same way, though with a transitive signification. Mount Tabor, called *Btabu'rion* by the Greeks (see LXX Hos 5:1), the mountain of Christ's transfiguration according to

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

an early tradition of the church, the present *Jebel et Tur* , is a large truncated cone of limestone, which is almost perfectly insulated, and rises to the height of about a thousand feet, on the north-eastern border of the plain of Jezreel. The sides of the mountain are covered with a forest of oaks and wild pistachios, and upon its flat summit, which is about half an hour in circumference, there are the remains of ancient fortifications (see *Robinson* , Pal. iii. pp. 211ff., and *v. Raumer* , Pal. pp. 37, 38).

The words "and take with thee 10,000 men" are not to be understood as signifying that Barak was to summon the people together upon the top of Mount Tabor, but the assembling of the people is presupposed; and all that is commanded is, that he was to proceed to Mount Tabor with the assembled army, and make his attack upon the enemy, who were encamped in the valley of Kishon, *from that point*. According to v. 10, the army was collected at Kedesh in Naphtali. *Nachal Kishon* is not only the brook *Kishon* , which is formed by streams that take their rise from springs upon Tabor and the mountains of Gilboa, flows in a north-westerly direction through the plain of Jezreel to the Mediterranean, and empties itself into the bay of Acca, and which is called *Mukatta* by the natives (see *Rob.* iii. pp. 472ff., and *v. Raumer* , pp. 39, 50), but the valley on both sides of the brook, i.e., the plain of Jezreel (see at Josh 17:16), where the greatest battles have been fought for the possession of Palestine from time immemorial down to the most recent times (see *v. Raumer* , pp. 40ff.).

Judges 4:8-11

And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go.

Barak replied that he would not go unless she would go with him-certainly not for the reason suggested by *Bertheau* , viz., that he distrusted the divine promise given

to him by Deborah, but because his mistrust of his own strength was such that he felt too weak to carry out the command of God. He wanted divine enthusiasm for the conflict, and this the presence of the prophetess was to infuse into both Barak and the army that was to be gathered round him. Deborah promised to accompany him, but announced to him as the punishment for this want of confidence in the success of his undertaking, that the prize of victory-namely, the defeat of the hostile general-should be taken out of his hand; for Jehovah would sell (i.e., deliver up) Sisera into the hand of a woman, viz., according to vv. 17ff., into the hand of Jael. She then went with him to Kedesh, where Barak summoned together Zebulun and Naphtali, i.e., the fighting men of those tribes, and went up with 10,000 men in his train ("at his feet," i.e., after him, v. 14; cf. Ex 11:8 and Deut 11:6) to Tabor ("went up:" the expression is used here to denote the advance of an army against a place). Kedesh, where the army assembled, was higher than Tabor. *zaa`aq* (OT:2199), *Hiphil* with acc., to call together (cf. 2 Sam 20:4-5). Before the engagement with the foe is described, there follows in v. 11 a statement that *Heber* the Kenite had separated himself from his tribe, the children of Hobab, who led a nomad life in the desert of Judah (Judg 1:16), and had pitched his tents as far as the oak forest at Zaanannim (see at Josh 19:33) near Kedesh. This is introduced because of its importance in relation to the issue of the conflict which ensued (vv. 17 ff). *nip^araad* (OT:6504) with *Kametz* is a participle, which is used in the place of the perfect, to indicate that the separation was a permanent one.

Judges 4:12-14

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

And they shewed Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam was gone up to mount Tabor.

As soon as Sisera received tidings of the march of Barak to Mount Tabor, he brought together all his chariots and all his men of war from Harosheth of the Goyim into the brook-valley of the Kishon. Then Deborah said to Barak, "*Up; for this is the day in which Jehovah hath given Sisera into thy hand. Yea (halo' , nonne , as an expression indicating lively assurance), the Lord goeth out before thee,*" sc., to the battle, to smite the foe; whereupon Barak went down from Tabor with his 10,000 men to attack the enemy, according to Judg 5:19, at Taanach by the water of Megiddo.

Judges 4:15-16

And the LORD discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet.

"And the Lord discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his army, with the edge of the sword before Barak." *wayaahaam* (OT:2000), as in Ex 14:24 and Josh 10:10, denotes the confounding of the hostile army by a miracle of God, mostly by some miraculous phenomenon of nature: see, besides Ex 14:24; 2 Sam 22:15; Ps 18:15, and 144:6. The expression *wayaahaam* (OT:2000) places the defeat of Sisera and his army in the same category as the miraculous destruction of Pharaoh and of the Canaanites at Gibeon; and the combination of this verb with the expression "with the edge of the sword" is to be taken as *constructio praegnans* , in the sense: Jehovah threw Sisera and his army into confusion, and, like a terrible champion fighting in front of Israel, smote him without quarter, Sisera sprang from his chariot to save himself, and fled on foot; but Barak pursued the routed foe to Harosheth, and completely destroyed them. "*All Sisera's army fell by the edge of*

the sword; there remained not even to one," i.e., not a single man.

Judges 4:17-22

Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.

Sisera took refuge in the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, to escape the sword of the Israelites, as king Jabin lived at peace with the house of Heber, i.e., with this branch of the Kenites.

Verse 18. Jael received the fugitive into her tent in the usual form of oriental hospitality (*cuwr* (OT:5493), as in Gen 19:2-3, to turn aside from the road and approach a person), and covered him with a covering (*s^amiykaah* (OT:8063), *hap leg* , covering, or rug), that he might be able to sleep, as he was thoroughly exhausted with his flight.

Verse 19. On his asking for water to drink, as he was thirsty (*tsaameetiy* (OT:6770), defective form for

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Verse 19. On his asking for water to drink, as he was thirsty (*tsaameetiy* (OT:6770), defective form for *tsaamee'tiy* (OT:6770)), she handed him milk from her bottle, and covered him up again. She gave him milk instead of water, as Deborah emphatically mentions in her song in Judg 5:25, no doubt merely for the purpose of giving to her guest a friendly and hospitable reception. When *Josephus* affirms, in his account of this event (Ant. v. 5, 4), that she gave him milk that was already spoiled (*diefthoro's ee'dee*), i.e., had turned sour, and *R. Tanchum* supposes that such milk intoxicated the weary man, these are merely later decorations of the simple fact, that have no historical worth whatever.

Verse 20-21. In order to be quite sure, Sisera entreated his hostess to stand before the door and turn any one away who might come to her to seek for one of the fugitives. *`amod* (OT:5975) is the imperative for *`im^adiy* (OT:5975), as the syntax proves that the word cannot be an infinitive. The anomaly apparent in the use of the gender may be accounted for on the ground that the masculine was the more general form, and might therefore be used for the more definite feminine. There are not sufficient grounds for altering it into *`aamowd* , the *inf. abs.* Whether Jael complied with this wish is not stated; but in the place of anything further, the chief fact alone is given in v. 21, namely, that Jael took a tent-plug, and went with a hammer in her hand to Sisera, who had fallen through exhaustion into a deep sleep, and drove the plug into his temples, so that it penetrated into the earth, or the floor.

The words *wayaa`ap w^ahuw'-nir^adam* are introduced as explanatory of the course of the events: "*but he was fallen into a deep sleep, and exhausted,*" i.e., had fallen fast asleep through exhaustion. "*And so he died.*" *wayaamot* (OT:4191) is attached as a consequence to *wgw' watits^anach* (OT:6795)... *watit^aqa`* (OT:8628), whereas *wayaa`ap* (OT:5774) belongs to the parenthetical clause *nir^adam* (OT:7290) *w^ahuw'* (OT:1931). This is the explanation adopted by *Rosenmüller* , and also in the remark of *Kimchi*: "the words *wayaa`ap* (OT:5774) *nir^adam* (OT:7290) indicate the reason why Sisera neither heard Jael approach him, nor was

conscious of the blow inflicted upon him." For the combination of *wayaa`ap* (OT:5774) with *wayaamot* (OT:4191), "then he became exhausted and died," which *Stud.* and *Bertheau* support, does not give any intelligible thought at all. A man who has a tent-peg driven with a hammer into his temples, so that the peg passes through his head into the ground, does not become exhausted before he dies, but dies instantaneously. And *wayaa`ap* (OT:5774), from *`uwp* (OT:5774), equivalent to *`aayep* (OT:5889) (Jer 4:31), or *yaa`ap* (OT:3286), and written with *Patach* in the last syllable, to distinguish it from *`uwp* (OT:5774), *volare*, has no other meaning than to be exhausted, in any of the passages in which it occurs (see 1 Sam 14:28,31; 2 Sam 21:15). The rendering adopted by the LXX, *eskotoo'thee* (NT:4656), cannot be grammatically sustained.

Verse 22. When Barak, who was in pursuit of Sisera, arrived at Jael's tent, she went to meet him, to show him the deed which he had performed. Thus was Deborah's prediction to Barak (v. 9) fulfilled. The Lord had sold Sisera into the hand of a woman, and deprived Barak of the glory of the victory. Nevertheless the act itself was not morally justified, either by this prophetic announcement, or by the fact that it is commemorated in the song of Deborah in Judg 5:24ff. Even though there can be no doubt that Jael acted under the influence of religious enthusiasm for the cause of Israel and its God, and that she was prompted by religious motives to regard the connection of her tribe with Israel, the people of the Lord, as higher and more sacred, not only than the bond of peace, in which her tribe was living with Jabin the Canaanitish king, but even than the duties of hospitality, which are so universally sacred to an oriental mind, her heroic deed cannot be acquitted of the sins of lying, treachery, and assassination, which were associated with it, by assuming as *Calovius*, *Buddeus*, and others have done, that when Jael invited Sisera into her tent, and promised him safety, and quenched this thirst with milk, she was acting with perfect sincerity, and without any thought of killing him, and that it was not till after he was fast asleep that she was instigated and impelled *instinctu Dei arcano* to perform the deed.

For Jehovah, the God of Israel, not only abhors lying lips (Prov 12:22), but hates

wickedness and deception of every kind. It is true, He punishes the ungodly at the hand of sinners; but the sinners whom He employs as the

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

instruments of His penal justice in carrying out the plans of His kingdom, are not instigated to the performance of wicked deeds by an inward and secret impulse from Him. God had no doubt so ordered it, that Sisera should meet with his death in Jael's tent, where he had taken refuge; but this divine purpose did not justify Jael in giving to the enemy of Israel a hospitable reception into her tent, making him feel secure both by word and deed, and then murdering him secretly while he was asleep. Such conduct as that was not the operation of the Spirit of God, but the fruit of a heroism inspired by flesh and blood; and even in Deborah's song (Judg 5:24ff.) it is not lauded as a divine act.

Judges 4:23,24

So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel.

"So God subdued at that time Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel; and the hand of the Israelites became heavier and heavier in its pressure upon him, until they had destroyed him." *w^aqaashaah* (OT:7186) *haalowk^a* (OT:3212)... *yad* (OT:3027) *wateelek^a* (OT:1980), "the hand... increased more and more, becoming heavy." *haalak^a* (OT:3212), used to denote the progress or continual increase of an affair, as in Gen 8:3, etc., is connected with the infinitive absolute, and with the participle of the action concerned. *qaashaah* (OT:7186) is the feminine participle of *qaasheh* (OT:7186), like *gaadeel* (OT:1432) in Gen 26:13 (see *Ges.* §131, 3, Anm. 3). The overthrow of Jabin and his rule did not involve the extermination of the Canaanites generally.

Deborah's Song of Victory. Ch. 5.

This highly poetical song is so direct and lively an utterance of the mighty force of

the enthusiasm awakened by the exaltation of Israel, and its victory over Sisera, that its genuineness is generally admitted now. After a general summons to praise the Lord for the courage with which the people rose up to fight against their foes (v. 2), Deborah the singer dilates in the first section (vv. 3-11) upon the significance of the victory, picturing in lively colours (1) the glorious times when Israel was exalted to be the nation of the Lord (vv. 3-5); (2) the disgraceful decline of the nation in the more recent times (vv. 6-8); and (3) the joyful turn of affairs which followed her appearance (vv. 9-11). After a fresh summons to rejoice in their victory (v. 12), there follows in the *second* section (vv. 13-21) a lively picture of the conflict and victory, in which there is a vivid description (*a*) of the mighty gathering of the brave to battle (vv. 13-15a) ; (*b*) of the cowardice of those who stayed away from the battle, and of the bravery with which the braver warriors risked their lives in the battle (vv. 15b-18); and (*c*) of the successful result of the conflict (vv. 19-21).

To this there is appended in the *third* section (vv. 22-31) an account of the glorious issue of the battle and the victory: first of all, a brief notice of the flight and pursuit of the foe (vv. 22-24); secondly, a commemoration of the slaying of Sisera by Jael (vv. 24-27); and thirdly, a scornful description of the disappointment of Sisera's mother, who was counting upon a large arrival of booty (vv. 28-30). The song then closes with the hope, founded upon this victory, that all the enemies of the Lord might perish, and Israel increase in strength (v. 31a). The whole song, therefore, is divided into three leading sections, each of which again is arranged in three somewhat unequal

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

strophes, the first and second sections being introduced by a summons to the praise of God (vv. 2, 12), whilst the third closes with an expression of hope, drawn from the contents of the whole, with regard to the future prospects of the kingdom of God (v. 31a).

Judges 5:1

Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying,

Verse 1. The historical introduction ("*Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying*") takes the place of a heading, and does not mean that the song of Deborah and Barak which follows was composed by them jointly, but simply that it was sung by them together, in commemoration of the victory. The poetess or writer of the song, according to vv. 3, 7, and 12, was Deborah. The song itself opens with a summons to praise the Lord for the willing and joyful rising up of His people.

2 That the strong in Israel showed themselves strong, That the people willingly offered themselves, Praise ye the Lord!

Judges 5:2

Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves.

The meaning of *paara`* (OT:6544) and *p^araa`owt* (OT:6546) is a subject of dispute. According to the Septuagint rendering, and that of *Theodot.* , *en too' a'rxasthai archeegou's en Israee'l* , many give it the meaning to begin or to lead, and

endeavour to establish this meaning from an Arabic word signifying to find one's self at the head of an affair. But this meaning cannot be established in Hebrew. *paara`* (OT:6544) has no other meaning than to let loose from something, to let a person loose or free (see at Lev 10:6); and in the only other passage where *p^araa`owt* (OT:6546) occurs (Deut 32:42), it does not refer to a leader, but to the luxuriant growth of the hair as the sign of great strength. Hence in this passage also *p^araa`owt* (OT:6546) literally means *comati*, the hairy ones, i.e., those who possessed strength; and *paara`* (OT:6544), to manifest or put forth strength.

The persons referred to are the champions in the fight, who went before the nation with strength and bravery. The preposition *b* before *p^aroa`* (OT:6544) indicates the reason for praising God, or rather the object with which the praise of the Lord was connected. *wgw' bip^aroa`* (OT:6544), literally "in the showing themselves strong." The meaning is, "for the fact that the strong in Israel put forth strength." *hit^anaadeeb*, to prove one's self willing, here to go into the battle of their own free will, without any outward and authoritative command. This introduction transports us in the most striking manner into the time of the judges, when Israel had no king who could summon the nation to war, but everything depended upon the voluntary rising of the strong and the will of the nation at large. The manifestation of this strength and willingness Deborah praises as a gracious gift of the Lord. After this summons to praise the Lord, the first part of the song opens with an appeal to the kings and princes of the earth to hear what Deborah has to proclaim to the praise of God.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

3 Hear, ye kings; give ear, ye princes! I, to the Lord will I sing, Will sing praise to the Lord, the God of Israel.

4 Lord, when Thou wentest out from Seir, When Thou marchedst out of the fields of Edom, The earth trembled, and the heavens also dropped; The clouds also dropped water.

5 The mountains shook before the Lord, Sinai there before the Lord, the God of Israel.

Judges 5:3

Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel.

The "kings and princes" are not the rulers in Israel, for Israel had no kings at that time, but the kings and princes of the heathen nations, as in Ps 2:2. These were to discern the mighty acts of Jehovah in Israel, and learn to fear Jehovah as the almighty God. For the song to be sung applies to Him, the God of Israel. *zimeer* , *psa'lein* , is the technical expression for singing with an instrumental accompaniment (see at Ex 15:2).

Judges 5:4-5

LORD, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water.

To give the Lord the glory for the victory which had been gained through His omnipotent help over the powerful army of Sisera, and to fill the heathen with fear of Jehovah, and the Israelites with love and confidence towards Him, the singer reverts to the terribly glorious manifestation of Jehovah in the olden time, when Israel was accepted as the nation of God (Ex 19). Just as Moses in his blessing (Deut 33:2) referred the tribes of Israel to this mighty act, as the source of all salvation and blessing for Israel, so the prophetess Deborah makes the praise of this glorious manifestation of God the starting-point of her praise of the great grace, which Jehovah as the faithful covenant God had displayed to His people in her own days. The tacit allusion to Moses' blessing is very unmistakeable. But whereas Moses describes the descent of the Lord upon Sinai (Ex 19), according to its gracious significance in relation to the tribes of Israel, as an objective fact (Jehovah came from Sinai, Deut 33:2), Deborah clothes the remembrance of it in the form of an address to God, to bring out the thought that the help which Israel

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

had just experienced was a renewal of the coming of the Lord to His people.

Jehovah's going out of Seir, and marching out of the fields of Edom, is to be interpreted in the same sense as His rising up from Seir (Deut 33:2). As the descent of the Lord upon Sinai is depicted there as a rising of the sun from the east, so the same descent in a black cloud amidst thunder, lightning, fire, and vapour of smoke (Ex 19:16,18), is represented here with direct allusion to these phenomena as a storm rising up from Seir in the east, in which the Lord advanced to meet His people as they came from the west to Sinai. Before the Lord, who came down upon Sinai in the storm and darkness of the cloud, the earth shook and the heaven dropped, or, as it is afterwards more definitely explained, the clouds dropped with water, emptied themselves of their abundance of water as they do in the case of a storm. The mountains shook (*naaz^qluw* (OT:5140), *Niphal* of *zaalal* (OT:2151), dropping the reduplication of the *l* = *naazoluw* (OT:2151), Isa 63:19; 64:2), even the strong rocky mountain of Sinai, which stood out so distinctly before the eyes of the singer, that she speaks of it as "this Sinai," pointing to it as though it were locally near.

David's description of the miraculous guidance of Israel through the desert in Ps 68:8-9, is evidently founded upon this passage, though it by no means follows from this that the passage before us also treats of the journey through the desert, as *Clericus* supposes, or even of the presence of the Lord in the battle with Sisera, and the victory which it secured. But greatly as Israel had been exalted at Sinai by the Lord its God, it had fallen just as deeply into bondage to its oppressors through its own sins, until Deborah arose to help it (vv. 6-8).

6 In the days of Shamgar, the son of Anath, In the days of Jael, the paths kept holiday, And the wanderers of the paths went crooked ways.

*7 The towns in Israel kept holiday, they kept holiday, Until that I, Deborah, arose,
That I arose a mother in Israel*

*8 They chose new gods; Then was war at the gates: Was there a shield seen and a
spear Among forty thousand in Israel?*

Judges 5:6-7

*In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were
unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways.*

The deep degradation and disgrace into which Israel had sunk before the appearance of Deborah, through its falling away from the Lord into idolatry, forms the dark reverse of that glorification at Sinai. Although, after Ehud, Shamgar had also brought help to the people against their enemies by a victory over the Philistines (Judg 3:31), and although Jael, who proved herself a heroine by slaying the fugitive Sisera, was then alive, things had got to such a

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

pitch with Israel, that no one would venture upon the public high roads. There are no good grounds for the conjecture that Jael was a different person from the Jael mentioned in Judg 4:17ff., whether a judge who is not further known, as *Ewald* supposes, or a female judge who stood at the head of the nation in these unhappy times (*Bertheau*). *'aaraachowt chaad^aluw* , lit., "*the paths ceased,*" sc., to be paths, or to be trodden by men. *n^atiybowt* (OT:5410) *hol^akeey* (OT:1980), "*those who went upon paths,*" or beaten ways, i.e., those who were obliged to undertake journeys for the purpose of friendly intercourse or trade, notwithstanding the burden of foreign rule which pressed upon the land; such persons went by "*twisted paths,*" i.e., by roads and circuitous routes which turned away from the high roads.

And the *p^araazown* (OT:6520), i.e., the *cultivated land* , with its open towns and villages, and with their inhabitants, was as forsaken and desolate as the public highways. The word *perazon* has been rendered judge or guidance by modern expositors, after the example of *Teller* and *Gesenius*; and in v. 11 decision or guidance. But this meaning, which has been adopted into all the more recent lexicons, has nothing really to support it, and does not even suit our verse, into which it would introduce the strange contradiction, that at the time when Shamgar and Jael were judges, there were no judges in Israel. In addition to the Septuagint version, which renders the word *dunatoi'* (NT:1415) in this verse (i.e., according to the *Cod. Vat.* , for the *Col. Al.* has *fra'zoon*), and then in the most unmeaning way adopts the rendering *au'xeeson* in v. 11, from which we may clearly see that the translators did not know the meaning of the word, it is common to adduce an Arabic word which signifies *segregavit, discrevit rem ab aliis* , though it is impossible to prove that the Arabic word ever had the meaning to judge or to lead.

All the old translators, as well as the Rabbins, have based their rendering of the word upon *p^araaziy* (OT:6521), inhabitant of the flat country (Deut 3:5, and 1 Sam 6:18), and *p^araazowt* (OT:6519), the open flat country, as distinguished from the towns surrounded by walls (Ezek 38:11; Zech 2:8), according to which *p^araazown* (OT:6520), as the place of meeting, would denote both the cultivated land with its

unenclosed towns and villages, and also the population that was settled in the open country in unfortified places—a meaning which also lies at the foundation of the word in Hab 3:14. Accordingly, *Luther* has rendered the word *Bauern* (peasants). *shaqam^atiy* (OT:6965) `ad (OT:5704) for *qam^atiy* (OT:6965) '*asher* (OT:834) `ad (OT:5704). The contraction of '*asher* (OT:834) into *sh* (OT:7716), with *Dagesh* following, and generally pointed with *Seghol*, but here with *Patach* on account of the *q*, which is closely related to the gutturals, belongs to the popular character of the song, and is therefore also found in the Song of Solomon (Judg 1:12; 2:7,17; 4:6). It is also met with here and there in simple prose (Judg 6:17; 7:12; 8:26); but it was only in the literature of the time of the captivity and a still later date, that it found its way more and more from the language of ordinary conversation into that of the Scriptures. Deborah describes herself as "a mother in Israel," on account of her having watched over her people with maternal care, just as Job calls himself a father to the poor who had been supported by him (Job. 29:16; cf. Isa 22:21).

Judges 5:8

They chose new gods; then was war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?

Verse 8 describes the cause of the misery into which Israel had fallen.

chadaashiym (OT:2319) '*elohiym* (OT:430) is the object to *yib^achar* (OT:977), and the subject is to be found in the previous term *Israel*. Israel forsook its God and creator, and chose new gods, i.e., gods not worshipped by its fathers (vid., Deut 32:17).

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Then there was war (*laachem* (OT:3899), the construct state of *laacheem* (OT:3901), a verbal noun formed from the *Piel* , and signifying conflict or war) at the gates; i.e., the enemy pressed up to the very gates of the Israelitish towns, and besieged them, and there was not seen a shield or spear among forty thousand in Israel, i.e., there were no warriors found in Israel who ventured to defend the land against the foe. *'im* (OT:518) indicates a question with a negative reply assumed, as in 1 Kings 1:27, etc. Shield and spear (or lance) are mentioned particularly as arms of offence and defence, to signify arms of all kinds.

The words are not to be explained from 1 Sam 13:22, as signifying that there were no longer any weapons to be found among the Israelites, because the enemy had taken them away ("not seen" is not equivalent to "not found" in 1 Sam 13:22); they simply affirm that there were no longer any weapons to be seen, because not one of the 40,000 men in Israel took a weapon in his hand. The number 40,000 is not the number of the men who offered themselves willingly for battle, according to v. 2 (*Bertheau*); for apart from the fact that they did not go unarmed into the battle, it is at variance with the statement in Judg 4:6,10, that Barak went into the war and smote the enemy with only 10,000 men. It is a round number, i.e., an approximative statement of the number of the warriors who might have smitten the enemy and delivered Israel from bondage, and was probably chosen with a reference to the 40,000 fighting men of the tribes on the east of the Jordan, who went with Joshua to Canaan and helped their brethren to conquer the land (Josh 4:13).

Most of the more recent expositors have given a different rendering of v. 8. Many of them render the first clause according to the *Peshito* and *Vulgate*, "*God chose something new,*" taking *Elohim* as the subject, and *chadashim* (new) as the object. But to this it has very properly been objected, that, according to the terms of the song, it was not *Elohim* but *Jehovah* who effected the deliverance of Israel, and that the Hebrew for new things is not *chadaashiyim* (OT:2319), but *chadaashowt* (Isa 42:9; 48:6), or *chadaashaah* (OT:2319) (Isa 43:19; Jer 31:22). On these

grounds *Ewald* and *Bertheau* render *Elohim* "judges" (they chose new judges), and appeal to Ex 21:6; 22:7-8, where the authorities who administered justice in the name of God are called *Elohim*. But these passages are not sufficient by themselves to establish the meaning "judges," and still less to establish the rendering "new judges" for *Elohim chadashim*. Moreover, according to both these explanations, the next clause must be understood as relating to the specially courageous conflict which the Israelites in their enthusiasm carried on with Sisera; whereas the further statement, that among 40,000 warriors who offered themselves willingly for battle there was not a shield or a lance to be seen, is irreconcilably at variance with this.

For the explanation suggested, namely, that these warriors did not possess the ordinary weapons for a well-conducted engagement, but had nothing but bows and swords, or instead of weapons of any kind had only the staffs and tools of shepherds and husbandmen, is proved to be untenable by the simple fact that there is nothing at all to indicate any contrast between ordinary and extraordinary weapons, and that such a contrast is altogether foreign to the context. Moreover, the fact appealed to, that '*aaz* (OT:227) points to a victorious conflict in vv. 13, 19, 22, as well as in v. 11, is not strong enough to support the view in question, as '*aaz* (OT:227) is employed in v. 19 in connection with the battle of the kings of Canaan, which was not a successful one, but terminated in a defeat.

The singer now turns from the contemplation of the deep degradation of Israel to the glorious change which took place as soon as she appeared:-

9 My heart inclines to the leaders of Israel; To those who offered themselves willingly in the nation. Praise ye the Lord!

10 Ye that ride upon white asses;

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Ye that sit upon covering, And that walk in the way, reflect!

11 With the voice of the archers among drawers (of water), There praise ye the righteous acts of the Lord, The righteous acts of His villages in Israel. Then the people of the Lord went down to the gates!

Judges 5:9

My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the LORD.

We must supply the *subst. verb* in connection with *l^a libiy* (OT:3820), "My heart is (sc., inclined) towards the leaders of Israel," i.e., feels itself drawn towards them. *chowqeeq* for *m^achowqeeq* (v. 14), the determining one, i.e., the commander or leader in war: as in Deut 33:21. The leaders and willing ones are first of all to praise the Lord for having crowned their willingness with victory.

Judges 5:10

Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way.

And all classes of the people, both high and low, have reason to join in the praise. Those who ride upon white, i.e., white-spotted asses, are the upper classes generally, and not merely the leaders (cf. Judg 10:4; 12:14). *tsaachor*, *lit.* dazzling white; but since there are no asses that are perfectly white, and white was a colour that was highly valued both by Hebrews and Arabs, they applied the term white to those that were only spotted with white. Those who sit upon coverings (*midiyn* (OT:4081) from *mad* (OT:4055), a covering or carpet, with the plural termination

yn , which is to be regarded as a poetical Chaldaism) are the rich and prosperous; and those who walk on the way, i.e., travellers on foot, represent the middle and lower classes, who have to go about and attend to their affairs. Considered logically, this triple division of the nation is not a very exact one, as the first two do not form a true antithesis.

But the want of exactness does not warrant our fusing together the middle term and the first, and understanding by *middin* either saddles or saddle-cloths, as *Ewald* and *Bertheau* have done; for saddle-cloths are still further from forming an antithesis to asses, so that those who ride upon white asses could be distinguished, as the upper classes and leaders, from those who sit upon saddles, or are "somewhat richer." Moreover, there is no reason for regarding these three classes as referring simply to the long line of warriors hastening from the victory to the triumphal fête. On the contrary, all classes of the people are addressed, as enjoying the fruits of the victory that had been obtained: the upper classes, who ride upon their costly animals; the rich resting at home upon their splendid

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

carpets; and the poor travellers, who can now go quietly along the high-road again without fear of interruption from the foe (v. 6). *siychuw* (OT:7878) is rendered "*sing*" by many; but this rendering cannot be sustained from Ps 105:2 and 145:5, and it is not necessary on the verse before us, since the well-established meaning of the word "ponder," reflect, sc., upon the acts of the Lord, is a perfectly suitable one.

Judges 5:11

They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel: then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates.

The whole nation had good reason to make this reflection, as the warriors, having returned home, were now relating the mighty acts of the Lord among the women who were watering their flocks, and the people had returned to their towns once more. This is in all probability the idea of the obscure verse before us, which has been interpreted in such very different ways. The first clause, which has no verb, and cannot constitute a sentence by itself, must be connected with the following clause, and taken as an *anakolouthon*, as *y^atanuw* (OT:8567) *shaam* (OT:8033) does not form a direct continuation of the clause commencing with *miqowl* (OT:6963). After the words "*from the voice of the archers,*" we should expect the continuation "*there is heard,*" or "*there sounds forth the praise of the acts of the Lord.*" Instead of that, the construction that was commenced is relinquished at *y^atanuw* (OT:8567) *shaam* (OT:8033), and a different turn is given to the thought.

This not only seems to offer the simplest explanation, but the only possible solution of the difficulty. For the explanation that *min* (OT:4480) is to be taken as signifying "away from," as in Num 15:24, etc., in the sense of "far from the voice

of the archers, among the watering women," does not suit the following word *shaam* (OT:8033), "there," at all. It would be necessary to attribute to *min* (OT:4480) the meaning "no more disquieted by," a meaning which the preposition could not possibly have in this clause. *m^achats^atsiym* (OT:2686) are not sharers in the booty, for *chaatsats* simply means to cut, to cut in pieces, to divide, and is never applied to the sharing of booty, for which *chileeq* is the word used (vid., v. 30; Ps 68:13; Isa 9:2). *m^achatseets* is to be regarded, as the Rabbins maintain, as a *denom.* from *cheets* (OT:2671), to hold an arrow, signifying therefore the shooter of an arrow.

It was probably a natural thing for Deborah, who dwelt in Benjamin, to mention the archers as representatives of warriors generally, since this was the principal weapon employed by the Benjaminites (see 1 Chron 8:40; 12:2; 2 Chron 14:7; 17:17). The tarrying of the warriors among the drawers of water, where the flocks and herds were being watered, points to the time of peace, when the warriors were again occupied with their civil and domestic affairs. *y^atanuw* (OT:8567) is a simple aorist. *tinaah*, *lit.* to repeat, then to relate, or praise. "*The righteousness of Jehovah,*" i.e., the marvellous acts of the Lord in and upon Israel for the accomplishing of His purposes of salvation, in which the righteousness of His work upon earth was manifested (cf. 1 Sam 12:7; Mic 6:5). *pir^azownow* (OT:6520) *tsid^aqowt* (OT:6666) has been rendered by modern expositors, either "the righteous acts of His guidance or of His decision" (*Ewald* and *Bertheau*), or "the righteous acts of His commanders," or "the benefits towards His princes (leaders) in Israel" (*Ros.* and others). But neither of these can be sustained. We must take *p^araazown* (OT:6520) here in just the same sense as in v. 7; the country covered with open towns and villages, together with their inhabitants, whom Jehovah had delivered from the hostile oppression that had rested upon them, by means of the victory obtained over Sisera. After that victory the people of the Lord went down again to their gates, from the mountains and hiding-places in which they had taken refuge from their foes (vv. 6, 7),

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

returning again to the plains of the land, and the towns that were now delivered from the foe.

Judges 5:12

Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam.

V. 12 forms the introduction to the second part, viz., the description of the conflict and the victory. Throwing herself into the great event which she is about to commemorate, Deborah calls upon herself to strike up a song, and upon Barak to lead off his prisoners:

12 Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, utter a song! Rise up, Barak, and lead captive thy captives, O son of Abinoam!

uwriy (OT:5782) has the tone upon the last syllable on the first two occasions, to answer to the rapid summoning burst of the Lord in the opening address (*Bertheau*). *sh^abiy* (OT:3427) *shaabaah* (OT:7725), to lead away captives, as the fruit of the victory; not merely to lead in triumph. On the form *uwshabah* with *Chateph-patach*, see *Ewald*, §90, *b*. In the next three strophes of this part (vv. 13-21) the progress of the conflict is described; and in the first two the part taken in the battle by the different tribes (vv. 13-15a, and 15b-18).

13 Then came down a remnant of nobles of the nation;

Jehovah came down to me among the heroes.

*14 Of Ephraim, whose root in Amalek; Behind thee Benjamin among thy peoples.
From Machir came down leaders, And from Zebulun marchers with the staff of the
conductor.*

*15a And princes in Issachar with Deborah, And Issachar as well as Barak, Driven
into the valley through his feet.*

Judges 5:13

*Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the
people: the LORD made*

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

me have dominion over the mighty.

Looking back to the commencement of the battle, the poetess describes the streaming of the brave men of the nation down from the mountains, to fight the enemy with Barak and Deborah in the valley of Jezreel; though the whole nation did not raise as one man against its oppressors, but only a remnant of the noble and brave in the nation, with whom Jehovah went into the battle. In v. 13 the Masoretic pointing of **y^arad** (OT:7287) is connected with the rabbinical idea of the word as the *fut. apoc.* of **raadaah** (OT:7287): "*then* (now) *will the remnant rule over the glorious,*" i.e., the remnant left in Israel over the stately foe; "Jehovah rules for me (or through me) over the heroes in Sisera's army," which *Luther* has also adopted. But, as *Schnurr.* has maintained, this view is decidedly erroneous, inasmuch as it is altogether irreconcilable with the description which follows of the marching of the tribes of Israel into the battle. **yrd** (OT:3381) is to be understood in the same sense as **yaar^aduw** (OT:3381) in v. 14, and to be pointed as a perfect **yaarad** (OT:3381).

(Note: The *Cod. Al.* of the LXX contains the correct rendering, *to'te* (NT:5119) *kate'bee* (NT:2597) *kata'leimma* (NT:2640). In the Targum also **yrd** (OT:3381) is correctly translated **n^atat** (OT:5414), *descendit*, although the germs of the rabbinical interpretation are contained in the paraphrase of the whole verse: *tunc descendit unus ex exercitu Israel et fregit fortitudinem fortium gentium. Ecce non ex fortitudine manus eorum fuit hoc; sed Dominus fregit ante populum suum fortitudinem virorum osorum eorum.*) "*There came down,*" sc., from the mountains of the land into the plain of Jezreel, a remnant of nobles. **l^aadiyriym** (OT:117) is used instead of a closer subordination through the construct state, to bring out the idea of **saariyd** (OT:8300) into greater prominence (see *Ewald*, §292). **`aam** (OT:5971) is in apposition to **l^aadiyriym** (OT:117), and not to be connected with the following word **y^ahaaowh** (OT:3068), as it is by some, in opposition to the accents. The thought is rather this: with the nobles or among the brave Jehovah himself went against the foe. **liy** (OT:3807a) is a *dat. commodi*, equivalent to "for my joy."

Judges 5:14

Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against Amalek; after thee, Benjamin, among thy people; out of Machir came down governors, and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer.

"**From** (*miniy* (OT:4480), poetical for *min* (OT:4480)) *Ephraim*," sc., there came fighting men; not the whole tribe, but only nobles or brave men, and indeed those whose roots were in Amalek, i.e., those who were rooted or had taken root, i.e., had settled and spread themselves out upon the tribe-territory of Ephraim, which had formerly been inhabited by Amalekites, the mount of the Amalekites, mentioned in Judg 12:15 (for the figure itself, see Isa 27:6; Ps 80:10, and Job 5:3). "*Behind thee*," i.e., behind Ephraim, there followed Benjamin among thy (Ephraim's) people (*`amaamiym* , a poetical form for *`amiym* (OT:5971), in the sense of hosts). Benjamin lived farther south than Ephraim, and therefore, when looked at from the stand-point of the plain of Jezreel, behind Ephraim; "but he came upon the scene of battle, either in subordination to the more powerful Ephraimites, or rushing on with the Ephraimitish hosts" (*Bertheau*). "*From Machir*," i.e., from western Manasseh, there came down leaders (see at v. 9), sc., with warriors in their train.

Machir cannot refer to the Manassite family of Machir, to which Moses gave the northern part of Gilead, and Bashan, for an inheritance (comp. Josh 17:1 with 13:29-31), but it stands poetically for Manasseh generally, as Machir was the only son of Manasseh, from whom all the Manassites were descended (Gen 50:23; Num 26:29ff.,

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

27:1). The reference here, however, is simply to that portion of the tribe of Manasseh which had received its inheritance by the side of Ephraim, in the land to the west of the Jordan. This explanation of the word is required, not only by the fact that Machir is mentioned after Ephraim and Benjamin, and before Zebulun and Issachar, but still more decidedly by the introduction of Gilead beyond Jordan in connection with Reuben, in v. 17, which can only signify Gad and eastern Manasseh. Hence the two names *Machir* and *Gilead*, the names of Manasseh's son and grandson, are poetically employed to denote the two halves of the tribe of Manasseh; Machir signifying the western Manassites, and Gilead the eastern. "*From Zebulun marchers (maashak^a (OT:4900), to approach in long processions, as in Judg 4:6) with the staff of the conductor.*" *copeer* (OT:5608), writer or numberer, was the technical name given to the musterer-general, whose duty it was to levy and muster the troops (2 Kings 25:19; cf. 2 Chron 26:11); here it denotes the military leader generally.

Judges 5:15-16

And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart.

saaray (OT:8297), "*my princes*," does not furnish any appropriate meaning, as neither Deborah nor Barak was of the tribe of Issachar, and it is not stated anywhere that the Issacharites gathered round Deborah as their leaders. The reading *saareey* (OT:8269) (*stat. constr.*), adopted by the old versions, must be taken as the correct one, and the introduction of the preposition *b^a* does not preclude this (compare *bagil^aboa` haareey*, 2 Sam 1:21, and *Ewald*, §289, *b.*). *`im* (OT:5973), which is used to denote an outward equality, as in 1 Sam 17:42, and is substantially the same as the *keen* (OT:3651) which follows ("*just as*"), is construed without *k^a* in the first clause, as in Ps 48:6. *baa`eemeq* (OT:6010): into the valley of Jezreel, the plain of Kishon. *b^arag^alaayw* (OT:7272) *shulach*

(OT:7971), as in Job 18:8, to be sent off, i.e., incessantly impelled, through his feet; here it is applied to an irresistible force of enthusiasm for the battle. The nominative to *shulach* (OT:7971) is Issachar and Barak.

15b At the brooks of Reuben were great resolutions of heart.

16 Why remainest thou between the hurdles, To hear the piping of the flocks? At the brooks of Reuben were great projects of heart.

17 Gilead rests on the other side of the Jordan; And Dan...why tarries he by ships? Asher sits on the shore of the sea, And by his bays he reposes.

18 Zebulun, a people that despises its soul even to death, And Naphtali upon the heights of the field.

In this strophe Deborah first of all mentions the tribes which took no part in the conflict (vv. 15b-17), and then

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

In this strophe Deborah first of all mentions the tribes which took no part in the conflict (vv. 15b-17), and then returns in v. 18 to the Zebulunites, who staked their life along with Naphtali for the deliverance of Israel from the yoke of the enemy. The enumeration of the tribes who remained at a distance from the conflict commences with Reuben (vv. 15b and 16). In this tribe there did arise a lively sympathy with the national elevation. They held meetings, passed great resolutions, but it led to no practical result; and at length they preferred to remain quietly at home in their own comfortable pastoral life. The meaning brooks for *p^lagowt* (OT:6391) is well established by Job 20:17, and there is no reason whatever for explaining the word as equivalent to *p^lugowt* (OT:6391), *mip^lagowt*, divisions (2 Chron 35:5,12; Ezra 6:18). The territory of Reuben, which was celebrated for its splendid pastures, must have abounded in brooks. The question, Why satest thou, or remainedst thou sitting between the hurdles? i.e., in the comfortable repose of a shepherd's life, is an utterance of amazement; and the irony is very apparent in the next clause, to hear the bleating of the flocks, i.e., the piping of the shepherds, instead of the blast of the war-trumpets.

Judges 5:17

Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the sea shore, and abode in his breaches.

Gilead, Dan, and Asher took no part at all. By *Gilead*, the tribes of Gad and half Manasseh are intended. The use of the term *hagil^a aad* (OT:1568) to denote the whole of the territory of the Israelites on the east of the Jordan probably gave occasion to this, although *gil^a aad* (OT:1568) (without the article) does not refer to the land even here, but refers primarily to the grandson of Manasseh, as the representative of his family which dwelt in Gilead. (For further remarks, see at v. 14.) Dan also did not let the national movement disturb it in its earthly trade and commerce. *guwr* (OT:1481), to keep one's self in a place, is construed here with the accusative of the place, as in Ps 120:5. The territory of Dan included the port of

Joppa (see at Josh 19:46), where the Danites probably carried on a trade with the Phoenicians. Asher also in his land upon the coast did not allow himself to be disturbed from his rest, to join in the common war of its nation. *yamiym* (OT:3220) *chowp* (OT:2348) is used, as in Gen 49:13, for the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. *mip^araatsiyim*, *hap* (NT:537) *leg* (NT:3004), literally a rent, and hence applied to a bay, as an incision made in the sea-shore.

Judges 5:18

Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeoparded their lives unto the death in the high places of the field.

Zebulun and Naphtali acted quite differently. Zebulun showed itself as a people that despised its life even to death, i.e., that sacrificed its life for the deliverance of its fatherland. Naphtali did the same in its mountain home. The two tribes had raised 10,000 fighting men at Barak's call (Judg 4:10), who constituted at any rate the kernel of the Israelitish army.

If we run over the tribes enumerated, it seems strange that the tribes of Judah and Simeon are not mentioned either

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

If we run over the tribes enumerated, it seems strange that the tribes of Judah and Simeon are not mentioned either among those who joined in the battle, or among those who stayed away. The only way in which this can be explained is on the supposition that these two tribes were never summoned by Barak, either because they were so involved in conflict with the Philistines, that they were unable to render any assistance to the northern tribes against their Canaanitish oppressors, as we might infer from Judg 3:31, or because of some inward disagreement between these tribes and the rest. But even apart from Judah and Simeon, the want of sympathy on the part of the tribes that are reproved is a sufficient proof that the enthusiasm for the cause of the Lord had greatly diminished in the nation, and that the internal unity of the congregation was considerably loosened.

In the next strophe the battle and the victory are described:-

19 Kings came,...they fought;

The kings of Canaan fought At Taanach, at the waters of Megiddo. A piece of silver they did not take.

20 From heaven they fought, The stars from their courses fought against Sisera.

21 The brook of Kishon swept them away, The brook of the olden time, the brook Kishon. Go on, my soul, in strength!

Judges 5:19

The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money.

The advance of the foe is described in few words. Kings came on and fought. They were the kings of Canaan, since Jabin, like his ancestor (Josh 11:1ff.), had formed an alliance with other kings of northern Canaan, who went to the battle under the command of Sisera. The battle took place at Taanach (see at Josh 12:21), by the water of Megiddo, the present Lejun (see at Josh 12:21), i.e., by the brook Kishon (cf. Judg 4:7). Taanach and Megiddo were not quite five miles apart, and beside and between them there were several brooks which ran into the southern arm of the Kishon, that flowed through the plain to the north of both these towns. The hostile kings went into the battle with the hope of slaying the Israelites and making a rich capture of booty. But their hopes were disappointed. They could not take with them a piece of silver as booty. *betsa`* (OT:1215), which generally signifies booty or gain, is probably to be taken here in its primary sense of *frustum*, from *baatsa`* (OT:1215), to cut off or cut in pieces, a "piece of silver," equivalent to a single piece of valuable booty.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 5:20

They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.

For not only did the Israelites fight against them, but the powers of heaven also. "*From heaven*" is more minutely defined by "*the stars from their courses.*" These words explain the statement in Judg 4:15, "the Lord discomfited Sisera;" though in our opinion not so clearly as to enable us to define more precisely the natural phenomenon by which God threw the enemy into confusion. In all probability we have to think of a terrible storm, with thunder and lightning and hail, or the sudden bursting of a cloud, which is poetically described as though the stars of heaven had left their courses to fight for the Lord and His kingdom upon earth.

Judges 5:21

The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength.

The kings of Canaan could do nothing against these powers. They were smitten; the brook Kishon washed them (i.e., their corpses) away. The meaning "to wash away" is well established by the dialects and the context, though the verb itself only occurs here. As the battle was fought between Taanach and Megiddo, i.e., to the south of the brook Kishon, and the smitten foe fled towards the north, many of them met with their death in the waves of the brook, which was flowing over its banks at the time. The brook is called *q^uduwmiym* (OT:6917) *nachal* (OT:5158), i.e., the brook of the old world or the olden time (according to the LXX *Cod. Vat. cheima'rrhous archai'oon*), as the stream that had been flowing from time immemorial, and not, as the Chaldee interprets it, the stream that had been celebrated from olden time on account of the

mighty acts that had been performed there. The meaning suggested by *Ewald* and others, "brook of attacks, or slaughters," is not well sustained, although *qideem* is sometimes used to denote a hostile encounter. The last clause interrupts the description of the slaughter and the victory. Borne away by the might of the acts to be commemorated, Deborah stimulates her soul, i.e., herself, to a vigorous continuation of her song. *tid^ar^akiy* (OT:1869) is jussive, and *`oz* (OT:5797) an accusative governed by the verb, in strength, vigorously; for she had still to celebrate the glorious results of the victory. This is done in the third part of the song (vv. 22-31), the first strophe of which (vv. 22-24) describes in brief drastic traits the flight of the foe, and the treatment of the fugitives by the people of the land.

22 Then did the hoofs of the horses stamp With the hunting, the hunting of his strong ones.

23 Curse ye Meroz, saith the angel of the Lord; Curse ye, curse ye the inhabitants thereof! Because they came not to the help of Jehovah, To the help of Jehovah among the mighty.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

24 Blessed before women be Jael, The wife of Heber the Kenite, Blessed before women in the tent!

Judges 5:22

Then were the horsehoofs broken by the means of the pransings, the pransings of their mighty ones.

The war-chariots of the enemy hunted away in the wildest flight (v. 22). The horses stamped the ground with the continuous hunting or galloping away of the warriors. *daharaah*, the hunting (cf. *daahar* (OT:1725), Nah 3:2). The repetition of the word expresses the continuance or incessant duration of the same thing (see *Ewald*, §313,

a.). *'abiyriym* (OT:47), strong ones, are not the horses, but the warriors in the war-chariots. The suffix refers to *cuwc* (OT:5483), which is used collectively. The mighty ones on horses are not, however, merely the Canaanitish princes, such as Sisera, as *Ewald* maintains, but the warriors generally who hunted away upon their war-chariots.

Judges 5:23

Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty.

The enemy, or at all events Sisera, might have been destroyed in his flight by the inhabitants of Meroz; but they did not come to the help of the Israelites, and brought down the curse of God upon themselves in consequence. That this is the thought of v. 23 is evident from the context, and more especially from the blessing

pronounced upon Jael in v. 24. The situation of Meroz, which is not mentioned again, cannot be determined with certainty *Wilson* and *v. Raumer* imagine that it may be *Kefr Musr* on the south of Tabor, the situation of which at all events is more suitable than *Marussus*, which was an hour and a half to the north of Beisan, and which *Rabbi Schwarz* supposed to be Meroz (see *V. de Velde*, Mem. p. 334). The curse upon the inhabitants of this place is described as a word or command of the angel of the Lord, inasmuch as it was the angel of the Lord who fought for Israel at Megiddo, as the revealer of the invisible God, and smote the Canaanites. Deborah heard from him the words of the curse upon the inhabitants of Meroz, because they did not come to help Jehovah when He was fighting with and for the Israelites. "*Among the heroes,*" or mighty men, i.e., associating with the warriors of Israel.

Judges 5:24

Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent.

Jael behaved altogether differently, although she was not an Israelite, but a woman of the tribe of the Kenites, which was only allied with Israel (see Judg 4:11,17ff.). For her heroic deed she was to be blessed before women (*min* (OT:4480) as in Gen 3:14, literally removed away from women). The "*women in the tent*" are dwellers in tents, or shepherdesses. This heroic act is poetically commemorated in the strophe which follows in vv. 25-27.

25 He asked water, she gave him milk; She handed him cream in the dish of nobles.

26 She stretched out her hand to the plug, And her right hand to the workmen's hammer, And hammered Sisera, broke his head, And dashed in pieces and pierced his temples.

27 Between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: Between her feet he bowed, he fell: Where he bowed, there he fell down dead.

Judges 5:25

He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish.

Assuming that the fact itself is well known, Deborah does not think it necessary to mention Sisera's name in v. 25. *chem^aaah* (OT:2529), which generally signifies thick curdled milk, is used here as synonymous with *chaalaab* (OT:2461), in the sense of good superior milk. *ceepel* (OT:5602) is only used here and in Judg 6:38, and signifies a bowl or vessel for holding liquids (see *Arab.*, *Chald* , and *Talm.*;

also *Bochart* , Hieroz, i. pp. 625ff., ed. *Ros.*). The dish of nobles is a fine costly bowl, such as they are accustomed to hand to noble guests. The whole verse is simply intended to express the thought, that Jael had given to her guest Sisera a friendly reception, and treated him honourably and hospitably, simply in order to make him feel secure.

Judges 5:26-27

She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples.

"Her hand," i.e., the left hand, as is shown by the antithesis, "her right hand," which follows. On the form

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

"**Her hand,**" i.e., the left hand, as is shown by the antithesis, "her right hand," which follows. On the form *tish^alach^anaah* (OT:7971), the third pers. fem. sing. with *naah* (OT:575) attached, to distinguish it the more clearly from the second pers., see the remarks on Ex 1:10. *`ameeliym* (OT:6001) *hal^amuwt* (OT:1989), *hammer* or *mallet of the hard workers*, is a large heavy hammer. For the purpose of depicting the boldness and greatness of the deed, the words are crowded together in the second hemistich: *haalam* (OT:1986), to hammer, or smite with the hammer; *maachaq* (OT:4277), *hap leg*, to smite in pieces, smite through; *maachats* (OT:4272), to smite or dash in pieces; *chaalap* (OT:2498), to pierce or bore through. The heaping up of the words in v. 27 answers the same purpose. They do not "express the delight of a satisfied thirst for revenge," but simply bring out the thought that Sisera, who was for years the terror of Israel, was now struck dead with a single blow. *kaara`* (OT:3766) *ba'asher* (OT:836), at the place where he bowed, there he fell *shaaduwd* (OT:7703), overpowered and destroyed. In conclusion, the singer refers once more in the last strophe (vv. 28-30) to the mother of Sisera, as she waited impatiently for the return of her son, and foreboded his death, whilst the prudent princesses who surrounded her sought to cheer her with the prospect of a rich arrival of booty.

28 Through the window there looks out and cries aloud The mother of Sisera, through the lattice work, Why does his chariot delay its coming? Why tarry the steps of his team?

29 The wise of her princesses reply:

- But she repeats her words to herself--

30 Surely they are finding and sharing booty: A maiden, two maidens to the head of a man, Booty of variegated cloths for Sisera: Booty of variegated cloths, garments worked in divers colours, A variegated cloth, two garments worked in

divers colours for his neck as booty.

Judges 5:28

The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots?

Sisera's mother looks out with impatience for the return of her son, and cries aloud out of the window, Why is he never coming?-foreboding the disastrous result of the war. *t^ayabeeb* (OT:2980), *hap leg* , signifies to cry; in Aramaean it is used for *heeriya`* and *rineen* , to denote a loud joyful cry; here it evidently signifies a loud cry of anxiety. For the repeated question, Why does his chariot delay its coming? is evidently expressive of anxiety and alarm. The form *'echeruw* (OT:309), *perf. Piel for 'icharuw* , may be attributed to the influence of the aleph, which favours the seghol sound, like *yechemuw* in Gen 30:39. The combination of *mar^ak^abowtaayw* (OT:4818) *pa`ameey* (OT:6471), "steps of his chariots," cannot be explained, as it is by *Bertheau* , on the ground that the word *p`my* , as a general expression for intermittent movement, might also be applied to the jerking of the wheels in rolling, but simply on the supposition that *mar^akaabowt* (OT:4818), as a synonym for *rekeb* (OT:7393), is used

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

for the horses yoked to the chariot in the sense of team, like *rekeb* (OT:7393) in 2 Sam 8:4; 10:18, etc.

Judges 5:29-30

Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself,

The princesses in attendance upon Sisera's mother sought to console her with the remark, that Sisera would have to gather together rich booty, and that his return was delayed in consequence. In the expression "the wisest of her princesses" (see *Ges.* §119, 2), the irony is very obvious, as the reality put all their wise conjectures to shame. *ta`anenaah* (OT:6030), third pers. plur. fem. for *ta`aneynaah* (OT:6030). The second hemistich of v. 29 contains a clause inserted as a parenthesis. '*ap-hiy*' is adversative: "*but she;*" '*ap*' (OT:639) is only an emphatic copula; the antithesis lies in the emphatic change of subject indicated by *hiy*' (OT:1931). '*amaareyhaa*' (OT:561) *heeshiyb* (OT:7725), *lit.* to bring back her words, i.e., to repeat. *laah* (OT:3807a) is used in a reflective sense, "to herself." The meaning is: But Sisera's mother did not allow herself to be quieted by the words of her wise princesses; on the contrary, she kept repeating the anxious question, Why does Sisera delay his coming?

In v. 30 there follows the answer of the wise princesses. They imagine that Sisera has been detained by the large amount of booty which has to be divided. *halo'*, *nonne*, is he not, in the sense of lively certainty. They will certainly discover rich booty, and divide it. *racham* (OT:7356), *uterus*, for *puella*. "A girl (or indeed probably) *two girls to the head of the man,*" i.e., for each man. *ts^abaa`iym* (OT:6648), *coloured things*, cloths or clothes. *riq^amaah* (OT:7553), *worked stuff*, or garments worked in divers colours (see the remarks on Ex 26:36), is attached without the *vav cop.* to *ts^abaa`iym* (OT:6648), and is also dependent upon *sh^{al}al* (OT:7998). The closing words, *shaalaal* (OT:7998) *l^tsaaw^areey* (OT:6677), "*for*

the necks," or (as the plural is also frequently used to signify a single neck, e.g., Gen 27:16; 45:14) "*for the neck of the booty,*" do not give any appropriate sense, as *shaalaal* (OT:7998) neither signifies animals taken as booty nor the taker of booty.

The idea, however, that *shaalaal* (OT:7998) is used for *shaalaal* (OT:7998) *'iysh* (OT:376), like *heelek^a* (OT:1982) in 2 Sam 12:4 for *heelek^a* (OT:1982) *'iysh* (OT:376), *viator*, and *chetep* in Prov 23:28 for *chetep 'iysh*, seems inadmissible, since *shaalaal* (OT:7998) has just before been used three times in its literal sense. There is just the same objection to the application of *shaalaal* (OT:7998) to animals taken as booty, not to mention the fact that they would hardly have thought of having valuable clothes upon the necks of animals taken as booty. Consequently the only explanation that remains, is either to alter *l^atsauw^areey* (OT:6677) into *l^atsauwaa'row* or *l^atsauwaa'raayw*, or else to change *shaalaal* (OT:7998) into *sheegaal* (OT:7694), the royal spouse. In the former case, *shaalaal* (OT:7998) would have to be taken as in apposition to *riq^amaatayim* (OT:7553) *tseba`* (OT:6648): a variegated cloth, two worked in divers colours for his (Sisera's) neck as booty, as the LXX have rendered it (*too'* (NT:3588) *trachee'loo* (NT:5137) *autou'* (NT:846) *sku'la* (NT:4661)).

Ewald and *Bertheau* decide in favour of the second alteration, and defend it on the ground that *shll* (OT:7998) might easily find its way into the text as a copyist's error for *shgl*, on account of *shll* (OT:7998) having been already written three times before, and that we cannot dispense with some such word as *sheegaal* (OT:7694) here, since the repetition of *shaalaal* (OT:7998) three times, and the threefold use of *l^a*, evidently show that there were three different kinds of people among whom the booty was to be distributed; and also that it was only a fitting thing that Sisera should set apart one portion of the booty to adorn the neck of his wife, and that the wisest of the noble ladies, when mentioning the booty, should not forget themselves.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

31a So shall all Thine enemies perish, O Jehovah! But let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its strength.

Judges 5:31

So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years.

This forms the conclusion of the song. *keen* (OT:3651), *so*, refers to the whole of the song: just in the same manner as Sisera and his warriors. The rising of the sun in its strength is a striking image of the exaltation of Israel to a more and more glorious unfolding of its destiny, which Deborah anticipated as the result of this victory. With the last clause, "*And the land had rest forty years*" (cf. Judg 3:11,30; 8:28), the account of this event is brought to a close.

2. The Times of Gideon and His Family, and of the Judges Tola and Jair. Ch. 6-10:5.

In this second stage of the period of the judges, which did not extend over an entire century (only ninety-five years), Israel was only punished for its apostasy from the Lord, it is true, with a seven years' oppression by the Midianites; but the misery which these enemies, who allied themselves with Amalekites and other Arabian hordes, brought upon both land and people, so far surpassed the pressure of the previous chastisements, that the Israelites were obliged to take refuge from the foe in ravines, caves, and strongholds of the mountains. But the more heavily the Lord punished His rebellious nation, the more gloriously did He set forth His nearness to help, and also the way which would lead to a lasting peace, and to true deliverance out of every trouble, in the manner in which He called and fitted Gideon to be its deliverer, and gave him the victory over the innumerable army of the hostile hordes, with only 300 chosen warriors. But the tendency to idolatry and to the worship of Baal had already become so strong in Israel, that even Gideon, that

distinguished hero of God, who had been so marvellously called, and who refused the title of king when offered to him from genuine fidelity to the Lord, yielded to the temptation to establish for himself an unlawful worship, in a high-priestly ephod which had been prepared for his use, and thus gave the people an occasion for idolatry. For this reason his house was visited with severe judgments, which burst upon it after his death, under the three years' reign of his son Abimelech; although, notwithstanding the deep religious and moral depravity which was manifested in the doings of Abimelech, the Lord gave His people rest for forty-five years longer after the death of Abimelech under two judges, before He punished their apostasy with fresh hostile oppressions.

The history of Gideon and his family is related very fully, because the working of the grace and righteousness of the faithful covenant God was so obviously displayed therein, that it contained a rich treasure of instruction and warning for the church of the Lord in all ages. The account contains such an abundance of special notices of separate events and persons, as can only be explained on the supposition that the author made use of copious records which had been made by contemporaries and eye-witnesses of the events. At the same time, the separate details do not

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

contain any such characteristic marks as will enable us to discover clearly, or determine with any certainty, the nature of the source or sources which the author employed. The only things peculiar to this narrative are the use of the prefix *sh* (OT:7716) for '*asher*' (OT:834), not only in reports of the sayings of the persons engaged (Judg 6:17), but also in the direct narrative of facts (ch. 7:12; 8:26), and the formula *laab^ashaah* (OT:3847) *y^ahaaowh* (OT:3068) *ruwach* (OT:7307) (Judg 6:34), which only occurs again in 1 Chron 12:18; 2 Chron 24:20. On the other hand, neither the interchange of *ha-Elohim* (Judg 6:36,39; 7:14) and *Elohim* (ch. 6:40; 8:3; 9:7,9,13,23,56-57) with *Jehovah*, nor the use of the name *Jerubbaal* for *Gideon* (Judg 6:32; 7:1; 8:29; 9:1-2,5,16,19,24,28), nor lastly the absence of the "theocratical pragmatism" in ch. 9, contains any proof of the nature of the source employed, or even of the employment of two different sources, as these peculiarities are founded upon the contents and materials of the narrative itself.

(Note: Even **Bertheau**, who infers from these data that two different sources were employed, admits that *ha-Elohim* in the mouth of the Midianites (Judg 7:14) and *Elohim* in Jotham's fable, where it is put into the mouth of the trees, prove nothing at all, because here, from the different meanings of the divine names, the author could not have used anything but *Elohim*. But the same difference is quite as unmistakable in Judg 8:3; 9:7,23,56-57, since in these passages, either the antithesis of man and God, or the idea of supernatural causality, made it most natural for the author to use the general name of God even it did not render it absolutely necessary. There remain, therefore, only Judg 6:20,36,39-40, where the use of *ha-Elohim* and *Elohim* instead of *Jehovah* may possibly have originated with the source made use of by the author. On the other hand, the name *Jerubbaal*, which Gideon received in consequence of the destruction of the altar of Baal (Judg 6:32), is employed with conscious reference to its origin and meaning, not only in ch. 7:1; 8:29,35, but also throughout ch. 9, as we may see more especially in Judg 9:16,19,28.

And lastly, even the peculiarities of ch. 9-namely, that the names *Jehovah* and *Gideon* do not occur there at all, and that many historical circumstances are related apparently without any link of connection, and torn away from some wider context, which might have rendered them intelligible, and without which very much remains obscure-do not prove that the author drew these incidents from a different

source from the rest of the history of Gideon-such, for example, as a more complete history of the town of Shechem and its rulers in the time of the judges, as *Bertheau* imagines. For these peculiarities may be explained satisfactorily enough from the intention so clearly expressed in Judg 8:34-35, and 9:57, of showing how the ingratitude of the Israelites towards Gideon, especially the wickedness of the Shechemites, who helped to murder Gideon's sons to gratify Abimelech, was punished by God. And no other peculiarities can be discovered that could possibly establish a diversity of sources.)

Oppression of Israel by the Midianites, and Call of Gideon to Be Their Deliverer. Ch. 6:1-32.

Judges 6:1-10

And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.

Verse 1-10. **Renewed Apostasy of the Nation, and Its Punishment.** - V. 1. As the Israelites forsook Jehovah their God again, the Lord delivered them up for seven years into the hands of the Midianites. The *Midianites*, who were descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Gen 25:2), and had penetrated into the grassy steppes on the eastern side of the country of the Moabites and Ammonites (see at Num 22:4), had shown hostility to Israel even in the time of Moses, and had been defeated in a war of retaliation on the part of the Israelites (Num 31). But they had

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

afterwards recovered their strength, so that now, after an interval of 200 years, the Lord used them as a rod of chastisement for His rebellious people. In vv. 1, 2, 6, they alone are mentioned as oppressors of Israel; but in vv. 3, 33, and Judg 7:12, the Amalekites and children of the east are mentioned in connection with them, from which we may see that the Midianites were the principal enemies, but had allied themselves with other predatory Bedouin tribes, to make war upon the Israelites and devastate their land. On the *Amalekites*, those leading enemies of the people of God who had sprung from Esau, see the notes on Gen 36:12 and Ex 17:8. "*Children of the east*" (see Job 1:3) is the general name for the tribes that lived in the desert on the east of Palestine, "like the name of *Arabs* in the time of *Josephus* (in Ant. v. 6, 1, he calls the children of the east mentioned here by the name of *Arabs*), or in later times the names of the Nabataeans and Kedarenes" (*Bertheau*). Hence we find in Judg 8:10, that all the enemies who oppressed the Israelites are called "children of the east."

Verse 2-5. **The Oppression of Israel by Midian and Its Allies.** Their power pressed so severely upon the Israelites, that before (or because of) them the latter "*made them the ravines which are in the mountains, and the caves, and the strongholds,*" sc., which were to be met with all over the land in after times (viz., at the time when our book was written), and were safe places of refuge in time of war. This is implied in the definite article before *min^ahaarowt* (OT:4492) and the following substantives. The words "*they made them*" are not at variance with the fact that there are many natural caves to be found in the limestone mountains of Palestine. For, on the one hand, they do not affirm that all the caves to be found in the land were made by the Israelites at that time; and, on the other hand, *aasaah* (OT:6213) does not preclude the use of natural caves as places of refuge, since it not only denotes the digging and making of caves, but also the adaptation of natural caves to the purpose referred to, i.e., the enlargement of them, or whatever was required to make them habitable.

The *hap leg min^ahaarowt* (OT:4492) does not mean "light holes" (*Bertheau*), or

"holes with openings to the light," from *naahar* (OT:5102), in the sense of to stream, to enlighten (*Rashi, Kimchi* , etc.), but is to be taken in the sense of "mountain ravines," hollowed out by torrents (from *naahar* (OT:5102), to pour), which the Israelites made into hiding-places. *m^atsaadowt* (OT:4679), *fortresses* , mountain strongholds. These ravines, caves, and fortresses were not merely to serve as hiding-places for the Israelitish fugitives, but much more as places of concealment for their possessions, and necessary supplies. For the Midianites, like genuine Bedouins, thought far more of robbing and plundering and laying waste the land of the Israelites, than of exterminating the people themselves. *Herodotus* (i. 17) says just the same respecting the war of the Lydian king Alyattes wit the Milesians.

Verse 3-5. When the Israelites had sown, the Midianites and their allies came upon them, encamped against them, and destroyed the produce of the land (the fruits of the field and soil) as far as Gaza, in the extreme south-west of the land ("till thou come," as in Gen 10:19, etc.). As the enemy invaded the land with their camels and flocks, and on repeated occasions encamped in the valley of Jezreel (v. 33), they must have entered the land on the west of the Jordan by the main road which connects the countries on the east with Palestine on the west, crossing the Jordan near Beisan, and passing through the plain of Jezreel; and from this point they spread over Palestine to the sea-coast of Gaza. "*They left no sustenance* (in the shape of produce of the field and soil) *in Israel, and neither sheep, nor oxen, nor asses. For they came on with their flocks, and their tents came like grasshoppers in multitude.*" The *Chethibh yaabo'uw* (OT:935) is not to be altered into *uwbaa'uw* (OT:935), according to the *Keri* and certain *Codd*. If we connect *w^aaahaaleeyhem* (OT:168) with the previous words, according to the Masoretic pointing, we have a simple asyndeton. It is more probable, however, that *w'hlyhm* belongs to what follows: "*And their tents came in such numbers as grasshoppers.*" *k^adeey* (OT:1767), *lit.* like a multitude of grasshoppers, in such abundance. "*Thus they came into the land to devastate it.*"

Verse 6. The Israelites were greatly weakened in consequence (*yidal* (OT:1809),

the *imperf. Niphal* of *daalal* (OT:1809)), so that in their distress they cried to the Lord for help.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Verse 7-10. But before helping them, the Lord sent a prophet to reprove the people for not hearkening to the voice of their God, in order that they might reflect, and might recognise in the oppression which crushed them the chastisement of God for their apostasy, and so be brought to sincere repentance and conversion by their remembrance of the former miraculous displays of the grace of God. The Lord God, said the prophet to the people, brought you out of Egypt, the house of bondage, and delivered you out of the hand of Egypt (Ex 18:9), and out of the hand of all your oppressors (see Judg 2:18; 4:3; 10:12), whom He drove before you (the reference is to the Amorites and Canaanites who were conquered by Moses and Joshua); but ye have not followed His commandment, that ye should not worship the gods of the Amorites. The Amorites stand here for the Canaanites, as in Gen 15:16 and Josh 24:15.

Judges 6:11-32

And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abi-ezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.

Call of Gideon to Be the Deliverer of Israel. - As the reproof of the prophet was intended to turn the hearts of the people once more to the Lord their God and deliverer, so that manner in which God called Gideon to be their deliverer, and rescued Israel from its oppressors through his instrumentality, as intended to furnish the most evident proof that the help and salvation of Israel were not to be found in man, but solely in their God. God had also sent their former judges. The Spirit of Jehovah had come upon Othniel, so that he smote the enemy in the power of God (Judg 3:10). Ehud had put to death the hostile king by stratagem, and then destroyed his army; and Barak had received the command of the Lord, through the prophetess Deborah, to deliver His people from the dominion of their foes, and had carried out the command with her assistance. But Gideon was called to be the deliverer of Israel through an appearance of the angel of the Lord, to show to him

and to all Israel, that Jehovah, the God of the fathers, was still near at hand to His people, and could work miracles as in the days of old, if Israel would only adhere to Him and keep His covenant. The call of Gideon took place in two revelations from God. First of all the Lord appeared to him in the visible form of an angel, in which He had already made himself known to the patriarchs, and summoned him in the strength of God to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Midianites (vv. 11-24). He then commanded him, in a dream of the night, to throw down his father's altar of Baal, and to offer a burnt-offering to Jehovah his God upon an altar erected for the purpose (vv. 25-32). In the first revelation the Lord acknowledged Gideon; in the second He summoned Gideon to acknowledge Him as his God.

Verse 11-24. **Appearance of the Angel of the Lord.** - V. 11. The angel of the Lord, i.e., Jehovah, in a visible self-revelation in human form (see Pentateuch, pp. 106ff.), appeared this time in the form of a traveller with a staff in his hand (v. 21), and sat down "*under the terebinth which (was) in Ophrah, that (belonged) to Joash the Abi-ezrite.*" It was not the oak, but Ophrah, that belonged to Joash, as we may see from v. 24, where the expression "Ophrah of the Abi-ezrite" occurs. According to Joash Judg 17:2 and 1 Chron 7:18, *Abiezer* was a family in the tribe of Manasseh, and according to v. 15 it was a small family of that tribe. *Joash* was probably the head of the family at that time, and as such was the lord or owner of *Ophrah*, a town (Judg 8:27; cf. 9:5) which was called "Ophrah of the Abi-ezrite," to distinguish it from Ophrah in the tribe of Benjamin (Josh 18:23). The situation of the town has not yet been determined with certainty.

Josephus (Ant. v. 6, 5) calls it *Ephran*. *Van de Velde* conjectures that it is to be found in the ruins of *Erfai*,

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Josephus (Ant. v. 6, 5) calls it *Ephran*. *Van de Velde* conjectures that it is to be found in the ruins of *Erfai*, opposite to *Akrabeh*, towards the S.E., near the Mohammedan Wely of Abu Kharib, on the S.W. of Janun (Me. pp. 337-8), close to the northern boundary of the tribe-territory of Ephraim, if not actually within it. By this terebinth tree was Gideon the son of Joash "*knocking out wheat in the wine-press.*" *chaabaT* does not mean to thresh, but to knock with a stick. The wheat was threshed upon open floors, or in places in the open field that were rolled hard for the purpose, with threshing carriages or threshing shoes, or else with oxen, which they drove about over the scattered sheaves to tread out the grains with their hoofs. Only poor people knocked out the little corn that they had gleaned with a stick (Ruth 2:17), and Gideon did it in the existing times of distress, namely in the pressing-tub, which, like all wine-presses, was sunk in the ground, in a hole that had been dug out or hewn in the rock (for a description of cisterns of this kind, see *Rob. Bibl. Res.* pp. 135-6), "*to make the wheat fly*" (i.e., to make it safe) "*from the Midianites*" (*haaniym* (OT:8141) as in Ex 9:20).

Verse 12. While he was thus engaged the angel of the Lord appeared to him, and addressed him in these words: "***Jehovah*** (is) *with thee, thou brave hero.*" This address contained the promise that the Lord would be with Gideon, and that he would prove himself a mighty hero through the strength of the Lord. This promise was to be a guarantee to him of strength and victory in his conflict with the Midianites.

Verse 13. But Gideon, who did not recognise the angel of the Lord in the man who was sitting before him, replied doubtingly, "*Pray, sir, if Jehovah is with us, why has all this befallen us?*" - words which naturally recall to mind the words of Deut 31:17, "Are not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?" "*And where,*" continued Gideon, "*are all His miracles, of which our fathers have told us?...But now Jehovah hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.*" Gideon may have been reflecting, while knocking the wheat, upon the misery of his people, and the best means of delivering them from the oppression of

the enemy, but without being able to think of any possibility of rescuing them. For this reason he could not understand the address of the unknown traveller, and met his promise with the actual state of things with which it was so directly at variance, namely, the crushing oppression of his people by their enemies, from which he concluded that the Lord had forsaken them and given them up to their foes.

Verse 14. **"Then Jehovah turned to him and said, Go in this thy strength, and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have not I sent thee?"** The writer very appropriately uses the name Jehovah here, instead of the angel of Jehovah; for by his reply the angel distinctly manifested himself as Jehovah, more especially in the closing words, *"Have not I sent thee?"* (*halo'*, in the sense of lively assurance), which are so suggestive of the call of Moses to be the deliverer of Israel (Ex 3:12). *"In this thy strength,"* i.e., the strength which thou now hast, since Jehovah is with thee-Jehovah, who can still perform miracles as in the days of the fathers. The demonstrative *"this"* points to the strength which had just been given to him through the promise of God.

Verse 15. Gideon perceived from these words that it was not a mere man who was speaking to him. He therefore said in reply, not "pray sir" (*'adoniy* (OT:113)), but *"pray, Lord"* (*'adonaay* (OT:136), i.e., Lord God), and no longer speaks of deliverance as impossible, but simply inquires, with a consciousness of his own personal weakness and the weakness of his family, *"Whereby (with what) shall I save Israel? Behold, my family (lit., 'thousand,' equivalent to mishpachah: see at Num 1:16) is the humblest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house (my family)."*

Verse 16. To this difficulty the Lord replies, *"I will be with thee* (see Ex 3:12; Josh 1:5), *and thou wilt smite the Midianites as one man,"* i.e., at one blow, as they slay a single man (see Num 14:15).

Verse 17-19. As Gideon could no longer have any doubt after this promise that the

person who had appeared to him was speaking in the name of God, he entreated him to assure him by a *sign* ('*owt* (OT:226), a miraculous sign)

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

of the certainty of his appearance. "*Do a sign that thou art speaking with me,*" i.e., that thou art really God, as thou affirmest. *shaa'ataah* (OT:859), or *'ataah* (OT:859) *'asher* (OT:834), is taken from the language of ordinary life. At the same time he presents this request: "*Depart not hence till I (go and) come to thee, and bring out my offering and set it before thee;*" and the angel at once assents. *Minchah* does not mean a sacrifice in the strict sense (*thusi'a* (NT:2378), *sacrificium*), nor merely a "gift of food," but a sacrificial gift in the sense of a gift presented to God, on the acceptance of which he hoped to receive the sign, which would show whether the person who had appeared to him was really God. This sacrificial gift consisted of such food as they were accustomed to set before a guest whom they wished especially to honour. Gideon prepared a kid of the goats (*'aasaah* (OT:6213) is used to denote the preparation of food, as in Gen 18:7-8, etc.), and unleavened cakes of an ephah (about 22 1/2 lbs.) of meal, and brought the flesh in a basket and the broth in a pot out to the terebinth tree, and placed it before him.

Verse 20-21. The angel of the Lord then commanded him to lay the flesh and the cakes upon a rock close by, and to pour the broth upon it; that is to say, to make use of the rock as an altar for the offering to be presented to the Lord. When he had done this, the angel touched the food with the end of his staff, and fire came out of the rock and consumed the food, and the angel of the Lord vanished out of Gideon's sight. "*This rock,*" i.e., a rocky stone that was lying near. The departure of the angel from his eyes it to be regarded as a sudden disappearance; but the expression does not warrant the assumption that the angel ascended to heaven in this instance, as in Judg 13:19-20, in the flame of the sacrifice.

Verse 22. In this miracle Gideon received the desired sign, that the person who had appeared to him was God. But the miracle filled his soul with fear, so that he exclaimed, *Alas, Lord Jehovah! for to this end have I seen the angel of the Lord face to face.* "*yhwh* (OT:3068) *'adonaay* (OT:136) *'ahaah* (OT:162) is an exclamation, sometimes of grief on account of a calamity that has occurred (Josh

7:7), and sometimes of alarm caused by the foreboding of some anticipated calamity (Jer 1:6; 4:10; 32:17; Ezek 4:14, etc.). Here it is an expression of alarm, viz., fear of the death which might be the necessary consequence of his seeing God (see Ex. 20:16-19, and the remarks on Gen 16:13). The expression which follows, "*for to this end,*" serves to account for the exclamation, without there being any necessity to assume an ellipsis, and supply "that I may die." *kiy-`al-keen* is always used in this sense (see Gen 18:5; 19:8 ; 33:10, etc.).

Verse 23-24. But the Lord comforted him with the words, "*Peace to thee; fear not: thou wilt not die.*" These words were not spoken by the angel as he vanished away, but were addressed by God to Gideon, after the disappearance of the angel, by an inward voice. In gratitude for this comforting assurance, Gideon built an altar to the Lord, which he called *Jehovah-shalom* , "the Lord is peace." The intention of this altar, which was preserved "unto this day," i.e., till the time when the book of Judges was composed, is indicated in the name that was given to it. It was not to serve as a place of sacrifice, but to be a memorial and a witness of the revelation of God which had been made to Gideon, and of the proof which he had received that Jehovah was peace, i.e., would not destroy Israel in wrath, but cherished thoughts of peace. For the assurance of peace which He had given to Gideon, was also a confirmation of His announcement that Gideon would conquer the Midianites in the strength of God, and deliver Israel from its oppressors.

The theophany here described resembles so far the appearance of the angel of the Lord to Abram in the grove of Mamre (Gen 18), that he appears in perfect human form, comes as a traveller, and allows food to be set before him; but there is this essential difference between the two, that whereas the three men who came to Abraham took the food that was set before them and ate thereof—that is to say, allowed themselves to be hospitably entertained by Abraham—the angel of the Lord in the case before us did indeed accept the *minchah* that had been made ready for him, but only as a sacrifice of Jehovah which he caused to ascend in fire. The reason for this essential difference is to be found in the different purpose of the two theophanies. To Abraham the Lord came to seal that fellowship of

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

grace into which He had entered with him through the covenant that He had made; but in the case of Gideon His purpose was simply to confirm the truth of His promise, that Jehovah would be with him and would send deliverance through him to His people, or to show that the person who had appeared to him was the God of the fathers, who could still deliver His people out of the power of their enemies by working such miracles as the fathers had seen. But the acceptance of the *minchah* prepared for Him as a sacrifice which the Lord himself caused to be miraculously consumed by fire, showed that the Lord would still graciously accept the prayers and sacrifices of Israel, if they would but forsake the worship of the dead idols of the heathen, and return to Him in sincerity. (Compare with this the similar theophany in ch. 13.)

Verse 25-32. Gideon Set Apart as the Deliverer of His People. - In order to be able to carry out the work entrusted to him of setting Israel free, it was necessary that Gideon should first of all purify his father's house from idolatry, and sanctify his own life and labour to Jehovah by sacrificing a burnt-offering.

Verse 25-26. "**In that night,**" i.e., the night following the day on which the Lord appeared to him, God commanded him to destroy his father's Baal's altar, with the *asherah-idol* upon it, and to build an altar to Jehovah, and offer a bullock of his father's upon the altar. "*Take the ox-bullock which belongs to thy father, and indeed the second bullock of seven years, and destroy the altar of Baal, which belongs to thy father, and throw down the asherah upon it.*" According to the general explanation of the first clauses, there are two oxen referred to: viz., *first*, his father's young bullock; and *secondly*, an ox of seven years old, the latter of which Gideon was to sacrifice (according to v. 26) upon the altar to be built to Jehovah, and actually did sacrifice, according to vv. 27, 28. But in what follows there is no further allusion to the young bullock, or the first ox of his father; so that there is a difficulty in comprehending for what purpose Gideon was to take it, or what use he was to make of it.

Most commentators suppose that Gideon sacrificed both of the oxen—the young bullock as an expiatory offering for himself, his father, and all his family, and the second ox of seven years old for the deliverance of the whole nation (see *Seb. Schmidt*). *Bertheau* supposes, on the other hand, that Gideon was to make use of both oxen, or of the strength they possessed for throwing down or destroying the altar, and (according to v. 26) for removing the *ma`araakaah* (OT:4634) and the *haa'asheeraah`atsee*y to the place of the new altar that was to be built, but that he was only to offer the second in sacrifice to Jehovah, because the first was probably dedicated to Baal, and therefore could not be offered to Jehovah. But these assumptions are both of them equally arbitrary, and have no support whatever from the text. If God had commanded Gideon to take two oxen, He would certainly have told him what he was to do with them both.

But as there is only one bullock mentioned in vv. 26-28, we must follow *Tremell.* and others, who understand v. 25 as meaning that Gideon was to take only one bullock, namely the young bullock of his father, and therefore regard *sh' sh' hasheeny uwpar* as a more precise definition of that one bullock (*vav* being used in an explanatory sense, "and indeed," as in Josh 9:27; 10:7, etc.). This bullock is called "the second bullock," as being the second in age among the bullocks of Joash. The reason for choosing this second of the bullocks of Joash for a burnt-offering is to be found no doubt in its age (seven years), which is mentioned here simply on account of its significance as a number, as there was no particular age prescribed in the law for a burnt-offering, that is to say, because the seven years which constituted the age of the bullock contained an inward allusion to the seven years of the Midianitish oppression.

For **seven** years had God given Israel into the hands of the Midianites on account of their apostasy; and now, to wipe away this sin, Gideon was to take his father's bullock of *seven* years old, and offer it as a burnt-offering to the Lord. To this end Gideon was first of all to destroy the altar of Baal and of the *asherah* which his father possessed, and which, to judge from vv. 28, 29, was the common altar of the whole family of Abiezer in Ophrah. This altar was dedicated to Baal, but there was

also upon it an *asherah* , an idol representing the goddess of nature, which the

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Canaanites worshipped; not indeed a *statue* of the goddess, but, as we may learn from the word *kaarat* (OT:3772), to *hew down*, simply a wooden pillar (see at Deut 16:21). The altar therefore served for the two principal deities of the Canaanites (see *Movers*, Phönizier, i. pp. 566ff.). Jehovah could not be worshipped along with Baal. Whoever would serve the Lord must abolish the worship of Baal. The altar of Baal must be destroyed before the altar of Jehovah could be built.

Gideon was to build this altar "*upon the top of this stronghold*," possibly upon the top of the mountain, upon which the fortress belonging to Ophrah was situated. *bama`araakaah* (OT:4634), "*with the preparation*;" the meaning of this word is a subject of dispute. As *baanaah* (OT:1129) occurs in 1 Kings 15:22 with *b^a*, to denote the materials out of which (i.e., with which) a thing is built, *Stud.* and *Berth.* suppose that *maaracah* refers to the materials of the altar of Baal that had been destroyed, with which Gideon was to build the altar of Jehovah. *Stud.* refers it to the stone foundation of the altar of Baal; *Bertheau* to the materials that were lying ready upon the altar of Baal for the presentation of sacrifices, more especially the pieces of wood. But this is certainly incorrect, because *maaracah* does not signify either building materials or pieces of wood, and the definite article attached to the word does not refer to the altar of Baal at all.

The verb *`aarak^a* (OT:6186) is not only very frequently used to denote the preparation of the wood upon the altar (Gen 22:9; Lev 1:7, etc.), but is also used for the preparation of an altar for the presentation of sacrifice (Num 23:4). Consequently *maaracah* can hardly be understood in any other way than as signifying the preparation of the altar to be built for the sacrificial act, in the sense of build the altar with the preparation required for the sacrifice. This preparation was to consist, according to what follows, in taking the wood of the *asherah*, that had been hewn down, as the wood for the burnt-offering to be offered to the Lord by Gideon. *haa'asheeraah`atseey* are not trees, but pieces of wood from the *asherah* (that was hewn down).

Verse 27. Gideon executed this command of God with ten men of his servants during the night, no doubt the following night, because he was afraid to do it by day, on account of his family (his father's house), and the people of the town.

Verse 28-29. But on the following morning, when the people of the town found the altar of Baal destroyed and the *asherah* upon it hewn down, and the bullock sacrificed upon the (newly) erected altar (the bullock would not be entirely consumed), they asked who had done it, and soon learned that Gideon had done it all. The accusative *chasheeny hapaar 'eet* is governed by the *Hophal ho`alaah* (OT:5927) (for *haa`aalaah* (OT:4605) see *Ges.*

s. 63, Anm. 4), according to a construction that was by no means rare, especially in the earlier Hebrew, viz., of the passive with *'eet* (OT:853) (see at Gen 4:18). "*They asked and sought,*" sc., for the person who had done it; "*and they said,*" either those who were making the inquiry, according to a tolerably safe conjecture, or the persons who were asked, and who were aware of what Gideon had done.

Verse 30-31. But when they demanded of Joash, "*Bring out (give out) thy son, that he may die,*" he said to all who stood round, "*Will ye, ye, fight for Baal, or will he save him?*" ('ye' is repeated with special emphasis). "*whoever shall fight for him (Baal), shall be put to death till the morning.*" *`ad-haboqer*, till the (next) morning, is not to be joined to *yuwmat* (OT:4191), in the sense of "very speedily, before the dawning day shall break" (*Bertheau*) - a sense which is not to be found in the words: it rather belongs to the subject of the clause, or to the whole clause in the sense of, Whoever shall fight for Baal, and seek to avenge the destruction of his altar by putting the author of it to death, shall be put to death himself; let us wait till to-morrow, and give Baal time to avenge the insult which he has received. "*If he be God, let him fight for himself; for they have destroyed his altar,*" and have thereby challenged his revenge. Gideon's daring act of faith had inspired his father Joash with believing courage, so that he took the part of his son, and left the whole matter to the deity to decide. If Baal were really God, he might be expected to avenge the crime that had been committed against this altar.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Verse 32. From this fact Gideon received the name of *Jerubbaal*, i.e., "*let Baal fight* (or decide," since they said, "*Let Baal fight against him, for he has destroyed his altar.*" *y^arubal* (OT:3378), is formed from *yaarob* = *yaareb* (OT:7378) or *yaariyb* (OT:7378) and *ba'al* (OT:1167). This surname very soon became an honourable title for Gideon. When, for example, it became apparent to the people that Baal could not do him any harm, *Jerubbaal* became a Baal-fighter, one who had fought against Baal. In 2 Sam 11:21, instead of *Jerubbaal* we find the name *Jerubbesheth*, in which *Besheth* = *Bosheth* is a nickname of Baal, which also occurs in other Israelitish names, e.g., in *Ishbosheth* (2 Sam 2:8ff.) for *Eshbaal* (1 Chron 8:33; 9:39). The name *Jerubbaal* is written *Aieroba'al* by the LXX, from which in all probability *Philo* of Byblus, in his revision of Sanchuniathon, has formed his *Aiero'mbalos*, a priest of the god *Beu'oo*.

Gideon's Victory over the Midianites. Ch. 6:33-8:3.

Judges 6:33-40

Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel.

Equipment of Gideon for the Battle. - When the Midianites and their allies once more invaded the land of Israel, Gideon was seized by the Spirit of God, so that he gathered together an army from the northern tribes of Israel (vv. 33-35), and entreated God to assure him by a sign of gaining the victory over the enemy (vv. 36-40).

Verse 33-35. The enemy gathered together again, went over (viz., across) the Jordan in the neighbourhood of Beisan (see at Judg 7:24 and 8:4), and encamped in the valley of Jezreel (see at Josh 17:16). "*And the Spirit of Jehovah came upon*

Gideon" (*laab^ashaah* (OT:3847), *clothed*, i.e., descended upon him, and laid itself around him as it were like a coat of mail, or a strong equipment, so that he became invulnerable and invincible in its might: see 1 Chron 12:18; 2 Chron 24:20, and Luke 24:49). Gideon then blew the trumpet, to call Israel to battle against the foe (see Judg 3:27); "*and Abiezer let itself be summoned after him.*" His own family, which had recognised the deliverer of Israel in the fighter of Baal, who was safe from Baal's revenge, was the first to gather round him. Their example was followed by all Manasseh, i.e., the Manassites on the west of the Jordan (for the tribes on the east of the Jordan took no part in the war), and the neighbouring tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali on the north, which had been summoned by heralds to the battle. "*They advanced to meet them:*" i.e., to meet the Manassites, who were coming from the south to the battle, to make war upon the enemy in concert with them and under the guidance of Gideon. *ʿaalaah* (OT:5927) is used to denote their advance against the enemy (see at Josh 8:2), and not in the sense of going up, since the Asherites and Naphtalites would not go up from their mountains into the plain of Jezreel, but could only go down.

Verse 36-37. But before Gideon went into the battle with the assembled army, he asked for a sign from God of the success of his undertaking. "*If Thou,*" he said to God, "*art saving Israel through my hand, as Thou hast said, behold, I lay this fleece of wool upon the floor; if there shall be dew upon the fleece only, and dryness upon all the earth (round about), I know (by this) that Thou wilt save,*" etc. *hatsemer* (OT:6785) *gizat* (OT:1492), *the shorn of the wool*; i.e., the fleece, the wool that had been shorn off a sheep, and still adhered together as one whole fleece. The sign which Gideon asked for, therefore, was that God would cause the dew to fall only upon a

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

shorn fleece, which he would spread the previous night upon the floor, that is to say, upon some open ground, and that the ground all round might not be moistened by the dew.

Verse 38. God granted the sign. *"And so it came to pass; the next morning, Gideon pressed the fleece together (**yaazar** (OT:2115) from **zuwr** (OT:2114)), and squeezed (**yimets** (OT:4680) from **maatsaah** (OT:4680)) dew out of the fleece a vessel full of water" (**m^alow'** (OT:4393) as in Num 22:18, and **ceepel** (OT:5602) as in Judg 5:25). So copiously had the dew fallen in the night upon the fleece that was exposed; whereas, as we may supply from the context, the earth all round had remained dry.*

Verse 39,40. But as this sign was not quite a certain one, since wool generally attracts the dew, even when other objects remain dry, Gideon ventured to solicit the grace of God to grant him another sign with the fleece—namely, that the fleece might remain dry, and the ground all round be wet with dew. And God granted him this request also. Gideon's prayer for a sign did not arise from want of faith in the divine assurance of a victory, but sprang from the weakness of the flesh, which crippled the strength of the spirit's faith, and often made the servants of God so anxious and despondent, that God had to come to the relief of their weakness by the manifestation of His miraculous power. Gideon knew himself and his own strength, and was well aware that his human strength was not sufficient for the conquest of the foe. But as the Lord had promised him His aid, he wished to make sure of that aid through the desired sign.

(Note: "From all these things, the fact that he had seen and heard the angel of Jehovah, and that he had been taught by fire out of the rock, by the disappearance of the angel, by the vision of the night, and by the words addressed to him there, Gideon did indeed believe that God both could and would deliver Israel through his instrumentality; but this faith was not placed above or away from the conflict of the flesh by which it was tested. And it is not strange that it rose to its greatest height when the work of deliverance was about to be performed. Wherefore Gideon with his faith sought for a sign from God against the more vehement struggle of the flesh, in order that his faith might be the more confirmed,

and might resist the opposing flesh with the great force. And this petition for a sign was combined with prayers for the strengthening of his faith." - *Seb. Schmidt.*)

And "the simple fact that such a man could obtain the most daring victory was to be a special glorification of God" (*O. v. Gerlach*). The sign itself was to manifest the strength of the divine assistance to his weakness of faith. Dew in the Scriptures is a symbol of the beneficent power of God, which quickens, revives, and invigorates the objects of nature, when they have been parched by the burning heat of the sun's rays. The first sign was to be a pledge to him of the visible and tangible blessing of the Lord upon His people, the proof that He would grant them power over their mighty foes by whom Israel was then oppressed. The woollen fleece represented the nation of Israel in its condition at that time, when God had given power to the foe that was devastating its land, and had withdrawn His blessing from Israel. The moistening of the fleece with the dew of heaven whilst the land all round continued dry, was a sign that the Lord God would once more give strength to His people from on high, and withdraw it from the nations of the earth. Hence the second sign acquires the more general signification, "that the Lord manifested himself even in the weakness and forsaken condition of His people, while the nations were flourishing all around" (*O. v. Gerl.*); and when so explained, it served to confirm and strengthen the first, inasmuch as it contained the comforting assurance for all times, that the Lord has not forsaken His church, even when it cannot discern and trace His beneficent influence, but rules over it and over the nations with His almighty power.

Judges 7:1-8

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley.

Mustering of the Army that Gideon had Collected. - V. 1. When Gideon had been assured of the help of God by this double sign, he went to the battle early the next morning with the people that he had gathered around him. The Israelites encamped above the fountain of *Harod*, i.e., upon a height at the foot of which this fountain sprang; but the camp of Midian was to him (Gideon) to the north of the hill *Moreh* in the valley (of Jezreel: see Judg 6:33). The geographical situation of these two places cannot be determined with certainty. The fountain of *Harod* is never mentioned again, though there is a place of that name referred to in 2 Sam 23:25 as the home of two of David's heroes; and it was from this, no doubt, that the fountain was named. The hill *Moreh* is also unknown. As it was by the valley (of Jezreel), we cannot possibly think of the grove of *Moreh* at Shechem (Gen 12:6; Deut 11:30).

(Note: *Bertheau* endeavours to settle the position of the place from our knowledge of the country, which is for the most part definite enough. Starting with the assumption that the fountain of *Harod* cannot be any other than the "fountain in Jezreel" mentioned in 1 Sam 29:1, where Saul and the Israelites encamped at Gilboa (1 Sam 28:4) to fight against the Philistines who were posted at *Shunem*, a place on the western slope of the so-called Little Hermon, he concludes that the fountain of *Harod* must be the present *Ain Jalud*, and the hill of *Moreh* the Little *Hermon* itself. These combinations are certainly possible, for we have nothing definite to oppose to them; still they are very uncertain, as they simply rest upon the very doubtful assumption that the only fountain in the plain of Jezreel was the celebrated fountain called *Ain Jalud*, and are hardly reconcilable with the account given of the route which was taken by the defeated Midianites (vv. 25ff. and Judg 8:4).)

Verse 2-3. The army of the Israelites amounted to 32,000 men (v. 4), but that of the Midianites and their allies was about 135,000 (Judg 8:10), so that they were greatly superior to the Israelites in numbers. Nevertheless the Lord said to Gideon, "*The people that are with thee are too many for me to give Midian into their hands, lest*

Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, My hand hath helped me." **rab** (OT:7227) followed by **min** (OT:4480) is to be understood as a comparative. Gideon was therefore to have a proclamation made before all the people: "*Whosoever is fearful and despondent, let him turn and go back from Mount Gilead.*" The *hap leg tsaapar* (OT:6852), judging from the Arabic, which signifies to plait, viz., hair, ropes, etc., and the noun *ts^apiyraah* (OT:6843), a circle or circuitous orbit, probably signifies to twist one's self round; hence in this instance to return in windings, to slink away in bypaths.

The expression "*from Mount Gilead,*" however, is very obscure. The mountain (or the mountains) of Gilead was on the eastern side of the Jordan; but the Israelitish army was encamped in or near the plain of Jezreel, in the country to the west of the Jordan, and had been gathered from the western tribes alone; so that even the inadmissible rendering, Let him turn and go home to the mountains of Gilead, would not give any appropriate sense. The only course left therefore is either to pronounce it an error of the text, as *Clericus* and *Bertheau* have done, and to regard "Gilead" as a mistake for "Gilboa," or to conclude that there was also a mountain or mountain range named *Gilead* by the plain of Jezreel in western Palestine, just as, according to Josh 15:10, there was a mountain, or range of mountains, called *Seir*, in the territory of Judah, of which nothing further is known. The appeal which Gideon is here directed to make to the army was prescribed in the law (Deut 20:8) for every war in which the Israelites should be engaged, and its general object was to fortify the spirit of the army by removing the cowardly and desponding. But in the case before us the intention of the Lord was to deprive His people of all ground for self-glorification. Hence the result of the appeal was one which Gideon himself certainly did not expect-namely, that more than two-thirds of the soldiers gathered round him-22,000 men of the people-turned back, and only 10,000

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

more than two-thirds of the soldiers gathered round him-22,000 men of the people turned back, and only 10,000 remained.

Verse 4. But even this number was regarded by the Lord as still too great, so that He gave to Gideon the still further command, "*Bring them (the 10,000 men) down to the water,*" i.e., the waters formed from the fountain of Harod, "*and I will purify them for thee there (tsaarap (OT:6884), separate those appointed for the battle from the rest of the army; the singular suffix refers to haa`aam (OT:5971)), and say to thee, This shall go with thee, and that,*" i.e., show thee each individual who is to go with thee to the battle, and who not.

Verse 5-6. Gideon was to divide the people by putting all those who should lick the water with their tongue as a dog licketh into one class, and all those who knelt down to drink into another, and so separating the latter from the former. The number of those who licked the water into their mouth with their hand amounted to 300, and all the rest knelt down to drink. "*To lick with their hand to their mouth,*" i.e., to take the water from the brook with the hollow of their hand, and lap it into the mouth with their tongue as a dog does, is only a more distinct expression for "licking with the tongue." The 300 men who quenched their thirst in this manner were certainly not the cowardly or indolent who did not kneel down to drink in the ordinary way, either from indolence or fear, as *Josephus, Theodoret*, and others supposed, but rather the bravest-namely those who, when they reached a brook before the battle, did not allow themselves time to kneel down and satisfy their thirst in the most convenient manner, but simply took up some water with their hands as they stood in their military accoutrements, to strengthen themselves for the battle, and then proceeded without delay against the foe. By such a sign as this, *Bertheau* supposes that even an ordinary general might have been able to recognise the bravest of his army. No doubt: but if this account had not been handed down, it is certain that it would never have occurred to an ordinary or even a distinguished general to adopt such a method of putting the bravery of his troops to the test; and even Gideon, the hero of God, would never have thought of diminishing still

further through such a trial an army which had already become so small, or of attempting to defeat an army of more than 100,000 men by a few hundred of the bravest men, if the Lord himself had not commanded it.

Whilst the Lord was willing to strengthen the feeble faith of Gideon by the sign with the fleece of wool, and thus to raise him up to full confidence in the divine omnipotence, He also required of him, when thus strengthened, an attestation of his faith, by the purification of his army that he might give the whole glory to Him, and accept the victory over that great multitude from His hand alone.

Verse 7. After his fighting men had been divided into a small handful of 300 men on the one hand, and the large host of 9700 on the other, by the fulfilment of the command of God, the Lord required of him that he should send away the latter, "every man to his place," i.e., to his own home, promising that He would save Israel by the 300 men, and deliver the Midianites into their hand. The promise preceded the command, to render it easier to Gideon to obey it. "*All the people,*" after taking out the 300 men, that is to say, the 9700 that remained.

Verse 8. "**So they** (the 300 picked men) *took the provision of the people in their hand, and their* (the people's) *trumpets* (the suffix points back to *haa`aam* (OT:5971), the people); *and all the men of Israel* (the 9700) *he had sent away every one to his tents*, i.e., to his home (see at Deut 16:7), *and the three hundred men he had kept by himself; but the camp of the Midianites was below to him in the valley.*" These words bring the preparations for the battle to a close, and the last clause introduces the ensuing conflict and victory. In the first clause *haa`aam* (OT:5971) (the people) cannot be the subject, partly because of the actual sense, since the 300 warriors, who are no doubt the persons intended (cf. v. 16), cannot be called "the people," in distinction from "all the men of Israel," and partly also because of the expression '*et-tseedaaah*', which would be construed in that case without any article in violation of the ordinary rule. We must rather read *haa`aam 'et-tseedat*, as the LXX and the Chaldee have done. The 300 men took the provision of the people, i.e., provision for the war, from the people

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

who had been sent away, and the war-trumpets; so that every one of the 300 had a trumpet now, and as the provision of the people was also probably kept in vessels or pitchers (*caddim*: v. 16), a jug as well. The subject to *yiq^achuw* (OT:3947) is to be taken from the first clause of the seventh verse. The sentences which follow from *kaal-'iysh w^aeet* are circumstantial clauses, introduced to bring out distinctly the situation in which Gideon was now placed. *b^a hecheziyq* (OT:2388), the opposite of *shilach* (OT:7971), to send away, signifies to hold fast, to keep back or by himself, as in Ex 9:2. *low* (OT:3807a), to him, Gideon, who was standing by the fountain of Harod with his 300 men, the situation of Midian was underneath in the valley (see v. 1, and Judg 6:33).

Judges 7:9-10

And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand.

Gideon's Battle and Victory. - Vv. 9-11a. The following night the Lord commanded Gideon to go down to the camp of the enemy, as He had given it into his hand (the perfect is used to denote the purpose of God which had already been formed, as in Judg 4:14). But in order to fill him with confidence for such an enterprise, which to all human appearance was a very rash one, God added, "*If thou art afraid to go down, go thou with thine attendant Purah down to the camp, and thou wilt hear what they say, and thy hands will thereby become strong.*" The meaning of the protasis is not, If thou art afraid to go down into the camp of the enemy alone, or to visit the enemy unarmed, take Purah thine armour-bearer with thee, to make sure that thou hast weapons to use (*Bertheau*); for, apart from the fact that the addition "unarmed" is perfectly arbitrary, the apodosis "thou wilt see," etc., by no means agrees with this explanation.

The meaning is rather this: Go with thy 300 men into (*b^a*) the hostile camp to smite it, for I have given it into thy hand; but if thou art afraid to do this, go down with thine attendant to (*'el* (OT:413)) the camp, to ascertain the state and feeling of the foe, and thou wilt hear what they say, i.e., as we gather from what follows, how they are discouraged, have lost all hope of defeating you, and from that thou wilt gather courage and strength for the battle. On the expression "*thine hands shall be strengthened,*" see 2 Sam 2:7. The expression which follows, *bamachaneh* (OT:4264) *w^ayaarad^ataa* (OT:3381), is not a mere repetition of the command to go down with his attendant to the hostile camp, but describes the result of the stimulus given to his courage: And then thou wilt go fearlessly into the hostile camp to attack the foe. *bamachaneh* (OT:4264) *yaarad* (OT:3381) (vv. 9, 11) is to be distinguished from *'el-hamachaneh yaarad* in v. 10. The former signifies to go down into the camp to smite the foe; the latter, to go down to the camp to reconnoitre it, and is equivalent to the following clause: "he went to the outside of the camp."

11b-14. But when Gideon came with his attendant to the end of the armed men (*chamushim* , as in Josh 1:14; Ex 13:18) in the hostile camp, and the enemy were lying spread out with their camels in the valley, an innumerable multitude, he heard one (of the fighting men) relate to his fellow (i.e., to another) a dream which he had had: "***Behold a cake of barley bread was rolling into the camp of Midian, and it came to the tent and smote it, so that it fell and turned upwards, and let the tent lay along.***" Then the other replied, "*This is nothing else than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash the Israelite: God hath given Midian and all the camp into his hand.*" "The end of fighting men" signifies the outermost or foremost of the outposts in the enemy's camp, which contained not only fighting men, but the whole of the baggage of the enemy, who had invaded the land as nomads, with their wives, their children, and their flocks.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

In v. 12, the innumerable multitude of the enemy is described once more in the form of a circumstantial clause, as in Judg 6:5, not so much to distinguish the fighting men from the camp generally, as to bring out more vividly the contents and meaning of the following dream. The comparison of the enemy to the sand by the sea-side recalls Josh 11:4, and is frequently met with (see Gen 22:17; 32:13; 1 Sam 13:5). With the word *wayaabo'* (OT:935) in v. 13, the thread of the narrative, which was broken off by the circumstantial clause in v. 12, is resumed and carried further. The *hap leg ts^uluwl* (OT:6742) (*Keri* , *ts^uliyl* (OT:6742)) is rendered *cake*, *placenta* , by the early translators: see *Ges. Thes.* p. 1170. The derivation of the word has been disputed, and is by no means certain, as *tsaalal* (OT:6749) does not give any suitable meaning, either in the sense of to ring or to be overshadowed, and the meaning to roll (*Ges. l.c.*) cannot be philologically sustained; whilst *tsaalaah* (OT:6740), to roast, can hardly be thought of, since this is merely used to denote the roasting of flesh, and *qaalaah* (OT:7033) was the word commonly applied to the roasting of grains, and even "the roasted of barley bread" would hardly be equivalent to *subcinericeus panis ex hordeo* (*Vulgate*). "The tent," with the definite article, is probably the principal tent in the camp, i.e., the tent of the general. *l^ama^ulaah* (OT:4605), upwards, so that the bottom came to the top. "The tent lay along," or the tent fell, lay in ruins, is added to give emphasis to the words. "This is nothing if not," i.e., nothing but. The cake of bread which had rolled into the Midianitish camp and overturned the tent, signifies nothing else than the sword of Gideon, i.e., Gideon, who is bursting into the camp with his sword, and utterly destroying it.

This interpretation of the dream was certainly a natural one under the circumstances. Gideon is especially mentioned simply as the leader of the Israelites; whilst the loaf of barley bread, which was the food of the poorer classes, is to be regarded as strictly speaking the symbol of Israel, which was so despised among the nations. The rising of the Israelites under Gideon had not remained a secret to the Midianites, and no doubt filled them with fear; so that in a dream this fear might easily assume the form of the defeat or desolation and destruction of

their camp by Gideon. And the peculiar form of the dream is also psychologically conceivable. As the tent is everything to a nomad, he might very naturally picture the cultivator of the soil as a man whose life is all spent in cultivating and baking bread. In this way bread would become almost involuntarily a symbol of the cultivator of the soil, whilst in his own tent he would see a symbol not only of his mode of life, but of his freedom, greatness, and power.

If we add to this, that the free pastoral tribes, particularly the Bedouins of Arabia, look down with pride not only upon the poor tillers of the soil, but even upon the inhabitants of towns, and that in Palestine, the land of wheat, none but the poorer classes feed upon barley bread, we have here all the elements out of which the dream of the Midianitish warrior was formed. The Israelites had really been crushed by the Midianites into a poor nation of slaves. But whilst the dream itself admits of being explained in this manner in a perfectly natural way, it acquires the higher supernatural character of a divine inspiration, from the fact that God not only foreknew it, but really caused the Midianite to dream, and to relate the dream to his comrade, just at the time when Gideon had secretly entered the camp, so that he should hear it, and discover therefrom, as God had foretold him, the despondency of the foe. Under these circumstances, Gideon could not fail to regard the dream as a divine inspiration, and to draw the assurance from it, that God had certainly given the Midianites into his hands.

Judges 7:15-18

And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

When therefore he had heard the dream related and interpreted, he worshipped, praising the Lord with joy, and returned to the camp to attack the enemy without delay. He then divided the 300 men into three companies, i.e., three attacking columns, and gave them all trumpets and empty pitchers, with torches in the pitchers in their hands. The pitchers were taken that they might hide the burning torches in them during their advance to surround the enemy's camp, and then increase the noise at the time of the attack, by dashing the pitchers to pieces (v. 20), and thus through the noise, as well as the sudden lighting up of the burning torches, deceive the enemy as to the strength of the army. At the same time he commanded them, "*See from me, and do likewise,*" - a short expression for, As ye see me do, so do ye also (*keen* (OT:3651), without the previous *k^a*, or *ka'asher* (OT:834), as in Judg 5:15; see *Ewald*, §260, a.), - "*I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me; ye also blow the trumpets round about the entire camp,*" which the 300 men divided into three companies were to surround, "*and say, To the Lord and Gideon.*" According to v. 20, this war-cry ran fully thus: "**Sword to** (for) *the Lord and Gideon.*" This addition in v. 20, however, does not warrant us in inserting "*chereb*" (sword) in the text here, as some of the early translators and MSS have done.

(Note: Similar stratagems to the one adopted by Gideon here are recorded by *Polyaenus* (Strateg. ii. c. 37) of Dicitas, at the taking of Heraea, and by *Plutarch* (*Fabius Max.* c. 6) of Hannibal, when he was surrounded and completely shut in by Fabius Maximus. An example from modern history is given by *Niebuhr* (Beschr. von Arabien, p. 304). About the middle of the eighteenth century two Arabian chiefs were fighting for the Imamate of Oman. One of them, Bel-Arab, besieged the other, Achmed ben Said, with four or five thousand men, in a small castle on the mountain. But the latter slipped out of the castle, collected together several hundred men, gave every soldier a sign upon his head, that they might be able to distinguish friends from foes, and sent small companies to all the passes. Every one had a trumpet to blow at a given signal, and thus create a noise at the same time on every side. The whole of the opposing army was thrown in this way into disorder, since they found all the passes occupied, and imagined the hostile army to be as great as the noise.)

Judges 7:19

So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands.

Gideon then proceeded with the 100 who were with him, i.e., the company which was led by himself personally, to the end of the hostile camp, at the beginning of the middle watch, i.e., at midnight. *ro'sh* (OT:7218) is an accusative defining the time: see *Ges.* 118, 2, and *Ewald*, §204, *a*. The only other watch that is mentioned in the Old Testament beside the middle night-watch, is the morning night-watch (Ex 14:24; 1 Sam 11:11), from which it has been correctly inferred, that the Israelites divided the night into three night-watches. The division into four watches (Matt 14:25; Mark 6:48) was first adopted by the Jews from the Romans. "*They* (the Midianites) *had only* (just) *posted the watchmen* (of the middle watch)," - a circumstantial clause, introduced to give greater distinctness to the situation. When the first sentries were relieved, and the second posted, so that they thought they might make quite sure of their night's rest once more, Gideon and his host arrived at the end of the camp, and, as we must supply from the context, the other two hosts at two other ends of the camp, who all blew their trumpets, breaking the pitchers in their hands at the same time. The *inf. abs. naapowts* (OT:5310), as a continuation of the finite verb *yit^aq^auw* (OT:8628), indicates that the fact was contemporaneous with the previous one (see *Ewald*, §351, *c*).

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 7:20-21

And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.

According to the command which they had received (v. 17), the other two tribes followed his example. *"Then the three companies blew the trumpets, broke the pitchers, and held the torches in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right to blow, and cried, Sword to the Lord and Gideon! And they stood every one his place round about the camp,"* sc., without moving, so that the Midianites necessarily thought that there must be a numerous army advancing behind the torch-bearers. *wgw' wayaaraats* (OT:7323), *"and the whole army ran,"* i.e., there began a running hither and thither in the camp of the enemy, who had been frightened out of their night's rest by the unexpected blast of the trumpets, the noise, and the war-cry of the Israelitish warriors; *"and they (the enemy) lifted up a cry (of anguish and alarm), and caused to fly"* (carried off), sc., their tents (i.e., their families) and their herds, or all their possessions (cf. Judg 6:11; Ex 9:20). The *Chethibh yaaniycuw* (OT:5127) is the original reading, and the *Keri yaanuwcuw* (OT:5127) a bad emendation.

Judges 7:22

And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to Bethshittah in Zererath, and to the border of Abelmeholah, unto Tabbath.

Whilst the 300 men blew their trumpets, *"Jehovah set the sword of one against the other, and against the whole camp,"* i.e., caused one to turn his sword against the

other and against all the camp, that is to say, not merely man against man, but against every one in the camp, so that there arose a terrible slaughter throughout the whole camp. The first clause, "*and the three hundred blew the trumpets,*" simply resumes the statement in v. 20, "the three companies blew the trumpets," for the purpose of appending to it the further progress of the attack, and the result of the battle. *Bertheau* inserts in a very arbitrary manner the words, "the second time." His explanation of the next clause ("then the 300 fighting men of Gideon drew the sword at Jehovah's command, every man against his man") is still more erroneous, since it does violence to the constant usage of the expression *b^aree`eehuw* (OT:7453) *'iysh* (OT:376) (see 1 Sam 14:20; 2 Chron 20:23; Isa 3:5; Zech 8:10). "*And all the camp of the Midianites fled to Beth-shittah to Zeredah, to the shore of Abel-meholah, over Tabbath.*" The situation of these places, which are only mentioned here, with the exception of Abel-meholah, the home of Elisha (1 Kings 19:16; 4:12), has not yet been determined.

According to the Syriac, the Arabic, and some of the MSS, we should read *Zeredathah* instead of *Zererathah*, and *Zeredathah* is only another form for *Zarthan* (comp. 1 Kings 7:46 with 2 Chron 4:17). This is favoured by the situation of *Zarthan* in the valley of the Jordan, probably near the modern *Kurn Sartabeh* (see p. 35), inasmuch as

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

in all probability Beth-shittah and Abel-meholah are to be sought for in the valley of the Jordan; and according to v. 24, the enemy fled to the Jordan. *Beth-shittah*, i.e., acacia-house, is not the same place as the village of *Shutta* mentioned by *Robinson* (iii. p. 219), since this village, according to *Van de Velde's* map, was to the north of Gilboa. For although *Shutta* is favoured by the circumstance, that from a very ancient time there was a road running from Jezreel along the valley, between the so-called Little Hermon (Duhy) and the mountains of Gilboa, and past Beisan to the Jordan; and the valley of Jalud, on the northern side of which *Shutta* was situated, may be regarded as the opening of the plain of Jezreel into the valley of the Jordan (see *v. Raumer*, Pal. p. 41, and *Rob.* iii. p. 176); and *v. Raumer* conjectures from this, that "the flight of the Midianites was apparently directed to Bethsean, on account of the nature of the ground," - this assumption is rendered very questionable by the fact that the flying foe did not cross the Jordan in the neighbourhood of Beisan, but much farther to the south, viz., according to Judg 8:4, in the neighbourhood of *Succoth*, which was on the south side of the Nahr Zerka (Jabbok).

From this we are led to conjecture, that they were not encamped in the north-eastern part of the plain of Jezreel, in the neighbourhood of Jezreel (Zerin) and Shunem (Solam), but in the south-eastern part of this plain, and that after they had been beaten there they fled southwards from Gilboa, say from the district of Ginaea (Jenin) to the Jordan. In this case we have to seek for Abel-shittah on the south-east of the mountains of Gilboa, to the north of Zeredathah (Zarthan). From this point they fled on still farther to the "*shore of Abel-meholah.*" *saapaah* (OT:8193) does not mean boundary, but brink; here the bank of the Jordan, like *hayar^adeen* (OT:3383) *s^apat* (OT:8193) in 2 Kings 2:13. The bank or strand of *Abel-meholah* is that portion of the western bank of the Jordan or of the Ghor, above which *Abel-meholah* was situated. According to the *Onom.* (s. v. *Abelmaelai'*, *Abelmaula*), this place was in the *Aulon* (or Ghor), ten Roman miles to the south of Scythopolis (Beisan), and was called at that time *Beethmaieia'* or *Bethaula*. According to this statement, *Abel-meholah* would have to be sought for near *Churbet es Shuk*, in the

neighbourhood of the Wady *Maleh* (see *V. de Velde* , Mem. p. 280). And lastly, *Tabbath* must have been situated somewhere to the south of Abel-meholah.

Judges 7:23

And the men of Israel gathered themselves together out of Naphtali, and out of Asher, and out of all Manasseh, and pursued after the Midianites.

Pursuit of the Enemy as far as the Jordan. - V. 23. As soon as the Midianites had been put to flight, the Israelitish men of Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh, let themselves be convened for the purpose of pursuing them: i.e., the men of these tribes, whom Gideon had sent away before the battle, and who were on their way home, could be summoned back again in a very short time to join in the pursuit of the flying foe. The omission of Zebulun (Judg 6:35) is, in all probability, simply to be attributed to the brevity of the account.

Judges 7:24,25

And Gideon sent messengers throughout all mount Ephraim, saying, Come down against the Midianites, and take before them the waters unto Beth-barah and Jordan. Then all the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and took the waters unto Beth-barah and Jordan.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

In order to cut off the retreat of the enemy who was flying to the Jordan, Gideon sent messengers into the whole of the mountains of Ephraim with this appeal to the Ephraimites, "*Come down (from your mountains into the lowlands of the Jordan) to meet Midian, and take the waters from them to Bethbarah and the Jordan,*" sc., by taking possession of this district (see Judg 3:28). "*The waters,*" mentioned before the Jordan and distinguished from it, must have been streams across which the flying foe would have to cross to reach the Jordan, namely, the different brooks and rivers, such as *Wady Maleh, Fyadh, Jamel, Tubâs* , etc., which flowed down from the eastern side of the mountains of Ephraim into the Jordan, and ran through the Ghor to Bethbarah. The situation of *Bethbarah* is unknown. Even *Eusebius* could say nothing definite concerning the place; and the conjecture that it is the same as Bethabara, which has been regarded ever since the time of Origen as the place mentioned in John 1:28 where John baptized, throws no light upon the subject, as the situation of Bethabara is also unknown, to say nothing of the fact that the identity of the two names is very questionable.

The Ephraimites responded to this appeal and took possession of the waters mentioned, before the Midianites, who could only move slowly with their flocks and herds, were able to reach the Jordan. They then captured two of the princes of the Midianites and put them to death: one of them, *Oreb* , i.e., the raven, at the rock *Oreb*; the other, *Zeeb* , i.e., the wolf, at the wine-press of *Zeeb*. Nothing further is known about these two places. The rock of *Oreb* is only mentioned again in Isa 10:26, when the prophet alludes to this celebrated victory. So much, however, is evident from the verse before us, viz., that the Midianites were beaten by the Ephraimites at both places, and that the two princes fell there, and the places received their names from that circumstance. They were not situated in the land to the east of the Jordan, as *Gesenius* (on Isa 10:26), *Rosenmüller* , and others infer from the fact that the Ephraimites brought the heads of *Oreb* and *Zeeb* to Gideon *layar^adeen* (OT:3383) *mee`eeber* (OT:5676) (v. 25), but on the western side of the Jordan, where the Ephraimites had taken possession of the waters and the Jordan in front of the Midianites. *layar^adeen* (OT:3383) *mee`eeber* (OT:5676) does not mean

"from the other side of the Jordan," but simply "*on the other side of* (beyond) *the Jordan*," as in Josh 13:32; 18:7; 1 Kings 14:15; and the statement here is not that the Ephraimites brought the heads from the other side to Gideon on the west of the river, but that they brought them to Gideon when he was in the land to the east of the Jordan. This explanation of the words is required by the context, as well as by the foregoing remark, "they pursued Midian," according to which the Ephraimites continued the pursuit of the Midianites after slaying these princes, and also by the complaint brought against Gideon by the Ephraimites, which is not mentioned till afterwards (Judg 8:1ff.), that he had not summoned them to the war. It is true, this is given before the account of Gideon's crossing over the Jordan (Judg 8:4), but in order of time it did not take place till afterwards, and, as *Bertheau* has correctly shown, the historical sequence is somewhat anticipated.

Judges 8:1-3

And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply.

When the Ephraimites met with Gideon, after they had smitten the Midianites at Oreb and Zeeb, and were pursuing them farther, they said to him, "*What is the thing that thou hast done to us* (i.e., what is the reason for your having done this to us), *not to call us when thou wentest forth to make war upon Midian? And they did chide with him sharply,*" less from any dissatisfied longing for booty, than from injured pride or jealousy, because Gideon had made war upon the enemy and defeated them without the co-operation of this tribe, which was striving

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

for the leadership. Gideon's reply especially suggests the idea of injured ambition: "*What have I now done like you?*" sc., as if I had done as great things as you. "*Is not the gleaning of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?*" The gleaning of Ephraim is the victory gained over the flying Midianites. Gideon declares this to be better than the vintage of Abiezer, i.e., the victory obtained by him the Abiezrite with his 300 men, because the Ephraimites had slain two Midianitish princes. The victory gained by the Ephraimites must indeed have been a very important one, as it is mentioned by Isaiah (Isa 10:26) as a great blow of the Lord upon Midian. "*And what could I do like you?*" i.e., could I accomplish such great deeds as you? "*Then their anger turned away from him.*" **ruwach** (OT:7307), the breathing of the nose, snorting, hence "*anger,*" as in Isa 25:4, etc.

Pursuit of the Midianites. Other Acts of Gideon; His Appointment as Judge. Ch. 8:4-35.

Judges 8:4-12

And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing them.

Pursuit and Complete Overthrow of the Midianites. - That the Midianites whom God had delivered into his hand might be utterly destroyed, Gideon pursued those who had escaped across the Jordan, till he overtook them on the eastern boundary of Gilead and smote them there.

Verse 4-5. When he came to the Jordan with his three hundred men, who were exhausted with the pursuit, he asked the inhabitants of Succoth for loaves of bread for the people in his train. So far as the construction is concerned, the words from *obeer* (OT:5674) to *w^arod^apiym* (OT:7291) form a circumstantial clause inserted

as a parenthesis into the principal sentence, and subordinate to it: "*When Gideon came to the Jordan, passing over he and the three hundred men...then he said to the men of Succoth.*" "*Exhausted and pursuing,*" i.e., exhausted with pursuing. The *vav* is explanatory, *lit.* "and indeed pursuing," for "because he pursued." The rendering *peinoo'ntes* (NT:3983) adopted by the LXX in the *Cod. Alex.* is merely an arbitrary rendering of the word *rod^apiym* (OT:7291), and without any critical worth. Gideon had crossed the Jordan, therefore, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Succoth. Succoth was upon the eastern side of the valley of the Jordan (Josh 13:27), not opposite to Bethshean, but, according to Gen 33:17, on the south side of the Jabbok (Zerka).

Verse 6. The princes of Succoth, however, showed so little sympathy and nationality of feeling, that instead of taking part of the attack upon the enemies of Israel, they even refused to supply bread to refresh their brethren of the western tribes who were exhausted with the pursuit of the foe. They said (the sing. *wayo'mer* (OT:559) may be explained on the ground that one spoke in the name of all: see *Ewald*, §319, *a.*), "*Is the fist of Zebah and Zalmunna already in thy hand (power), that we should give thine army bread?*" In these words there is not only an expression of cowardice, or fear of the vengeance which the Midianites might take when they returned upon those who had supported Gideon and his host, but contempt of the small force which Gideon had, as if it were impossible for him to accomplish anything at all against the foe; and in this contempt they manifested their utter want of confidence in God.

Verse 7. Gideon threatened them, therefore, with severe chastisement in the event of a victorious return. "*If Jehovah give Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will thresh your flesh (your body) with desert thorns*

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

and thistles." The verb *duwsh* (OT:1758), constructed with a double accusative (see *Ewald* , §283, *a.*), is used in a figurative sense: "to thresh," in other words, to punish severely. "Thorns of the desert" as strong thorns, as the desert is the natural soil for thorn-bushes. The *hap leg bar"qaaniym* also signifies prickly plants, according to the early versions and the Rabbins, probably "such as grow upon stony ground" (*Bertheau*). The explanation "threshing machines with stones or flints underneath them," which was suggested by *J. D. Michaelis* and *Celsius* , and adopted by *Gesenius* , cannot be sustained.

Verse 8-9. The inhabitants of Pnuel on the north bank of the Jabbok (see at Gen 32:24ff.) behaved in the same churlish manner to Gideon, and for this he also threatened them: "If I return in peace," i.e., unhurt, "*I will destroy this tower*" (probably the castle of Pnuel).

Verse 10-12. The Midianitish kings were at *Karkor* with all the remnant of their army, about fifteen thousand men, a hundred and twenty thousand having already fallen. Gideon followed them thither by the road of the dwellers in tents on the east of *Nobah* and *Jogbeha*; and falling upon them unawares, smote the whole camp, which thought itself quite secure, and took the two kings prisoners, after discomfiting all the camp. The situation of *Karkor* , which is only mentioned here, cannot be determined with certainty. The statement of *Eusebius* and *Jerome* (*Onom. s. v. Carka'* , *Carcar*), that it was the castle of *Carcaria* , a day's journey from *Petra* , is decidedly wrong, since this castle is much too far to the south, as *Gesenius* (Thes. p. 1210) has shown. *Karkor* cannot have been very far from *Nobah* and *Jogbeha*. These two places are probably preserved in the ruins of *Nowakis* and *Jebeiha* , on the north-west of *Ammân* (*Rabbath-ammon*; see at Num 21:31).

Now, as **Burckhardt** (Syr. p. 612) also mentions a ruin in the neighbourhood, called *Karkagheisch* , on the left of the road from Szalt to Ammân, and at the most

an hour and a half to the north-west of Ammân, *Knobel* (on Num 32:42) is inclined to regard this ruin as *Karkor*. If this supposition could be proved to be correct, Gideon would have fallen upon the camp of the enemy from the north-east. For "*the way of the dwellers in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbeha*" cannot well be any other than the way which ran to the east of Nobah and Jogbeha, past the most easterly frontier city of the Gadites, to the nomads who dwelt in the desert.

baa'aalaaliym hash^qkuwneey has the article attached to the governing noun, which may easily be explained in this instance from the intervening preposition. The passive participle *shaakuwn* has an intransitive force (see *Ewald* , §149, *a.*). The verb *hecheriyd* (OT:2729) in the circumstantial clause acquires the force of the pluperfect from the context. When he had startled the camp out of its security, having alarmed it by his unexpected attack, he succeeded in taking the two kings prisoners.

Judges 8:13-21

And Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle before the sun was up,

Punishment of the Towns of Succoth and Pnuel, and Execution of the Captures Kings of Midian.

Verse 13-14. Gideon returned victorious from the war, *hechaarec* (OT:2775) *mil^ama`aleeh* (OT:4608), "*from by the ascent (or mountain road) of Hecheres,*" a place in front of the town of Succoth, with which we are not acquainted. This is the rendering adopted by the LXX, the Peshito, and the Arabic; but the rest of the early translators have merely guessed at the meaning. The *Chaldee* , which has been followed by the *Rabbins* and *Luther* , has rendered it "before sunset," in utter opposition to the rules of the language; for although *cheres* is a

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

word used poetically to denote the sun, *ma`aleh* (OT:4608) cannot mean the setting of the sun. *Aquila* and *Symmachus*, on the other hand, confound *cherec* (OT:2776) with *haariym* (OT:2022). - Gideon laid hold of a young man of the people of Succoth, and got him to write down for him the princes and elders (magistrates and rulers) of the city-in all seventy-seven men. *wayik^atob wayish^aaalhuw* is a short expression for "he asked him the names of the princes and elders of the city, and the boy wrote them down." *'eelaayw* (OT:413), *lit.* to him, i.e., for him.

Verse 15-16. Gideon then reproached the elders with the insult they had offered him (v. 6), and had them punished with desert thorns and thistles. "*Men of Succoth*" (vv. 15a and 16b) is a general expression for "elders of Succoth" (v. 16a); and elders a general term applied to all the representatives of the city, including the princes. *'otiy* (OT:853) *cheerap^atem* (OT:2778) *'asher* (OT:834), with regard to whom ye have despised me. *'asher* (OT:834) is the accusative of the more distant or second object, not the subject, as *Stud.* supposes. "*And he taught the men of Succoth* (i.e., caused them to know, made them feel, punished them) with them (the thorns)." There is no good ground for doubting the correctness of the reading *wayoda`* (OT:3045). The free renderings of the LXX, *Vulg.*, etc., are destitute of critical worth; and *Bertheau's* assertion, that if it were the *Hiphil* it would be written *yowda`*, is proved to be unfounded by the defective writing in Num 16:5; Job 32:7.

Verse 17. Gideon also inflicted upon Pnuel the punishment threatened in v. 9. The punishment inflicted by Gideon upon both the cities was well deserved in all respects, and was righteously executed. The inhabitants of these cities had not only acted treacherously to Israel as far as they could, from the most selfish interests, in a holy conflict for the glory of the Lord and the freedom of His people, but in their contemptuous treatment of Gideon and his host they had poured contempt upon the Lord, who had shown them to be His own soldiers before the eyes of the whole nation by the victory which He had given them over the innumerable army of the

foe. Having been called by the Lord to be the deliverer and judge of Israel, it was Gideon's duty to punish the faithless cities.

Verse 18-21. After punishing these cities, Gideon repaid the two kings of Midian, who had been taken prisoners, according to their doings. From the judicial proceedings instituted with regard to them (vv. 18, 19), we learn that these kings had put the brothers of Gideon to death, and apparently not in open fight; but they had murdered them in an unrighteous and cruel manner. And Gideon made them atone for this with their own lives, according to the strict *jus talionis*. **'eeypoh** (OT:375), in v. 18, does not mean *where?* but *"in what condition, of what form, were the men whom he slew at Tabor?"* i.e., either in the city of Tabor or at Mount Tabor (see Judg 4:6, and Josh 19:22). The kings replied: **"As thou so they"** (those men), i.e., they were all as stately as thou art, *"every one like the form of kings' sons."* **'echaad** (OT:259), one, for every one, like **'echaad** (OT:259) **'iysh** (OT:376) in 2 Kings 15:20, or more frequently **'iysh** (OT:376) alone. As the men who had been slain were Gideon's own brothers, he swore to those who had done the deed, i.e., to the two kings, *"As truly as Jehovah liveth, if ye had let them live I should not have put you to death;"* and then commanded his first-born son Jether to slay them, for the purpose of adding the disgrace of falling by the hand of a boy. *"But the boy drew not his sword from fear, because he was yet a boy."* And the kings then said to Gideon, *"Rise thou and stab us, for as the man so is his strength,"* i.e., such strength does not belong to a boy, but to a man. Thereupon Gideon slew them, and took the little moons upon the necks of their camels as booty. *"The little moons"* were crescent-shaped ornaments of silver or gold, such as men and women wore upon their necks (see v. 26, and Isa 3:18), and which they also hung upon the necks of camels—a custom still prevalent in Arabia (see Schröder, *de vestitu mul. hebr.* pp. 39, 40, and Wellsted, *Reisen in Arab.* i. p. 209).

Judges 8:22-23

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian.

Gideon's Remaining Acts, and Death. - Vv. 22, 23. As Gideon had so gloriously delivered Israel from the severe and long oppression on the part of the Midianites, the Israelites offered him an hereditary crown. "*The men of Israel*" were hardly all the twelve tribes, but probably only the northern tribes of the western part of the land already mentioned in Judg 6:35, who had suffered the most severely from the Midianitish oppression, and had been the first to gather round Gideon to make an attack upon the foe. The temptation to accept the government of Israel was resisted by this warrior of God. "*Neither I nor my son shall rule over you; Jehovah shall rule over you,*" was his reply to this offer, containing an evident allusion to the destination and constitution of the tribes of Israel as a nation which Jehovah had chosen to be His own possession, and to which He had just made himself known in so conspicuous a manner as their omnipotent Ruler and King. This refusal of the regal dignity on the part of Gideon is not at variance with the fact, that Moses had already foreseen the possibility that at some future time the desire for a king would arise in the nation, and had given them a law for the king expressly designed for such circumstances as these (Deut 17:14ff.). For Gideon did not decline the honour because Jehovah was King in Israel, i.e., because he regarded an earthly monarchy in Israel as irreconcilable with the heavenly monarchy of Jehovah, but simply because he thought the government of Jehovah in Israel amply sufficient, and did not consider either himself or his sons called to found an earthly monarchy.

Judges 8:24

And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.)

Gideon resisted the temptation to put an earthly crown upon his head, from true fidelity to Jehovah; but he yielded to another temptation, which this appeal on the part of the people really involved, namely, the temptation to secure to himself for the future the position to which the Lord had called and exalted him. The Lord had called him to be the deliverer of Israel by visibly appearing in His angel, and had not only accepted the gift which he offered Him, as a well-pleasing sacrifice, but had also commanded him to build an altar, and by offering an atoning burnt-sacrifice to re-establish the worship of Jehovah in his family and tribe, and to restore the favour of God to His people once more. Lastly, the Lord had made His will known to him again and again; whilst by the glorious victory which He had given to him and to his small band over the powerful army of the foe, He had confirmed him as His chosen servant to be the deliverer and judge of Israel. The relation which Gideon thus sustained to the Lord he imagined that he ought to preserve; and therefore, after declining the royal dignity, he said to the people, "*I will request of you one request, that ye give me every one the ring that he has received as booty.*" This request the historian explains by adding the remark: "*for they (the enemy) had golden rings, for they were Ishmaelites,*" from whom therefore the Israelites were able to get an abundance of rings as booty. *Ishmaelites* is the general name for the nomad tribes of Arabia, to whom the Midianites also belonged (as in Gen 37:25).

Verse 17. This request of Gideon's was cheerfully fulfilled: "*They spread out the cloth (brought for collecting the rings), and threw into it every one the ring that he had received as booty.*" *Simlah*, the upper garment, was for the most part only a large square piece of cloth. The weight of these golden rings amounted to 1700 shekels, i.e., about 50 lbs., (*min* (OT:4480) *l'bad* (OT:905)) separate from, i.e., beside, the remaining booty, for which Gideon

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

had not asked, and which the Israelites kept for themselves, viz., the little moons, the ear-pendants (*netiphoth*, *lit.* little drops, probably pearl-shaped ear-drops: see Isa 3:19), and the purple clothes which were worn by the kings of Midian (i.e., which they had on), and also apart from the neck-bands upon the necks of their camels. Instead of the *anakothe* or necklaces (v. 26), the *saharonim*, or little moons upon the necks of the camels, are mentioned in v. 21 as the more valuable portion of these necklaces.

Even at the present day the Arabs are accustomed to ornament the necks of these animals "with a band of cloth or leather, upon which small shells called cowries are strung or sewed in the form of a crescent. The sheiks add silver ornaments to these, which make a rich booty in time of war" (*Wellsted*, *Reise*, i. p. 209). The Midianitish kings had their camels ornamented with golden crescents. This abundance of golden ornaments will not surprise us, when we consider that the Arabs still carry their luxurious tastes for such things to a very great excess. *Wellsted* (i. p. 224) states that "the women in Omân spend considerable amounts in the purchase of silver ornaments, and their children are literally laden with them. I have sometimes counted fifteen ear-rings upon each side; and the head, breast, arms, and ankles are adorned with the same profusion." As the Midianitish army consisted of 130,000 men, of whom 15,000 only remained at the commencement of the last engagement, the Israelites may easily have collected 5000 golden rings, or even more, which might weigh 1700 shekels.

Judges 8:27

And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house.

"And Gideon made it into an ephod," i.e., used the gold of the rings obtained

from the booty for making an ephod. There is no necessity, however, to understand this as signifying that 1700 shekels or 50 lbs. of gold had been used for the ephod itself, but simply that the making of the ephod was accomplished with this gold. The word *ephod* does not signify an image of Jehovah, or an idol, as *Gesenius* and others maintain, but the shoulder-dress of the high priest, no doubt including the *choshen* belonging to it, with the Urim and Thummim, as in 1 Sam 14:3; 21:10; 23:6,9, etc. The material for this was worked throughout with gold threads; and in addition to that there were precious stones set in gold braid upon the shoulder-pieces of the ephod and upon the *choshen*, and chains made of gold twist for fastening the *choshen* upon the ephod (see Ex 28:6-30). Now, if 50 lbs. of gold could not be used for these things, there were also fourteen precious stones to be procured, and the work itself to be paid for, so that 50 lbs. of gold might easily be devoted to the preparation of this state dress. The large quantity of gold, therefore, does not warrant us in introducing arbitrarily into the text the establishment of a formal sanctuary, and the preparation of a golden image of Jehovah in the form of a bull, as *Bertheau* has done, since there is no reference to *pecel* (OT:6459) or *maceekaah* (OT:4541), as in ch. 17-18; and even the other words of the text do not point to the founding of a sanctuary and the setting up of an image of Jehovah.

(Note: **Oehler** has correctly observed in *Herzog's Cyclopaedia*, that *Bertheau* acts very arbitrarily when he represents Gideon as setting up the image of a bull, as Jeroboam did afterwards, since there is nothing to sustain it in the account itself. Why cannot Gideon have worshipped without any image of Jehovah, with the help of the altar mentioned in Judg 6:24, which was a symbol of Jehovah's presence, and remained standing till the historian's own time?)

The expression which follows, '*otow* (OT:853) *wayatseeg* (OT:3322), does not affirm that "he set it up," but may

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

also mean, "*he kept it in his city of Ophrah.*" *hitsiyg* is never used to denote the setting up of an image or statue, and signifies not only to put up, but also to lay down (e.g., Judg 6:37), and to let a thing stand, or leave behind (Gen 33:15). The further remark of the historian, "*and all Israel went thither a whoring after it, and it became a snare to Gideon and his house,*" does not presuppose the founding of a sanctuary or temple in Ophrah, and the setting up of a golden calf there. In what the whoring of Israel after the ephod, i.e., the idolatry of the Israelites with Gideon's ephod which was kept in Ophrah, consisted, cannot be gathered or determined from the use of the ephod in the worship of Jehovah under the Mosaic law. "The breastplate upon the coat, and the holy lot, were no doubt used in connection with idolatry" (*Oehler*), and Gideon had an ephod made in his town of Ophrah, that he might thereby obtain revelations from the Lord. We certainly are not for a moment to think of an exposure of the holy coat for the people to worship.

It is far more probable that Gideon put on the ephod and wore it as a priest, when he wished to inquire and learn the will of the Lord. It is possible that he also sacrificed to the Lord upon the altar that was built at Ophrah (Judg 6:24). The motive by which he was led to do this was certainly not merely ambition, as *Bertheau* supposes, impelling the man who, along with his followers, and maintained an independent attitude towards the tribe of Ephraim in the war itself (Judg 8:1ff.), to act independently of the common sanctuary of the congregation which was within the territory of Ephraim, and also of the office of the high priest in the time of peace as well. For there is not the slightest trace to be found of such ambition as this in anything that he did during the conflict with the Midianites. The germs of Gideon's error, which became a snare to him and to his house, lie unquestionably deeper than this, namely, in the fact that the high-priesthood had probably lost its worth in the eyes of the people on account of the worthlessness of its representatives, so that they no longer regarded the high priest as the sole or principal medium of divine revelation; and therefore Gideon, to whom the Lord had manifested himself directly, as He had not to any judge or leader of the people since the time of Joshua, might suppose that he was not acting in violation of the

law, when he had an ephod made, and thus provided himself with a substratum or vehicle for inquiring the will of the Lord. His sin therefore consisted chiefly in his invading the prerogative of the *Aaronic* priesthood, drawing away the people from the one legitimate sanctuary, and thereby not only undermining the theocratic unity of Israel, but also giving an impetus to the relapse of the nation into the worship of Baal after his death. This sin became a snare to him and to his house.

Judges 8:28-32

Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more. And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon.

The history of Gideon is concluded in vv. 28-32. - V. 28. The Midianites had been so humiliated that they lifted up their head no more, and the land of Israel had rest forty years *"in the days of Gideon,"* i.e., as long as Gideon lived.

Verse 29-31. Before the account of his death, a few other notices respecting his family are introduced for the purpose of preparing the way for the following history of the doings of his sons, in which the sin of Gideon came to a head, and the judgment burst upon his house. *"And Jerubbaal, the son of Joash, went and dwelt in his house."* Both the word *wayeelek*^a (OT:3212), which simply serves to bring out the fact more vividly (see the remarks on Ex 2:1), and also the choice of the name *Jerubbaal*, merely serve to give greater prominence to the change, from the heat of the war against the Midianites to the quiet retirement of domestic life. Instead of accepting

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

the crown that was offered him and remaining at the head of the nation, the celebrated Baal-fighter retired into private life again. In addition to the seventy sons of his many wives, there was a son born to him by a concubine, who lived at Shechem and is called his maid-servant in Judg 9:18, and to this son he gave the name of *Abimelech*, i.e., king's father. '*et-sh^amow wayaasem*' is not the same as '*et-sh^amow qaaraa*', to give a person a name, but signifies to add a name, or give a surname (see Neh 9:7, and Dan 5:12 in the Chaldee). It follows from this, that Abimelech received this name from Gideon as a cognomen answering to his character, and therefore not at the time of his birth, but when he grew up and manifested such qualities as led to the expectation that he would be a king's father.

Verse 32. Gideon died at a good old age (see Gen 15:15; 25:8), and therefore also died a peaceful death (not so his sons; see ch. 9), and was buried in his father's grave at Ophrah (Judg 6:11).

Judges 8:33-35

And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baalberith their god.

Vv. 33-35 form the introduction to the history of Gideon's sons.

Verse 33. After Gideon's death the Israelites fell once more into the Baal-worship which Gideon had rooted out of his father's city (Judg 6:25ff.), and worshipped *Baal-berith* as their God. *Baal-berith*, the covenant Baal (equivalent to *el-berith*, the covenant god, Judg 9:46), is not Baal as the god of covenants, but, according to Gen 14:13, Baal as a god in covenant, i.e., Baal with whom they had made a covenant, just as the Israelites had their faithful covenant God in Jehovah (see

Movers , Phöniz. i. p. 171). The worship of Baal-berith, as performed at Shechem according to Judg 9:46, was an imitation of the worship of Jehovah, an adulteration of that worship, in which Baal was put in the place of Jehovah (see *Hengstenberg* , Dissertations on the Pentateuch, vol. ii. p. 81).

Verse 34,35. In this relapse into the worship of Baal they not only forgot Jehovah, their Deliverer from all their foes, but also the benefits which they owed to Gideon, and showed no kindness to his house in return for all the good which he had shown to Israel. The expression *Jerubbaal-Gideon* is chosen by the historian here, not for the purely outward purpose of laying express emphasis upon the identity of Gideon and Jerubbaal (*Bertheau*), but to point to what Gideon, the Baal-fighter, had justly deserved from the people of Israel.

Judgment upon the House of Gideon, or Abimelech's Sins and End. Ch. 9.

After the death of Gideon, Abimelech, his bastard son, opened a way for himself to reign as king over Israel, by murdering his brethren with the help of the Shechemites (vv. 1-6). For this grievous wrong Jotham, the only one of Gideon's seventy sons who escaped the massacre, reproached the citizens of Shechem in a parable, in which he threatened them with punishment from God (vv. 7-21), which first of all fell upon Shechem within a very short time (vv. 22-49), and eventually reached Abimelech himself (vv. 50-57).

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 9:1-6

And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem unto his mother's brethren, and communed with them, and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying,

Verse 1-2. Having gone to Shechem, the home of his mother (Judg 8:31), Abimelech applied to his mother's brothers and the whole family (all the relations) of the father's house of his mother, and addressed them thus: "***Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the lords of Shechem,***" i.e., speak to them publicly and solemnly. *sh^akem* (OT:7926) *ba`aleey* (OT:1167), the lords, i.e., the possessors or citizens of Shechem (compare v. 46 with v. 49, where *mig^adaal* (OT:4026) *ba`aleey* (OT:1167) is interchangeable with *mig^adaal* (OT:4026) *'an^asheey* (OT:376); also Judg 20:5, and Josh 24:11): they are not merely Canaanitish citizens, of whom there were some still living in Shechem according to v. 28, but all the citizens of the town; therefore chiefly Israelites. "*What is better for you, that seventy men rule over you, all the sons of Jerubbaal, or (only) one man* (i.e., Abimelech)? *and remember that I am your flesh and bone*" (blood relation, Gen 29:14). The name "sons of Jerubbaal," i.e., of the man who had destroyed the altar of Baal, was just as little adapted to commend the sons of Gideon to the Shechemites, who were devoted to the worship of Baal, as the remark that seventy men were to rule over them. No such rule ever existed, or was even aspired to by the seventy sons of Gideon. But Abimelech assumed that his brothers possessed the same thirst for ruling as he did himself; and the citizens of Shechem might be all the more ready to put faith in his assertions, since the distinction which Gideon had enjoyed was thoroughly adapted to secure a prominent place in the nation for his sons.

Verse 3. When his mother's brethren spake to the citizens of Shechem concerning him, i.e., respecting him and his proposal, their heart turned to Abimelech.

Verse 4-5. They gave him seventy shekels of silver from the house of Baal-berith, i.e., from the treasury of the temple that was dedicated to the covenant Baal at Shechem, as temple treasures were frequently applied to political purposes (see 1 Kings 15:18). With this money Abimelech easily hired light and desperate men, who followed him (attached themselves to him); and with their help he murdered his brethren at Ophrah, seventy men, with the exception of Jotham the youngest, who had hidden himself. The number seventy, the total number of his brethren, is reduced by the exception mentioned immediately afterwards to sixty-nine who were really put to death. *reeyq* (OT:7386), *empty*, i.e., without moral restraint. *pocheez lit.* gurgling up, boiling over; figuratively, *hot, desperate men*. "Upon (against) *one stone*," that is to say, by a formal execution: a bloody omen of the kingdom of ten tribes, which was afterwards founded at Shechem by the Ephraimite Jeroboam, in which one dynasty overthrew another, and generally sought to establish its power by exterminating the whole family of the dynasty that had been overthrown (see 1 Kings 15:27ff., 2 Kings 10:1ff.). Even in Judah, Athaliah the worshipper of Baal sought to usurp the government by exterminating the whole of the descendants of her son (2 Kings 11). Such fratricides have also occurred in quite recent times in the Mohammedan countries of the East.

Verse 6. **"Then all the citizens of Shechem assembled together, and all the house of Millo, and made Abimelech king at the memorial terebinth at Shechem."** **Millo** is unquestionably the name of the castle or citadel of the town of Shechem, which is called the tower of Shechem in vv. 46-49. The word *Millo* (Chaldee *mileeytaa'*) signifies primarily a rampart, inasmuch as it consisted of two walls, with the space between them filled with rubbish. There was also a *Millo* at Jerusalem (2 Sam 5:9; 1 Kings 9:15). "*All the house of Millo*" are all the inhabitants of the castle, the same persons who are described in v. 46 as "all the men (*baale*) of the tower." The meaning of *mutsaab* (OT:5324) '*eelown* (OT:436) is doubtful. *mutsaab* (OT:5324), the thing set up, is a military

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

post in Isa 29:3; but it may also mean a monument of memorial, and here it probably denotes the large stone set up as a memorial at Shechem under the oak or terebinth (see Gen 35:4). The inhabitants of Shechem, the worshippers of Baal-berith, carried out the election of Abimelech as king in the very same place in which Joshua had held the last national assembly, and had renewed the covenant of Israel with Jehovah the true covenant God (Josh 24:1,25-26). It was there in all probability that the temple of Baal-berith was to be found, namely, according to v. 46, near the tower of Shechem or the citadel of Millo.

Judges 9:7-15

And when they told it to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice, and cried, and said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you.

When Jotham, who had escaped after the murder, was told of the election which had taken place, he went to the top of Mount Gerizim, which rises as a steep wall of rock to the height of about 800 feet above the valley of Shechem on the south side of the city (*Rob.* iii. p. 96), and cried with a loud voice, "*Hearken to me, ye lords of Shechem, and God will also hearken to you.*" After this appeal, which calls to mind the language of the prophets, he uttered aloud a fable of the trees which wanted to anoint a king over them—a fable of true prophetic significance, and the earliest with which we are acquainted (vv. 8-15). To the appeal which is made to them in succession to become king over the trees, the olive tree, the fig tree, and the vine all reply: Shall we give up our calling, to bear valuable fruits for the good and enjoyment of God and men, and soar above the other trees?

The briar, however, to which the trees turn last of all, is delighted at the unexpected honour that is offered it, and says, "*Will ye in truth anoint me king over you? Then come and trust in my shadow; but if not, let fire go out of the briar and consume*

the cedars of Lebanon." The rare form *m^alowkaah* (*Chethib* , vv. 8, 12) also occurs in 1 Sam 28:8; Isa 32:11; Ps 26:2: see *Ewald* , §228, *b.*). *maal^akiy* (OT:4427) (v. 10) is also rare (see *Ewald* , §226, *b.*). The form *hechaadal^atiy* (OT:2308) (vv. 9, 11, 13), which is quite unique, is not "*Hophal* or *Hiphil* , compounded of *hehaachaad'* or *heheched'* " (*Ewald* , §51, *c.*), for neither the *Hophal* nor the *Hiphil* of *chaadal* (OT:2308) occurs anywhere else; but it is a simple *Kal* , and the obscure *o* sound is chosen instead of the *a* sound for the sake of euphony, i.e., to assist the pronunciation of the guttural syllables which follow one after another.

The meaning of the fable is very easy to understand. The olive tree, fig tree, and vine do not represent different historical persons, such as the judges Othniel, Deborah, and Gideon, as the Rabbins affirm, but in a perfectly general way the nobler families or persons who bring forth fruit and blessing in the calling appointed them by God, and promote the prosperity of the people and kingdom in a manner that is well-pleasing to God and men. Oil, figs, and wine were the most valuable productions of the land of Canaan, whereas the briar was good for nothing but to burn. The noble fruit-trees would not tear themselves from the soil in which they had been planted and had borne fruit, to soar (*nuwa`* (OT:5128), float about) above the trees, i.e., not merely to rule over the trees, but *obire et circumagi in rebus eorum curandis*. *nuwa`* (OT:5128) includes the idea of restlessness and insecurity of existence.

The explanation given in the *Berleb.* Bible, "We have here what it is to be a king, to reign or be lord over many others, namely, very frequently to do nothing else than float about in such restlessness and distraction of thoughts,

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

feelings, and desires, that very little good or sweet fruit ever falls to the ground," if not a truth without exception so far as royalty is concerned, is at all events perfectly true in relation to what Abimelech aimed at and attained, to be a king by the will of the people and not by the grace of God. Wherever the Lord does not found the monarchy, or the king himself does not lay the foundations of his government in God and the grace of God, he is never anything but a tree, moving about above other trees without a firm root in a fruitful soil, utterly unable to bear fruit to the glory of God and the good of men. The expression "*all the trees*" is to be carefully noticed in v. 14. "*All the trees*" say to the briar, Be king over us, whereas in the previous verse only "*the trees*" are mentioned.

This implies that of all the trees not one was willing to be king himself, but that they were unanimous in transferring the honour to the briar. The briar, which has nothing but thorns upon it, and does not even cast sufficient shadow for any one to lie down in its shadow and protect himself from the burning heat of the sun, is an admirable simile for a worthless man, who can do nothing but harm. The words of the briar, "*Trust in my shadow,*" seek refuge there, contain a deep irony, the truth of which the Shechemites were very soon to discover. "*And if not,*" i.e., if ye do not find the protection you expect, fire will go out of the briar and consume the cedars of Lebanon, the largest and noblest trees. Thorns easily catch fire (see Ex 22:5). The most insignificant and most worthless man can be the cause of harm to the mightiest and most distinguished.

Judges 9:16-20

Now therefore, if ye have done truly and sincerely, in that ye have made Abimelech king, and if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands;

In vv. 16-20 Jotham gives the application of his fable, for there was no necessity

for any special explanation of it, since it was perfectly clear and intelligible in itself. These verses form a long period, the first half of which is so extended by the insertion of parentheses introduced as explanations (vv. 17, 18), that the commencement of it (v.

16) is taken up again in v. 19a for the purpose of attaching the apodosis. *"If ye have acted in truth and sincerity, and (i.e., when he) made Abimelech king; if ye have done well to Jerubbaal and his house, and if ye have done to him according to the doing of his hands...as my father fought for you...but ye have risen up to-day against my father's house, and have slain...if (I say) ye have acted in truth and sincerity to Jerubbaal and his house this day: then rejoice in Abimelech...."* **nap^ashow** (OT:5315) **hish^alyk^a** (OT:7993), to throw away his life, i.e., expose to death. **mineged** (OT:5048), *"from before him,"* serves to strengthen the **hish^alyk^a** (OT:7993).

Jotham imputes the slaying of his brothers to the citizens of Shechem, as a crime which they themselves had committed (v. 18), because they had given Abimelech money out of their temple of Baal to carry out his designs against the sons of Jerubbaal (v. 4). In this reproach he had, strictly speaking, already pronounced sentence upon their doings. When, therefore, he proceeds still further in v. 19, "If ye have acted in truth towards Jerubbaal...then rejoice," etc., this turn contains the bitterest scorn at the faithlessness manifested towards Jerubbaal. In that case nothing could follow but the fulfilment of the threat and the bursting forth of the fire. In carrying out this point the application goes beyond the actual meaning of the parable itself. Not only will fire go forth from Abimelech and consume the lords of Shechem and the inhabitants of Millo, but fire will also go forth from them and devour Abimelech himself. The fulfilment of this threat was not long delayed, as the following history shows (vv. 23ff.).

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 9:21

And Jotham ran away, and fled, and went to Beer, and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother.

But Jotham fled to *Beer*, after charging the Shechemites with their iniquity, and dwelt there before his brother Abimelech ("before," i.e., "for fear of." - *Jerome*). *Beer* in all probability is not the same place as *Beeroth* in the tribe of Benjamin (Josh 9:17), but, according to the *Onom.* (s. v. *Beera'*), a place eight Roman miles to the north of Eleutheropolis, situated in the plain; at present a desolate village called *el Bîreh*, near the mouth of Wady es Surâr, not far from the former Beth-shemesh (*Rob. Pal. ii. p. 132*).

Judges 9:22-24

When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel,

Abimelech's reign lasted three years. *wayaasar* (OT:7786), from *suwr* (OT:7786) to govern, is used intentionally, as it appears, in the place of *wayim^alok^a* (OT:4427), because Abimelech's government was not a monarchical reign, but simply a tyrannical despotism. "*Over Israel*," that is to say, not over the whole of the twelve tribes of Israel, but only over a portion of the nation, possibly the tribes of Ephraim and half Manasseh, which acknowledged his sway.

Verse 23-24. Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem, so that they became treacherous towards him. "*An evil spirit*" is not merely "an evil disposition," but an evil demon, which produced discord and strife, just as an evil spirit came upon Saul (1 Sam 16:14-15; 18:10); not Satan himself, but a supernatural spiritual power which was under his influence. This evil spirit

God sent to punish the wickedness of Abimelech and the Shechemites. *Elohim* , not *Jehovah* , because the working of the divine justice is referred to here. "*That the wickedness to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood* (the blood of these sons that had been shed), *to lay it upon Abimelech.*" "*And their blood*" is only a more precise definition of "the wickedness to the seventy sons;" and "*to lay it*" is an explanation of the expression "might come." The introduction of *laasuwm* (OT:7760), however, brings an *anakolouthon* into the construction, since the transitive *suwm* (OT:7760) presupposes *Elohim* as the subject and *daamaam* (OT:1818) as the object, whereas the parallel *chamac* (OT:2555) is the subject to the intransitive *laabow'* (OT:935): that the wickedness might come, and that God might lay the blood not only upon Abimelech, the author of the crime, but also upon the lords of Shechem, who had strengthened his hands to slay his brethren; had supported him by money, that he might be able to hire worthless fellows to execute his crime (vv. 4, 5).

Judges 9:25-29

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

And the men of Shechem set liers in wait for him in the top of the mountains, and they robbed all that came along that way by them: and it was told Abimelech.

The faithlessness of the Shechemites towards Abimelech commenced by their placing liers in wait for him (*low* (OT:3807a), *dat. incomm.* , to his disadvantage) upon the tops of the mountains (Ebal and Gerizim, between which Shechem was situated), who plundered every one who passed by them on the road. In what way they did harm to Abimelech by sending out liers in wait to plunder the passers-by, is not very clear from the brevity of the narrative. The general effect may have been, that they brought his government into discredit with the people by organizing a system of robbery and plunder, and thus aroused a spirit of discontent and rebellion. Possibly, however, these highway robbers were to watch for Abimelech himself, if he should come to Shechem, not only to plunder him, but, if possible, to despatch him altogether. This was made known to Abimelech. But before he had put down the brigandage, the treachery broke out into open rebellion.

Verse 26. Gaal, the son of Ebed, came to Shechem with his brethren. *`aabar* (OT:5674) with *b^a* , to pass over into a place. Who Gaal was, and whence he came, we are not informed. Many of the MSS and early editions, e.g., the Syriac and Arabic, read "son of Eber," instead of "son of Ebed." Judging from his appearance in Shechem, he was a knight-errant, who went about the country with his brethren, i.e., as captain of a company of freebooters, and was welcomed in Shechem, because the Shechemites, who were dissatisfied with the rule of Abimelech, hoped to find in him a man who would be able to render them good service in their revolt from Abimelech. This may be gathered from the words "*and the lords of Shechem trusted in him.*"

Verse 27. At the vintage they prepared *hiluwliym* (OT:1974), "praise-offerings," with the grapes which they had gathered and pressed, eating and drinking in the

house of their god, i.e., the temple of Baal-berith, and cursing Abimelech at these sacrificial meals, probably when they were excited with wine. *hiluwliym* (OT:1974) signifies, according to Lev 19:24, praise-offerings of the fruits which newly-planted orchards or vineyards bore in the fourth years. The presentation of these fruits, by which the vineyard or orchard was sanctified to the Lord, was associated, as we may learn from the passage before us, with sacrificial meals. The Shechemites held a similar festival in the temple of their covenant Baal, and in his honour, to that which the law prescribes for the Israelites in Lev 19:23-25.

Verse 28,29. At this feast Gaal called upon the Shechemites to revolt from Abimelech. *"Who is Abimelech,"* he exclaimed, *"and who Shechem, that we serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal, and Zebul his officer? Serve the men of Hamor, the father of Shechem! and why should we, we serve him (Abimelech)?"* The meaning of these words, which have been misinterpreted in several different ways, is very easily seen, if we bear in mind (1) that *miy* (OT:4310) (who is?) in this double question cannot possibly be used in two different and altogether opposite senses, such as "how insignificant or contemptible is Abimelech," and "how great and mighty is Shechem," but that in both instances it must be expressive of disparagement and contempt, as in 1 Sam 25:10; and (2) that Gaal answers his own questions. Abimelech was regarded by him as contemptible, not because he was the son of a maid-servant or of very low birth, nor because he was ambitious and cruel, a patricide and the murderer of his brethren (*Rosenmüller*), but because he was a son of Jerubbaal, a son of the man who destroyed the altar of Baal at Shechem and restored the worship of Jehovah, for which the Shechemites themselves had endeavoured to slay him (Judg 6:27ff.). So also the meaning of the question, Who is Shechem? may be gathered from the answer, "and Zebul his officer."

The use of the personal *miy* (OT:4310) (how) in relation to Shechem may be explained on the ground that Gaal is speaking not so much of the city as of its inhabitants. The might and greatness of Shechem did not consist in the

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

might and authority of its prefect, Zebul, who had been appointed by Abimelech, and whom the Shechemites had no need to serve. Accordingly there is no necessity either for the arbitrary paraphrase of Shechem, given in the *Sept.*, viz., *uhio's* (NT:5207) *Suche'm* (NT:4966) (son of Shechem); or for the perfectly arbitrary assumption of *Bertheau*, that Shechem is only a second name for Abimelech, who was a descendant of Shechem; or even for the solution proposed by *Rosenmüller*, that Zebul was "a man of low birth and obscure origin," which is quite incapable of proof. To Zebul, that one man whom Abimelech had appointed prefect of the city, Gaal opposes "*the men of Hamor, the father of Shechem,*" as those whom the Shechemites should serve (i.e., whose followers they should be). *Hamor* was the name of the Hivite prince who had founded the city of Shechem (Gen 33:19; 34:2; compare Josh 24:32). The "men of Hamor" were the patricians of the city, who "derived their origin from the noblest and most ancient stock of Hamor" (*Rosenmüller*). Gaal opposes them to Abimelech and his representative Zebul.

(Note: **Bertheau** maintains, though quite erroneously, that serving the men of Hamor is synonymous with serving Abimelech. But the very opposite of this is so clearly implied in the words, that there cannot be any doubt on the question. All that can be gathered from the words is that there were remnants of the Hivite (or Canaanitish) population still living in Shechem, and therefore that the Canaanites had not been entirely exterminated—a fact which would sufficiently explain the revival of the worship of Baal there.)

In the last clause, "*why should we serve him*" (Abimelech or his officer Zebul)? Gaal identifies himself with the inhabitants of Shechem, that he may gain them fully over to his plans.

Verse 29. "**O that this people,**" continued Gaal, "*were in my hand,*" i.e., could I but rule over the inhabitants of Shechem, "*then would I remove* (drive away) *Abimelech.*" He then exclaimed with regard to Abimelech (*l' 'aamar* (OT:559), as in v. 54b, Gen 20:13, etc.), "*Increase thine army and come out!*" Heated as he was with wine, Gaal was so certain of victory that he challenged Abimelech boldly to make war upon Shechem. *rabeh* (OT:7235), imper. *Piel* with *Seghol*. *tsee'aah*

(OT:3318), imperative, with *aa-h* of motion or emphasis.

Judges 9:30-31

And when Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled.

This rebellious speech of Gaal was reported to Abimelech by the town-prefect Zebul, who sent messengers to him *b^ataar^amaah* (OT:8649), either with deceit (*taar^amaah* (OT:8649) from *raamaah* (OT:7311)), i.e., employing deceit, inasmuch as he had listened to the speech quietly and with apparent assent, or "*in Tormah*," the name of a place, *taar^amaah* (OT:8649) being a misspelling for *'rmh* = *'aruwmaah* (OT:725) (v. 41). The *Sept.* and *Chaldee* take the word as an appellative = *en* (NT:1722) *krufee'* (NT:2931), secretly; so also do *Rashi* and most of the earlier commentators, whilst *R. Kimchi* the elder has decided in favour of the second rendering as a proper name. As the word only occurs here, it is impossible to decide with certainty in favour of either view. *tsaariym* (OT:6696) *hinaam* (OT:2009), behold they stir up the city against thee (*tsaariym* (OT:6696) from *tsuwr* (OT:6698) in the sense of *tsaarar* (OT:6887)).

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 9:32-33

Now therefore up by night, thou and the people that is with thee, and lie in wait in the field:

At the same time he called upon Abimelech to draw near, with the people that he had with him, during the night, and to lie in wait in the field (*'aarab* (OT:693), to place one's self in ambush), and the next morning to spread out with his army against the town; and when Gaal went out with his followers, he was to do to him "as his hand should find," i.e., to deal with him as he best could and would under the circumstances. (On this formula, see at 1 Sam 10:7; 25:8 .)

Judges 9:34

And Abimelech rose up, and all the people that were with him, by night, and they laid wait against Shechem in four companies.

On receiving this intelligence, Abimelech rose up during the night with the people that were with him, i.e., with such troops as he had, and placed four companies ("heads" as in Judg 7:16) in ambush against Shechem.

Judges 9:35-36

And Gaal the son of Ebed went out, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and Abimelech rose up, and the people that were with him, from lying in wait.

When Gaal went out in the morning with his retinue upon some enterprise, which

is not more clearly defined, and stood before the city gate, Abimelech rose up with his army out of the ambush. On seeing this people, Gaal said to Zebul (who must therefore have come out of the city with him): "***Behold, people come down from the tops of the mountains.***" Zebul replied, for the purpose of deceiving him and making him feel quite secure, "*Thou lookest upon the shadow of the mountains as men.*"

Judges 9:37

And Gaal spake again and said, See there come people down by the middle of the land, and another company come along by the plain of Meonenim.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

But Gaal said again, "*Behold, people come down from the navel of the land,*" i.e., from the highest point of the surrounding country, "*and a crowd comes by the way of the wizard's terebinths,*" - a place in the neighbourhood of Shechem that is not mentioned anywhere else, and therefore is not more precisely known.

Judges 9:38

Then said Zebul unto him, Where is now thy mouth, wherewith thou saidst, Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him? is not this the people that thou hast despised? go out, I pray now, and fight with them.

Then Zebul declared openly against Gaal, and reproached him with his foolhardy speech, whilst Abimelech was drawing nearer with his troops: "*Where is thy mouth now with which thou saidst, Who is Abimelech? Is not this the people that thou hast despised? Go out now and fight with him!*"

Judges 9:39-40

And Gaal went out before the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech.

Then Gaal went out "before the citizens of Shechem;" i.e., not at their head as their leaders, which is the meaning of *lip^aneey* (OT:6440) in Gen 33:3; Ex 13:21; Num 10:35, etc. - for, according to vv. 33-35, Gaal had only gone out of the town with his own retinue, and, according to vv. 42, 43, the people of Shechem did not go out till the next day-but "in the sight of the lords of Shechem," so that they looked upon the battle. But the battle ended unfortunately for him. Abimelech put him to flight (*raadap* (OT:7291) as in Lev 26:36), and there fell many slain up to the gate of the city, into which Gaal had fled with his followers.

Judges 9:41

And Abimelech dwelt at Arumah: and Zebul thrust out Gaal and his brethren, that they should not dwell in Shechem.

Abimelech did not force his way into the city, but remained (*yeesheb* (OT:3427), *lit.* sat down) with his army in *Arumah* , a place not mentioned again, which was situated, according to v. 42, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Shechem. It cannot possibly have been the place called *Chouma' hee kai' A'rima* in the *Onom.* of *Eusebius* , which was named *Che'mfis* in his day, and was situated in the neighbourhood of Diospolis (or Lydda). Zebul, however, drove Gaal and his brethren (i.e., his retinue) out of Shechem.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 9:42-43

And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people went out into the field; and they told Abimelech.

The next day the people of Shechem went into the field, apparently not to make war upon Abimelech, but to work in the field, possibly to continue the vintage. But when Abimelech was informed of it, he divided the people, i.e., his own men, into three companies, which he placed in ambush in the field, and then fell upon the Shechemites when they had come out of the city, and slew them.

Judges 9:44

And Abimelech, and the company that was with him, rushed forward, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and the two other companies ran upon all the people that were in the fields, and slew them.

That is to say, Abimelech and the companies with him spread themselves out and took their station by the city gate to cut off the retreat of the Shechemites into the city, whilst the other two companies fell upon all who were in the field, and slew them.

Judges 9:45

And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt.

Thus Abimelech fought all that day against the city and took it; and having slain all

the people therein, he destroyed the city and strewed salt upon it. Strewing the ruined city with salt, which only occurs here, was a symbolical act, signifying that the city was to be turned for ever into a barren salt desert. Salt ground is a barren desert (see Job 39:6; Ps 107:34).

Judges 9:46-49

And when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard that, they entered into an hold of the house of the

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

And when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard that, they entered into an hold of the house of the god Berith.

When the inhabitants of the castle of Shechem ("lords of the tower of Shechem" = "all the house of Millo," v. 6) heard of the fate of the town of Shechem, they betook themselves to the hold of the house (temple) of the covenant god (Baal-berith), evidently not for the purpose of defending themselves there, but to seek safety at the sanctuary of their god from fear of the vengeance of Abimelech, towards whom they also had probably acted treacherously. The meaning of the word *tsariyach* (OT:6877), which answers to an Arabic word signifying *arx*, *palatium*, *omnis structura elatior*, cannot be exactly determined, as it only occurs again in 1 Sam 13:6 in connection with caves and clefts of the rock. According to v. 49, it had a roof which could be set on fire. The meaning "tower" is only a conjecture founded upon the context, and does not suit, as *tsariyach* (OT:6877) is distinguished from *mig^adaal* (OT:4026).

Verse 47-49. As soon as this was announced to Abimelech, he went with all his men to Mount Zalmon, took hatchets in his hand, cut down branches from the trees, and laid them upon his shoulders, and commanded his people to do the same. These branches they laid upon the hold, and set the hold on fire over them (the inhabitants of the tower who had taken refuge there), so that all the people of the tower of Shechem (about one thousand persons) perished, both men and women. Mount *Zalmon*, which is mentioned again in Ps 68:15, was a dark, thickly-wooded mountain near Shechem—a kind of "Black Forest," as *Luther* has rendered the name. The plural *kardumoth*, "axes," may be explained on the ground that Abimelech took axes not only for himself but for his people also. *maah* (OT:4100) in a relative sense, as in Num 23:3 (see *Ewald*, §331, *b.*).

Judges 9:50-57

Then went Abimelech to Thebez, and encamped against Thebez, and took it.

At length the fate predicted by Jotham (v. 20) overtook Abimelech.

Verse 50-54. He went from Shechem to Thebez, besieged the town, and took it. *Thebez*, according to the *Onom.* thirteen miles from Neapolis (Shechem) on the road to Scythopolis (Beisan), has been preserved in the large village of *Tubâs* on the north of Shechem (see *Rob. Pal.* iii. p. 156, and *Bibl. Res.* p. 305). This town possessed a strong tower, in which men and women and all the inhabitants of the town took refuge and shut themselves in. But when Abimelech advanced to the tower and drew near to the door to set it on fire, a woman threw a millstone down upon him from the roof of the tower and smashed his skull, whereupon he called hastily to the attendant who carried his weapons to give him his death-blow with his sword, that men might not say of him "a woman slew him." *rekeb* (OT:7393) *pelach* (OT:6400), the upper millstone which was turned round, *lapis vector* (see Deut 24:6). *taariyts* (OT:7323): from *raatsats* (OT:7533), with a toneless *i*, possibly to distinguish it from *wataarets* (OT:7533) (from *ruwts* (OT:7323)). *gul^agal^atow* (OT:1538), an unusual form for *gul^agaal^atow* (OT:1538), which is found in the edition of *Norzi* (Mantua, 1742).

Verse 55-57. After the death of Abimelech his army was dissolved. *yis^araa'eel* (OT:3478) *'iysh* (OT:376) are the Israelites who formed Abimelech's army. In vv. 56, 57, the historian closes this account with the remark, that in this manner God recompensed Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem, who had supported him in the murder of his brothers (v. 2), according to their doings. After the word "*rendered*" in v. 56 we must supply "upon his head," as

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

in v. 57. Thus Jotham's curse was fulfilled upon Abimelech and upon the Shechemites, who had made him king.

The Judges Tola and Jair. Ch. 10:1-5.

Judges 10:1-5

And after Abimelech there arose to defend Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in mount Ephraim.

Of these two judges no particular deeds are mentioned, no doubt because they performed none.

Verse 1-2. **Tola** arose after Abimelech's death to deliver Israel, and judged Israel twenty-three years until his death, though certainly not all the Israelites of the twelve tribes, but only the northern and possibly also the eastern tribes, to the exclusion of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin, as these southern tribes neither took part in Gideon's war of freedom nor stood under Abimelech's rule. To explain the clause "*there arose to defend (or save) Israel,*" when nothing had been said about any fresh oppression on the part of the foe, we need not assume, as *Rosenmüller* does, "that the Israelites had been constantly harassed by their neighbours, who continued to suppress the liberty of the Israelites, and from whose stratagems or power the Israelites were delivered by the acts of Tola;" but Tola rose up as the deliverer of Israel, even supposing that he simply regulated the affairs of the tribes who acknowledged him as their supreme judge, and succeeded by his efforts in preventing the nation from falling back into idolatry, and thus guarded Israel from any fresh oppression on the part of hostile nations. *Tola* was the son of *Puah*, the son of *Dodo*, of the tribe of Issachar. The names *Tola* and *Puah* are already met with among the descendants of Issachar, as founders of families of the tribes of

Issachar (see Gen 46:13; Num 26:23, where the latter name is written *puuwaah* (OT:6312)), and they were afterwards repeated in the different households of these families. *Dodo* is not an appellative, as the *Sept.* translators supposed (*uhio's patrade'lfou autou'*), but a proper name, as in 2 Sam 23:9 (*Keri*), 24, and 1 Chron 11:12. The town of *Shamir* , upon the mountains of Ephraim, where Tola judged Israel, and was afterwards buried, was a different place from the *Shamir* upon the mountains of Judah, mentioned in Josh 15:48, and its situation (probably in the territory of Issachar) is still unknown.

Verse 3-5. After him *Jair* the Gileadite (born in Gilead) judged Israel for twenty-two years. Nothing further is related of him than that he had thirty sons who rode upon thirty asses, which was a sign of distinguished rank in those times when the Israelites had no horses. They had thirty cities (the second *`ayaariym* (OT:5895) in v. 4 is another form for *`aariym* (OT:5892), from a singular *`ayir* (OT:5895) = *`iyr* (OT:5892), a city, and is chosen because of its similarity in sound to *`ayaariym* (OT:5895), asses). These cities they were accustomed to call *Havvoth-jair* unto this day (the time when our book was written), in the land of Gilead. The *laahem* (OT:3807a) before *yiq^ruw* (OT:7121) is placed first for the sake of emphasis, "even these they call," etc. This statement is not at variance with the fact, that in the time of Moses the Manassite *Jair* gave the name of *Havvoth-jair* to the towns of Bashan which had been conquered by him (Num 32:41; Deut 3:14); for it is not affirmed here, that the thirty cities which belonged to the sons of *Jair* received this name for the first time from the judge *Jair*, but simply that this name was brought into use again by the sons of *Jair*, and was applied to these cities in a peculiar sense. (For further remarks on the *Havvoth-jair* , see at Deut 3:14.) The situation of *Camon* , where *Jair* was buried, is altogether uncertain.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Josephus (Ant. v. 6, 6) calls it a city of Gilead, though probably only on account of the assumption, that it would not be likely that Jair the Gileadite, who possessed so many cities in Gilead, should be buried outside Gilead. But this assumption is a very questionable one. As Jair judged Israel after Tola the Issacharite, the assumption is a more natural one, that he lived in Canaan proper. Yet *Reland* (Pal. ill. p. 679) supports the opinion that it was in Gilead, and adduces the fact that *Polybius* (Hist. v. 70, 12) mentions a town called *Camou'n*, by the side of Pella and Gefrun, as having been taken by Antiochus. On the other hand, *Eusebius* and *Jerome* (in the *Onom.*) regard our *Camon* as being the same as the *koo'mee Kammoona' en too' mega'loo pedi'oo*, six Roman miles to the north of *Legio* (*Lejun*), on the way to Ptolemais, which would be in the plain of Jezreel or Esdraelon. This is no doubt applicable to the *Cuamoo'n* of Judith 7:3; but whether it also applies to our *Camon* cannot be decided, as the town is not mentioned again.

3. Period of Oppression by the Ammonites and Philistines. Ch. 10:6-16.

The third stage in the period of the judges, which extended from the death of Jair to the rise of Samuel as a prophet, was a time of deep humiliation for Israel, since the Lord gave up His people into the hands of two hostile nations at the same time, on account of their repeated return to idolatry; so that the Ammonites invaded the land from the east, and oppressed the Israelites severely for eighteen years, especially the tribes to the east of the Jordan; whilst the Philistines came from the west, and extended their dominion over the tribes on this side, and brought them more and more firmly under their yoke. It is true that Jephthah delivered his people from the oppression of the Ammonites, in the power of the Spirit of Jehovah, having first of all secured the help of God through a vow, and not only smote the Ammonites, but completely subdued them before the Israelites. But the Philistine oppression lasted forty years; for although Samson inflicted heavy blows upon the Philistines again and again, and made them feel the superior power of the God of Israel, he was nevertheless not in condition to destroy their power and rule over Israel. This was

left for Samuel to accomplish, after he had converted the people to the Lord their God.

Israel's Renewed Apostasy and Consequent Punishment. Ch. 10:6-18.

Judges 10:6-18

And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served not him.

Verse 6-18. As the Israelites forsook the Lord their God again, and served the gods of the surrounding nations, the Lord gave them up to the power of the Philistines and Ammonites, and left them to groan for eighteen years under the severe oppression of the Ammonites, till they cried to Him in their distress, and He sent them deliverance through Jephthah, though not till He had first of all charged them with their sins, and they had put away the strange gods. This section forms the introduction, not only to the history of Jephthah (Judg 11:1-12:7) and the judges who followed him, viz., Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon (Judg 12:8-15), but also to the history of Samson, who began to deliver Israel out of the power of the Philistines (ch. 13-16). After the fact has been mentioned in the introduction

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

(in v. 7), that Israel was given up into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites at the same time, the Ammonitish oppression, which lasted eighteen years, is more particularly described in vv. 8, 9.

This is followed by the reproof of the idolatrous Israelites on the part of God (vv. 10-16); and lastly, the history of Jephthah is introduced in vv. 17, 18, the fuller account being given in ch. 11. Jephthah, who judged Israel for six years after the conquest and humiliation of the Ammonites (Judg 12:7), was followed by the judges Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon, who judged Israel for seven, ten, and eight years respectively, that is to say, for twenty-five years in all; so that Abdon died forty-nine years (18 + 6 + 25) after the commencement of the Ammonitish oppression, i.e., nine years after the termination of the forty years' rule of the Philistines over Israel, which is described more particularly in Judg 13:1, for the purpose of introducing the history of Samson, who judged Israel twenty years under that rule (Judg 15:20; 16:31), without bringing it to a close, or even surviving it. It was only terminated by the victory which Israel achieved under Samuel at Ebenezer, as described in 1 Sam 7.

Verse 6-8. In the account of the renewed apostasy of the Israelites from the Lord contained in v. 6, seven heathen deities are mentioned as being served by the Israelites: viz., in addition to the *Canaanitish Baals* and *Astartes* (see at Judg 2:11,13), the gods of *Aram*, i.e., *Syria*, who are never mentioned by name; of *Sidon*, i.e., according to 1 Kings 11:5, principally the Sidonian or Phoenician *Astarte*; of the *Moabites*, i.e., *Chemosh* (1 Kings 11:33), the principal deity of that people, which was related to *Moloch* (see at Num 21:29); of the *Ammonites*, i.e., *Milcom* (1 Kings 11:5,33) (see at Judg 16:23). If we compare the list of these seven deities with vv. 11 and 12, where we find seven nations mentioned out of whose hands Jehovah had delivered Israel, the correspondence between the number seven in these two cases and the significant use of the number are unmistakable. Israel had balanced the number of divine deliverances by a similar number of idols which it served, so that the measure of the nation's iniquity was filled up in the

same proportion as the measure of the delivering grace of God. The number *seven* is employed in the Scriptures as the stamp of the works of God, or of the perfection created, or to be created, by God on the one hand, and of the actions of men in their relation to God on the other.

The foundation for this was the creation of the world in seven days. - On v. 7, see Judg 2:13-14. The Ammonites are mentioned after the Philistines, not because they did not oppress the Israelites till afterwards, but for purely formal reasons, viz., because the historian was about to describe the oppression of the Ammonites first. In v. 8, the subject is the "children of Ammon," as we may see very clearly from v. 9. "*They (the Ammonites) ground and crushed the Israelites in the same year,*" i.e., the year in which God sold the Israelites into their hands, or in which they invaded the land of Israel. *raa`ats* (OT:7492) and *raatsats* (OT:7533) are synonymous, and are simply joined together for the sake of emphasis, whilst the latter calls to mind Deut 28:33. The duration of this oppression is then added: "*Eighteen years (they crushed) all the Israelites, who dwelt on the other side of the Jordan in the land of the Amorites,*" i.e., of the two Amoritish kings Sihon and Og, who (dwelt) in Gilead. *Gilead*, being a more precise epithet for the land of the Amorites, is used here in a wider sense to denote the whole of the country on the east of the Jordan, so far as it had been taken from the Amorites and occupied by the Israelites (as in Num 32:29; Deut 34:1: see at Josh 22:9).

Verse 9. They also crossed the Jordan, and made war even upon Judah, Benjamin, and the house of Ephraim (the families of the tribe of Ephraim), by which Israel was brought into great distress. *wateetser* (OT:3334), as in Judg 2:15.

Verse 10-12. When the Israelites cried in their distress to the Lord, "*We have sinned against Thee, namely, that we have forsaken our God and served the Baals,*" the Lord first of all reminded them of the manifestations of His grace (vv. 11, 12), and then pointed out to them their faithless apostasy and the worthlessness of their idols (vv. 13, 14). *w^akiy* (OT:3588), "*and indeed that,*" describes the sin more minutely, and there is no necessity to remove it from the text-an act which is neither

warranted by its absence from several MSS nor by its omission from

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

the Sept., the Syriac, and the Vulgate. *Baalim* is a general term used to denote all the false gods, as in Judg 2:11. This answer on the part of God to the prayer of the Israelites for help is not to be regarded as having been given through an extraordinary manifestation (theophany), or through the medium of a prophet, for that would certainly have been recorded; but it was evidently given in front of the tabernacle, where the people had called upon the Lord, and either came through the high priest, or else through an inward voice in which God spoke to the hearts of the people, i.e., through the voice of their own consciences, by which God recalled to their memories and impressed upon their hearts first of all His own gracious acts, and then their faithless apostasy.

There is an *anakolouthon* in the words of God. The construction which is commenced with *mimits^arayim* (OT:4714) is dropped at *wgw' w^atsiydowniym* (OT:6722) in v. 12; and the verb *howsha^atiy*, which answers to the beginning of the clause, is brought up afterwards in the form of an apodosis with *'et^akem* (OT:853) *waa'owshiy^aaah* (OT:3467). "*Did I not deliver you (1) from the Egyptians (cf. Ex 1-14); (2) from the Amorites (cf. Num 21:3); (3) from the Ammonites (who oppressed Israel along with the Moabites in the time of Ehud, Judg 3:12ff.); (4) from the Philistines (through Shamgar: see 1 Sam 12:9, where the Philistines are mentioned between Sisera and Moab); (5) from the Sidonians (among whom probably the northern Canaanites under Jabin are included, as Sidon, according to Judg 18:7,28, appears to have exercised a kind of principality or protectorate over the northern tribes of Canaan); (6) from the Amalekites (who attacked the Israelites even at Horeb, Ex 17:8ff., and afterwards invaded the land of Israel both with the Moabites, Judg 3:13, and also with the Midianites, Judg 6:3); and (7) from the Midianites?" (see ch. 6-7).*

The last is the reading of the LXX in *Cod. Al.* and *Vat.*, viz., *Madia'm* (NT:3099); whereas *Ald.* and *Compl.* read *Chanaa'n* (NT:5477), also the *Vulgate*. In the Masoretic text, on the other hand, we have *Maon*. Were this the original and true reading, we might perhaps think of the *Mehunim*, who are mentioned in 2 Chron

26:7 along with Philistines and Arabians (cf. 1 Chron 4:41), and are supposed to have been inhabitants of the city of *Maan* on the Syrian pilgrim road to the east of Petra (*Burckhardt* , Syr. pp. 734 and 1035: see *Ewald* , Gesch. i. pp. 321, 322). But there is very little probability in this supposition, as we cannot possibly see how so small a people could have oppressed Israel so grievously at that time, that the deliverance from their oppression could be mentioned here; whilst it would be very strange that nothing should be said about the terrible oppression of the Midianites and the wonderful deliverance from that oppression effected by Gideon.

Consequently the Septuagint (*Madia'm* (NT:3099)) appears to have preserve the original text.

Verse 13. Instead of thanking the Lord, however, for these deliverances by manifesting true devotedness to Him, Israel had forsaken Him and served other gods (see Judg 2:13).

Verse 14-16. Therefore the Lord would not save them any more. They might get help from the gods whom they had chosen for themselves. The Israelites should now experience what Moses had foretold in his song (Deut 32:37-38). This divine threat had its proper effect. The Israelites confessed their sins, submitted thoroughly to the chastisement of God, and simply prayed for salvation; nor did they content themselves with merely promising, they put away the strange gods and served Jehovah, i.e., they devoted themselves again with sincerity to His service, and so were seriously converted to the living God. "*Then was His* (Jehovah's) *soul impatient* (*tiq^atsar* (OT:7114), as in Num 21:4) *because of the troubles of Israel;*" i.e., Jehovah could no longer look down upon the misery of Israel; He was obliged to help. The change in the purpose of God does not imply any changeableness in the divine nature; it simply concerns the attitude of God towards His people, or the manifestation of the divine love to man. In order to bend the sinner at all, the love of God must withdraw its helping hand and make men feel the consequences of their sin and rebelliousness, that they may forsake their evil ways and turn to the Lord their God. When this end has been attained, the same divine love manifests itself as pitying and helping grace. Punishments and benefits flow from the love of God, and have for their object the happiness and

well-being of men.

Verse 17,18. These verses form the introduction to the account of the help and deliverance sent by God, and

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Verse 17,18. These verses form the introduction to the account of the help and deliverance sent by God, and describe the preparation made by Israel to fight against its oppressors. The Ammonites "*let themselves be called together,*" i.e., assembled together (*hitsaa`eeq*, as in Judg 7:23), and encamped in Gilead, i.e., in that portion of Gilead of which they had taken possession. For the Israelites, i.e., the tribes to the east of the Jordan (according to v. 18 and Judg 11:29), also assembled together in Gilead and encamped at *mizpeh*, i.e., Ramath-mizpeh or Ramoth in Gilead (Josh 13:26; 20:8), probably on the site of the present *Szalt* (see at Deut 4:43, and the remarks in the Commentary on the Pentateuch, pp. 180f.), and resolved to look round for a man who could begin the war, and to make him the head over all the inhabitants of Gilead (the tribes of Israel dwelling in Perea). The "*princes of Gilead*" are in apposition to "*the people.*" "The people, namely, the princes of Gilead," i.e., the heads of tribes and families of the Israelites to the east of the Jordan. "*Head*" is still further defined in Judg 11:6,11, as "*captain,*" or "*head and captain.*"

Jephthah Elected as Prince; Negotiations with the Ammonites; Victory, Vow, and Office of Judge. -Ch. 11-12:7.

(Note: On the nature of the sources from which the author drew this tolerably elaborate history of Jephthah, all that can be determined with certainty is, that they sprang from some contemporary of this judge, since they furnish so clear and striking a picture of his life and doings. *Bertheau's* hypothesis, that the section extending from Judg 11:12 to v. 28 is founded upon some historical work, which is also employed in Num 21; Deut 2:1-3:29, and here and there in the book of Joshua, has really no other foundation than the unproved assumption that the Pentateuch and the book of Joshua were written towards the close of the period of the kings. For the marked agreement between Jephthah's negotiations with the king of the Ammonites concerning the possession of the land to the east of the Jordan, and the account given in the Pentateuch, especially in Num 20-21, may be explained very simply and very perfectly, on the supposition that the author possessed the Pentateuch itself. And the account which is wanting in the Pentateuch, namely, that Israel petitioned the king of Moab also for permission to go through his land (v. 17), may have been added from oral tradition, as those glorious victories gained by Israel under Moses were celebrated in verse by contemporaneous poets (see Num 21:14,17,27); and this certainly contributed not a little to keep alive the memory of those events in the nation for centuries long.)

Judges 11:1-2

Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah.

Election of Jephthah as Prince and Judge of Israel. - Vv. 1-3. The account begins with his descent and early mode of life. "*Jephthah* (LXX *Ieftha'* (NT:2422)) the Gileadite was a brave hero" (see Judg 6:12; Josh 1:14, etc.); but he was the son of a harlot, and was begotten by Gilead, in addition to other sons who were born of his wife. *Gilead* is not the name of the country, as *Bertheau* supposes, so that the land is mythically personified as the forefather of Jephthah. Nor is it the name of the son of Machir and grandson of Manasseh (Num 26:29), so that the celebrated ancestor of the Gileadites is mentioned here instead of the unknown father of Jephthah. It is really the proper name of the father himself; and just as in the case of Tola and Puah, in Judg 10:1, the name of the renowned ancestor was repeated in his descendant. We are forced to this conclusion by the fact that the wife of Gilead, and his other sons by that wife, are mentioned in v. 2. These sons drove their half-brother Jephthah out of the house

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

because of his inferior birth, that he might not share with them in the paternal inheritance; just as Ishmael and the sons of Keturah were sent away by Abraham, that they might not inherit along with Isaac (Gen 21:10ff., 25:6).

Judges 11:3

Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and went out with him.

Jephthah departed from his brothers into the land of *Tob*, i.e., according to 2 Sam 10:6,8, a district in the north-east of Perea, on the border of Syria, or between Syria and Ammonitis, called *Eoo'bion* in 1 Macc. 5:13, or more correctly *Eoubi'n*, according to 2 Macc. 12:17, where loose men gathered round him (cf. Judg 9:4), and "went out with him," viz., upon warlike and predatory expeditions like the Bedouins.

Judges 11:4-6

And it came to pass in process of time, that the children of Ammon made war against Israel.

But when the Ammonites made war upon Israel some time afterwards, the elders of Gilead (= "the princes of Gilead," Judg 10:18) went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob, to make this brave warrior their leader. In v. 4 the account of the war between the Ammonites and Israel, which is mentioned in Judg 10:17, is resumed, and its progress under Jephthah is then more fully described. "*In process of time*" (*miyaamiym* (OT:3117), *a diebus*, i.e., after the lapse of a long period, which cannot be more precisely defined), sc., after the expulsion of Jephthah from his home (see Judg 14:8; 15:1; Josh 23:1).

qaatsiyn (OT:7101) signifies a leader in war (Josh 10:24), and is therefore distinguished in v. 11 from *ro'sh* (OT:7218), a chief in peace and war.

Judges 11:7

And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?

Jephthah expressed to the elders his astonishment that they had formerly hated and expelled him, and now came to him in their distress, sc., to make him their leader in time of war. Thus he lays his expulsion upon the shoulders of the elders of Gilead, although it was only by his brethren that he had been driven away from his father's house, inasmuch as they had either approved of it, or at all events had not interfered as magistrates to prevent it. We cannot indeed infer from this reproach, that the expulsion and disinheriting of Jephthah was a legal wrong; but so much at all events is implied, namely, that Jephthah looked upon the thing as a wrong that had been done to him,

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

and found the reason in the hatred of his brethren. The Mosaic law contained no regulation upon this matter, since the rule laid down in Deut 21:15-17 simply applied to the sons of different wives, and not to a son by a harlot.

Judges 11:8

And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Therefore we turn again to thee now, that thou mayest go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

The elders replied, "*Therefore (laakeen (OT:3651), because we have formerly done thee wrong) we have now come to thee again to make thee our head, if thou comest with us and fightest against the Ammonites.*" The clauses *w^ahaalak^ataa* (OT:1980), *w^anil^acham^ataa* (OT:3898), and *w^ahaayiytaa* (OT:1961), which are formally co-ordinate, are logically to be subordinated to one another, the first two expressing the condition, the third the consequence, in this sense, "*If thou go with us and fight,...thou shalt be head to us, namely, to all the inhabitants of Gilead,*" i.e., to the two tribes and a half on the east of the Jordan.

Judges 11:9

And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the LORD deliver them before me, shall I be your head?

Jephthah assented to this: "*If ye will take me back to make war upon the Ammonites, and Jehovah shall give them up to me (lit. 'before me,' as in Josh 10:12; Deut 2:31, etc.), I will be your head.*" "I" is emphatic as distinguished from *he*; and there is no necessity to regard the sentence as a question, with which the

expression in v. 10, "according to thy words," which presuppose an affirmative statement on the part of Jephthah, and not a question, would be altogether irreconcilable.

Judges 11:10

And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words.

The elders promised this on oath. "*Jehovah be hearing between us,*" i.e., be hearer and judge of the things concerning which we are negotiating; "*truly according to thy word so will we do*" (*lo'* (OT:3808) *'im* (OT:518), a particle used in connection with an oath).

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 11:11

Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the LORD in Mizpeh.

Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, "*and the people* (i.e., the inhabitants of Gilead) *made him head and captain, and Jephthah spoke all his words before Jehovah at Mizpeh:*" i.e., he repeated in a solemn assembly of the people, before God at Mizpeh, the conditions and obligations under which he would accept the honour conferred upon him. "*Before Jehovah*" does not necessarily presuppose the presence of the ark at Mizpeh; nor can we possibly assume this, since the war was resolved upon primarily by the eastern tribes alone, and they had no ark at all. It merely affirms that Jephthah performed this act, looking up to God, the omnipresent head of Israel. Still less do the words warrant the assumption that there was an altar in Mizpeh, and that sacrifices were offered to confirm the treaty, of which there is not the slightest indication in the text. "'Before Jehovah' implies nothing more than that Jephthah confirmed all his words by an oath" (*Hengstenberg* , Diss. ii. pp. 35, 36).

Judges 11:12-28

And Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land?

Jephthah's Negotiations with the King of the Ammonites. - V. 12. Before Jephthah took the sword, he sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites, to make complaints to him of his invasion of the land of the Israelites. "*What have we to do with one another* ('what to me and thee?' see Josh 22:24; 2 Sam 16:10), *that thou*

hast come to me to fight against my land?" Jephthah's ambassadors speak in the name of the nation; hence the singulars "*me*" and "*my land*."

Verse 13. The king of the Ammonites replied, that when Israel came up out of Egypt, they had taken away his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok (on the north), and to the Jordan (on the west), and demanded that they should now restore these lands in peace. The plural '*aat^hen*' (them) refers *ad sensum* to the cities and places in the land in question. The claim raised by the king of the Ammonites has one feature in it, which appears to have a certain colour of justice. The Israelites, it is true, had only made war upon the two kings of the Amorites, Sihon and Og, and defeated them, and taken possession of their kingdoms and occupied them, without attacking the Ammonites and Moabites and Edomites, because God had forbidden their attacking these nations (Deut 2:5,9,19); but one portion of the territory of Sihon had formerly been Moabitish and Ammonitish property, and had been conquered by the Amorites and occupied by them. According to Num 21:26, Sihon had made war upon the previous king of Moab, and taken away all his land as far as the Arnon (see the comm. on this passage). And although it is not expressly stated in the Pentateuch that Sihon had extended his conquests beyond Moabitis into the land of the Ammonites, which was situated to the east of Moab, and had taken a portion of it from them, this is pretty clearly indicated in Josh 13:25, since, according to that passage, the tribe of Gad received in addition to Jazer and all the towns of Gilead, half the land of the children of Ammon, namely, the land to the east of Gilead, on the western side of the upper Jabbok (Nahr Ammân: see at Josh 13:26).

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

(Note: The explanation which *Masius* gives of this passage (*Eatenus moao sursum in Galaaditidem exporrectam jacuisse Gaditarum haereditatem, quatenus dimidia Ammonitarum ditio Galaaditidem ab oriente ambiebat*) is not sufficiently in keeping with the words, and too unnatural, to be regarded as correct, as it is by *Reland* (Pal. ill. p. 105) and *Hengstenberg* (Dissertations on the Pentateuch, ii. p. 29); and the reasons assigned by Masius, viz., "that the Israelites were prohibited from occupying the land of the Ammonites," and "the Ammonites are not mentioned in Num 21:26," are too weak to establish anything. The latter is an *argumentum e silentio* , which loses all significance when we bear in mind, that even the allusion to the land of the Moabites in Num 21:26 is only occasioned by the prominence given to Heshbon, and the poetical saying founded upon its fall. But the prohibition against taking the land of the Ammonites from them had just as much force in relation to the land of the Moabites, and simply referred to such land as these tribes still possessed in the time of Moses, and not to that which the Amorites had taken from them.)

Verse 14-15. Jephthah then sent ambassadors again to explain to him the true state of the case, namely, that Israel had neither taken away the land of Moab nor the land of the Ammonites. As a proof of this, Jephthah adduced the leading facts connected with the journey of the Israelites through the desert of Arabia to Canaan, by which this assertion was confirmed, in exact agreement with the accounts of the Pentateuch respecting the matter in dispute.

Verse 16-18. On leaving Egypt, Israel passed through the desert to the Red Sea, and came to Kadesh (Num 20:1). They then sent messengers to the king of Edom, to obtain permission to pass through his land; and this the king of Edom refused (Num 20:14-21). They also sent to the king of Moab, who sent back a similar refusal. The embassy to the king of Moab is not mentioned in the Pentateuch, as it had no direct bearing upon the further course of the Israelites (see Pentateuch, p. 741, note 1). "*And Israel abode in Kadesh*" (word for word, as in Num 20:1b), and "*then passed through the desert,*" namely to Mount Hor, then down the Arabah to the Red Sea, and still farther past Oboth to Ijje-abarim in the desert (Num 20:22-21:11). In this way they went round the land of Edom and the land of Moab (*yaacob* (OT:5437), like *c^abob* in Num 21:4); and came from the east to the land of Moab (i.e., along the eastern boundary, for Ijje-abarim was situated there, according to Num 21:11); and encamped on the other side of the Arnon (Num

21:13), i.e., on the upper course of the Arnon where it still flows through the desert (see Pent. p. 749). On this march, therefore, they did not enter the territory of Moab, as the Arnon formed the boundary of Moab, i.e., the boundary between Moab and the territory of the Amorites (Num 21:13).

Verse 19-22. Vv. 19-22 are almost *verbatim* the same as Num 21:21-25. Israel then sent messengers to Sihon the king of the Amorites at Heshbon, to ask permission to pass through his land. "*Into my place,*" i.e., into the land of Canaan, that Jehovah has appointed for me. But Sihon "*trusted not Israel to pass through his land,*" i.e., he did not trust to the assurance of Israel that they only wanted to pass peaceably through his land, but supposed the petition to cover an intention to take forcible possession of it. (In Num 21:23 we have *naatan* (OT:5414) *lo'* (OT:3808) instead of *he'emiyn* (OT:539) *lo'* (OT:3808).) He did not confine himself, therefore, to a refusal of the permission they asked for, but collected his men of war, and marched against the Israelites to the desert as far as Jahza, on the east of Medeba and Dibon (see at Num 21:23), and fought with them. But he was defeated, and lost all his land, from the Arnon (Mojob) on the south to the Jabbok (Zerka) on the north, and from the desert on the east to the Jordan on the west, of which the Israelites took possession.

Verse 23-24. From these facts Jephthah drew this simple but indisputable conclusion: "*Jehovah the God of Israel has rooted out the Amorites before His people Israel, and thou wilt take possession of it* (viz., the land of the Amorites)." The suffix to *tiyraashenuw* (OT:3423) refers to *haa'emoriy* (OT:567), the Amorites, i.e., their land. The construction of *yaarash* (OT:3423) with the accusative of the people (as in Deut 2:12,21-22; 9:1) may be explained on the simple ground, that in order to take possession of a country, it is necessary first of all to

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

get the holders of it into your power. Jephthah then proved still further how unwarrantable the claim of the king of the Ammonites was, and said to him (v. 24), *"Is it not the fact (**halo'** , *nonne*), that what thy god Chemosh gives thee for a possession, of that thou takest possession; and all that Jehovah makes ownerless before us, of that we take possession?"* - an appeal the validity of which could not be disputed. For *Chemosh* , see at Num 21:29. The verb **howriysh** (OT:3423) combines the three meanings: to drive out of a possession, to deprive of a possessor, and to give for a possession; inasmuch as it is impossible to give a land for a possession without driving away or exterminating its former possessor.

Verse 25-26. But not contenting himself with this conclusive deduction, Jephthah endeavoured to remove the lost appearance of right from the king's claim by a second and equally conclusive argument. *"And now art thou better than Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab? Did he strive (**rowb** (OT:7378), *inf. abs.* of **riyb** (OT:7379) or **ruwb** (OT:7378)) with Israel, or did he fight against them?"* By the repetition of **w^aataah** (OT:6258) (v. 25, cf. v. 23), the new argument is attached to the previous one, as a second deduction from the facts already described. Balak, the king of the Moabites, had indeed bribed Balaam to destroy Israel by his curses; but he did so not so much with the intention of depriving them of the territory of the Amorites which they had conquered, as from the fear that the powerful Israelites might also conquer his still remaining kingdom. Balak had neither made war upon Israel on account of the territory which they had conquered from the Amorites, nor had he put forward any claim to it as his own property, which he certainly might have done with some appearance of justice, as a large portion of it had formerly belonged to the Moabites (see Num 21:26 and the comm. on this passage).

If therefore Balak the king of the Moabites never thought of looking upon this land as being still his property, or of asking it back from the Israelites, the king of the Ammonites had no right whatever to lay claim to the land of Gilead as belonging to him, or to take it away from the Israelites by force, especially after the lapse of

300 years. "*As Israel dwells in Heshbon,...and in all the cities by the side of the Arnon for three hundred years, why have ye not taken away (these towns and lands) within that time*" (i.e., during these 300 years)? If the Ammonites had had any right to it, they ought to have asserted their claim in Moses' time. It was much too late now, after the expiration of 300 years. For "if no prescriptive right is to be admitted, on account of length of time, and if long possession gives no title, nothing would ever be held in safety by any people, and there would be no end to wars and dissension" (*Clericus*).

On Heshbon and its daughters, see at Num 21:25. *Aroër* (*`ar^aowr* , another form for *`aro`eer* , or possibly only a copyist's error) is Aroër of Gad, before *Rabbah* (Josh 13:25), and is to be sought for in the Wady Nahr Ammân, on the north-east of Ammân (see at Josh. *l. c.*), not Aroër of Reuben, on the border of the valley of Arnon (Num 32:34; Deut 2:36; 4:48; Josh 12:2; 13:9). This is evident from the fact, that it is distinguished from "all the cities on the side (*y^adeey* (OT:3027) *`al* (OT:5921), see at Num 34:3) of the Arnon," which included Aroër of Reuben. *Aroër* of Gad, with its daughter towns, was probably Ammonitish territory before the time of Sihon. On the 300 years, a round number that comes very near the reality, see the *Chronol.* p. 285.

Verse 27. After Jephthah had adduced all that could be said, to prove that the Israelites were the rightful possessors of the land of Gilead,

(Note: "Jephthah urged everything that could be pleaded in support of their prescriptive right: possession, length of time, the right of conquest, and undisputed occupation." - *Rosenmüller.*) he closed with these words: "*I* (i.e., Israel, whose cause Jephthah was pleading) *have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong in that thou makest war against me. Let Jehovah the Judge be judge this day (now) between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon.*" God should decide between the two nations, by giving the victory in war to the side whose cause was the just one.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Verse 28. But the king of the Ammonites did not hearken to the words of Jephthah "which he had sent to him," i.e., had instructed his messengers to address to him; so that it was necessary that Jehovah should decide for Israel in battle.

Judges 11:29-33

Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon.

Jephthah's Victory over the Ammonites. - As the negotiations with the king of the Ammonites were fruitless, Jephthah had no other course left than to appeal to the sword.

Verse 29. In the power of the Spirit of Jehovah which came upon him (see Judg 3:10), he passed through Gilead (the land of the tribes of Reuben and Gad between the Arnon and the Jabbok) and Manasseh (northern Gilead and Bashan, which the half tribe of Manasseh had received for a possession), to gather together an army to battle, and then went with the assembled army to Mizpeh-Gilead, i.e., Ramoth-mizpeh, where the Israelites had already encamped before his call (Judg 10:17), that he might thence attack the Ammonites. *'aabar* (OT:5674) (to pass over) with an accusative signifies to come over a person in a hostile sense.

Verse 30-31. Before commencing the war, however, he vowed a vow to the Lord: *"If Thou givest the Ammonites into my hand, he who cometh to meet me out of the doors of my house, when I return safely (in peace, shalom) from the Ammonites, shall belong to the Lord, and I will offer him for a burnt-offering."* By the words *'asher* (OT:834) *hayowtsee'* (OT:3318), "he that goeth out," even if Jephthah did not think "only of a man, or even more definitely still of some one of

his household," he certainly could not think in any case of a head of cattle, or one of his flock. "Going out of the doors of his house to meet him" is an expression that does not apply to a herd or flock driven out of the stall just at the moment of his return, or to any animal that might possibly run out to meet him. For the phrase *liq^{raa}'t* (OT:7125) *yaatsaa'* (OT:3318) is only applied to men in the other passages in which it occurs.

(Note: *Augustine* observes in his *Quaest. xlix. in l. Jud.*: "He did not vow in these words that he would offer some *sheep* , which he might present as a holocaust, according to the law. For it is not, and was not, a customary thing for sheep to come out to meet a victorious general returning from the war. Nor did he say, I will offer as a holocaust *what* ever shall come out of the doors of my house to meet me; but he says, '*Who* ever comes out, I will offer *him*;' so that there can be no doubt whatever that he had then a human being in his mind.")

Moreover, Jephthah no doubt intended to impose a very difficult vow upon himself. And that would not have been the case if he had merely been thinking of a sacrificial animal. Even without any vow, he would have offered, not one, but many sacrifices after obtaining a victory.

(Note: "What kind of vow would it be if some great prince or general should say, 'O God, if Thou wilt give me this victory, the first calf that meets me shall be Thine!' *Parturiunt montes, nascetur*

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

ridiculus mus!" - Pfeiffer, dubia vex. p. 356.)

If therefore he had an animal sacrifice in his mind, he would certainly have vowed the best of his flocks. From all this there can be no doubt that Jephthah must have been thinking of some human being as at all events included in his vow; so that when he declared that he would dedicate that which came out of his house to meet him, the meaning of the vow cannot have been any other than that he would leave the choice of the sacrifice to God himself. "In his eagerness to smite the foe, and to thank God for it, Jephthah could not think of any particular object to name, which he could regard as great enough to dedicate to God; he therefore left it to accident, i.e., to the guidance of God, to determine the sacrifice. He shrank from measuring what was dearest to God, and left this to God himself" (*P. Cassel* in *Herzog's Real-encycl.*). Whomsoever God should bring to meet him, he would dedicate to Jehovah, and indeed, as is added afterwards by way of defining it more precisely, he would offer him to the Lord as a burnt-offering. The *w*^a before *ha`aliythyhuw* is to be taken as explanatory, and not as disjunctive in the sense of "or," which *w* never has. But whether Jephthah really thought of his daughter at the time, cannot be determined either in the affirmative or negative. If he did, he no doubt hoped that the Lord would not demand this hardest of all sacrifices.

Verse 32-33. After seeking to ensure the help of the Lord by this vow, he went against the Ammonites to fight against them; and the Lord delivered them into his hand, so that Jephthah smote them in a very great slaughter "from *Aroër* (or *Nahr Ammân*; see v. 26) to the neighbourhood of ('till thou come to;' see at Gen 10:19) *Minnith*, (conquering and taking) twenty cities, and to *Abel Keramim* (of the vineyards)." *Minnith*, according to the *Onom.* (*s. v. Mennith*), was a place called *Manith* in the time of *Eusebius*, four Roman miles from Heshbon on the road to Philadelphia, with which the account given by *Buckingham* of the ruins of a large city a little to the east of Heshbon may be compared (see v. *Raum. Pal.* p. 265). The situation of *Abel Keramim* (plain of the vineyards: *Luther* and *Eng. Ver.*) cannot be determined with the same certainty. *Eusebius* and *Jerome* mention two places of this name (*Onom. s. v. Abel vinearum*), a *villa Abela vinetis consita* (*koo'mee*

(NT:2968) *ampelofo'ros* (NT:290) *A'bel* (NT:6)) seven Roman miles from Philadelphia, and a *civitas nomine Abela vini fertilis* twelve Roman miles to the east of Gadara, and therefore in the neighbourhood of the Mandhur. Which of the two is referred to here remains uncertain, as we have no precise details concerning the battle. If the northern *Abela* should be meant, Jephthah would have pursued the foe first of all towards the south to the neighbourhood of Heshbon, and then to the north to the border of Bashan. Through his victory the Ammonites were completely subdued before the Israelites.

Judges 11:34-35

And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.

Jephthah's Vow. - Vv. 34, 35. When the victorious hero returned to Mizpeh, his daughter came out to meet him "*with timbrels and in dances,*" i.e., at the head of a company of women, who received the conqueror with joyous music and dances (see at Ex 15:20): "*and she was the only one; he had neither son nor daughter beside her.*" *mimenuw* (OT:4480) cannot mean *ex se*, no other child of his own, though he may have had children that his wives had brought him by other husbands; but it stands, as the great Masora has pointed it, for *mimenaah* (OT:4480), "besides her," the daughter just mentioned-the masculine being used for the feminine as the nearest and more general gender, simply because the idea of "*child*" was floating before the author's mind. At

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

such a meeting Jephthah was violently agitated. Tearing his clothes (as a sign of his intense agony; see at Lev 10:6), he exclaimed, "*O my daughter! thou hast brought me very low; it is thou who troublest me*" (*lit.* thou art among those who trouble me, thou belongest to their class, and indeed in the fullest sense of the word; this is the meaning of the so-called *b essentiae*: see *Ges. Lehrgeb.* p. 838, and such passages as 2 Sam 15:31; Ps 54:6; 55:19, etc.): "***I have opened my mouth to the Lord*** (i.e., have uttered a vow to Him: compare Ps 66:14 with Num 30:3ff., Deut 23:23-24), *and cannot turn it,*" i.e., revoke it.

Judges 11:36-37

And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon.

The daughter, observing that the vow had reference to her (as her father in fact had, no doubt, distinctly told her, though the writer has passed this over because he had already given the vow itself in v. 31), replied, "*Do to me as has gone out of thy mouth* (i.e., do to me what thou hast vowed), *since Jehovah has procured the vengeance upon thine enemies the Ammonites.*" She then added (v. 37), "*Let this thing be done for me* (equivalent to, Let this only be granted me); *let me alone two months and I will go,*" i.e., only give me two months to go, "*that I may go down to the mountains* (i.e., from Mizpeh, which stood upon an eminence, to the surrounding mountains and their valleys) *and bewail my virginity, I and my friends.*" *b^atuwliym* (OT:1331) does not mean "youth" (*n^auwriym* (OT:5271)), but the condition of virginity (see Lev 21:13). The *Kethibh ra^ayotay* is a less common form of *ree^owtay* (OT:7464) (*Keri*).

Judges 11:38

And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains.

The father granted this request.

Judges 11:39-40

And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel,

At the end of two months she returned to her father again, *"and he did to her the vow that he had vowed, and*

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

she knew no man." In consequence of this act of Jephthah and his daughter, "*it became an ordinance* (a standing custom) *in Israel: from year to year* (see Ex 13:10) *the daughters of Israel go to praise the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.*" *tinaah* does not mean *threenei'n* , to lament or bewail (LXX, Chald., etc.), but to praise, as *R. Tanchum* and others maintain.

With regard to **Jephthah's vow** , the view expressed so distinctly by *Josephus* and the Chaldee was the one which generally prevailed in the earlier times among both Rabbins and fathers of the church, viz., that Jephthah put his daughter to death and burned her upon the altar as a bleeding sacrifice to Jehovah. It was not till the middle ages that *Mos.* and *Dav. Kimchi* and certain other Rabbins endeavoured to establish the view, that Jephthah merely dedicated his daughter to the service of the sanctuary of Jehovah in a lifelong virginity. And lastly, *Ludov. Cappellus* , in his *Diatriba de voto Jephthae* , Salm. 1683 (which has been reprinted in his *Notae critic.* in Jud.

xvi., and the *Critici Sacri* , tom. i.), has expressed the opinion that Jephthah put his daughter to death in honour of the Lord according to the law of the ban, because human beings were not allowed to be offered up as burnt-sacrifices.

Of these different opinions the third has no foundation in the text of the Bible. For supposing that Jephthah had simply vowed that on his return he would offer to the Lord whatever came to meet him out of his house, with such restrictions only as were involved in the very nature of the case-viz., offering it as a burnt-offering if it were adapted for this according to the law; and if it were not, then proceeding with it according to the law of the ban-the account of the fulfilment of this vow would certainly have defined with greater precision the manner in which he fulfilled the vow upon his daughter. The words "he did to her his vow which he had vowed," cannot be understood in any other way than that he offered her as *`owlaah* (OT:5930), i.e., as a *burnt-offering* , to the Lord. Moreover, the law concerning the ban and a vow of the ban could not possibly give any individual Israelite the right to ban either his own child or one of his household to the Lord, without opening a

very wide door to the crime of murder.

The infliction of the ban upon any man presupposed notorious wickedness, so that burnt-offering and ban were diametrically opposed the one to the other. Consequently the other two views are the only ones which can be entertained, and it is not easy to decide between them. Although the words "and I offer him as a burnt-offering" appear to favour the actual sacrifice so strongly, that *Luther's* marginal note, "some affirm that he did not sacrifice her, but the text is clear enough," is perpetually repeated with peculiar emphasis; yet, on looking more closely into the matter, we find insuperable difficulties in the way of the literal interpretation of the words. Since *yeetsee'* (OT:3318) '*asher* (OT:834) *hayowtsee'* (OT:3318) cannot be taken impersonally, and therefore when Jephthah uttered his vow, he must at any rate have had the possibility of some human being coming to meet him in his mind; and since the two clauses "*he shall be the Lords,*" and "*I will offer him up for a burnt-offering,*" cannot be taken disjunctively in such a sense as this, it shall *either* be dedicated to the Lord, *or*, if it should be a sacrificial animal, I will offer it up as a burnt-offering, but the second clause simply contains a more precise definition of the first-Jephthah must at the very outset have contemplated the possibility of a human sacrifice. Yet not only were human sacrifices prohibited in the law under pain of death as an abomination in the sight of Jehovah (Lev 18:21; 20:2-5; Deut 12:31; 18:10), but they were never heard of among the Israelites in the early times, and were only transplanted to Jerusalem by the godless kings Ahaz and Manasseh.

(Note: "Human sacrifices do not even belong to heathenism generally, but to the darkest night of heathenism. They only occur among those nations which are the most thoroughly depraved in a moral and religious sense." This remark of *Hengstenberg* (Diss. iii. p. 118) cannot be set aside by a reference to *Euseb. praep. ev.* iv. 16; *Baur*, *Symb.* ii. 2, pp. 293ff.; *Lasaulx*, *Sühnopfer der Griechen und Römer*, 1841, pp. 8-12; *Ghillany*, *die Menschenopfer der alten Hebräer*, 1842, pp. 107ff., as *Kurtz* supposes, since the uncritical character of the proofs collected together in these writings is very obvious on a closer inspection, and *Eusebius* has simply taken his examples from Porphyry, and other writings of a very recent date.)

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

If Jephthah therefore vowed that he would offer a human sacrifice to Jehovah, he must either have uttered his vow without any reflection, or else have been thoroughly depraved in a moral and religious sense. But what we know of this brave hero by no means warrants any such assumptions, His acts do not show the slightest trace of impetuosity and rashness. He does not take to the sword at once, but waits till his negotiations with the king of the Ammonites have been without effect. Nor does he utter his vow in the midst of the confusion of battle, so that we might fancy he had made a vow in the heat of the conflict without fully weighting his words, but he uttered it before he set out against the Ammonites (see vv. 30 and 32). So far as the religious training of Jephthah was concerned, it is true that he had led the life of a freebooter during his exile from his country and home, and before his election as the leader of the Israelites; but the analogous circumstances connected with David's life preclude us from inferring either moral depravity or religious barbarism from this.

When David was obliged to fly from his country to escape from Saul, he also led a life of the same kind, so that all sorts of people came to him, not pious and virtuous people, but all who were in distress and had creditors, or were embittered in spirit (1 Sam 22:2); and yet, even under these circumstances, David lived in the law of the Lord. Moreover, Jephthah was not destitute of the fear of God. This is proved first of all by the fact, that when he had been recalled from his exile he looked to Jehovah to give him the victory over the Ammonites, and made a treaty with the elders of Gilead "before Jehovah" (vv. 9 and 10); and also by the fact, that he sought to ensure the help of God in war through the medium of a vow. And again, we have no right to attribute to him any ignorance of the law. Even if *Kurtz* is correct in his opinion, that the negotiations with the king of the Ammonites, which show the most accurate acquaintance with the Pentateuch, were not carried on independently and from his own knowledge of the law, and that the sending of messengers to the hostile king was resolved upon in the national assembly at Mizpeh, with the priests, Levites, and elders present, so that the Levites, who knew the law, may have supplied any defects in his own knowledge of the law and of the early history of his people; a private Israelite did not need to study the whole of the

law of the Pentateuch, and to make himself master of the whole, in order to gain the knowledge and conviction that a human sacrifice was irreconcilable with the substance and spirit of the worship of Jehovah, and that Jehovah the God of Israel was not a Moloch. And again, even if we do not know to what extent the men and fathers of families in Israel were acquainted and familiar with the contents of the Mosaic law, the opinion is certainly an erroneous one, that the Israelites derived their knowledge of the law exclusively from the public reading of the law at the feast of tabernacles in the sabbatical year, as enjoined in Deut 31:10ff.; so that if this public reading, which was to take place only once in seven years, had been neglected, the whole nation would have been left without any instruction whatever in the law.

The reason for this Mosaic precept was a totally different one from that of making the people acquainted with the contents of the law (see the commentary on this passage). And again, though we certainly do not find the law of the Lord so thoroughly pervading the religious consciousness of the people, received as it were *in succum et sanguinem*, in the time of the judges, that they were able to resist the bewitching power of nature-worship, but, on the contrary, we find them repeatedly falling away into the worship of Baal; yet we discover no trace whatever of human sacrifices even in the case of those who went a whoring after Baalim. And although the theocratical knowledge of the law seems to have been somewhat corrupted even in the case of such men as Gideon, so that this judge had an unlawful ephod made for himself at Ophrah; the opinion that the Baal-worship, into which the Israelites repeatedly fell, was associated with human sacrifices, is one of the many erroneous ideas that have been entertained as to the development of the religious life not only among the Israelites, but among the Canaanites, and which cannot be supported by historical testimonies or facts.

That the Canaanitish worship of Baal and Astarte, to which the Israelites were addicted, required no human sacrifices, is indisputably evident from the fact, that even in the time of Ahab and his idolatrous wife Jezebel, the daughter of the Sidonian king Ethbaal, who raised the worship of Baal into the national religion in

the kingdom of

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

the ten tribes, persecuting the prophets of Jehovah and putting them to death, there is not the slightest allusion to human sacrifices. Even at that time human sacrifices were regarded by the Israelites as so revolting an abomination, that the two kings of Israel who besieged the king of the Moabites—not only the godly Jehoshaphat, but Jehoram the son of Ahab and Jezebel—withdrew at once and relinquished the continuance of the war, when the king of the Moabites, in the extremity of his distress, sacrificed his son as a burnt-offering upon the wall (2 Kings 3:26-27).

With such an attitude as this on the part of the Israelites towards human sacrifices before the time of Ahaz and Manasseh, who introduced the worship of Moloch into Jerusalem, we cannot, without further evidence, impute to Jephthah the offering of a bloody human sacrifice, the more especially as it is inconceivable, with the diametrical opposition between the worship of Jehovah and the worship of Moloch, that God should have chosen a worshipper of Moloch to carry out His work, or a man who was capable of vowing and offering a human-being sacrifice. The men whom God chose as the recipients of His revelation of mercy and the executors of His will, and whom He endowed with His Spirit as judges and leaders of His people, were no doubt affected with infirmities, faults, and sins of many kinds, so that they could fall to a very great depth; but nowhere is it stated that the Spirit of God came upon a worshipper of Moloch and endowed him with His own power, that he might be the helper and saviour of Israel.

We cannot therefore regard Jephthah as a servant of Moloch, especially when we consider that, in addition to what has already been said, the account of the actual fulfilment of his vow is apparently irreconcilable with the literal interpretation of the words *owlaah* (OT:5930) *w^aha`aliythyhuw* (OT:5927), as signifying a bleeding burnt-offering. We cannot infer anything with certainty as to the mode of the sacrifice, from the grief which Jephthah felt and expressed when his only daughter came to meet him. For this is quite as intelligible, as even the supporters of the literal view of these words admit, on the supposition that Jephthah was compelled by his vow to dedicate his daughter to Jehovah in a lifelong virginity, as it would

be if he had been obliged to put her to death and burn her upon the altar as a burnt-offering. But the entreaty of the daughter, that he would grant her two months' time, in order that she might lament her virginity upon the mountains with her friends, would have been marvellously out of keeping with the account that she was to be put to death as a sacrifice.

To mourn one's virginity does not mean to mourn because one has to die a virgin, but because one has to live and remain a virgin. But even if we were to assume that mourning her virginity was equivalent to mourning on account of her youth (which is quite untenable, as *b^atuwliym* (OT:1331) is not synonymous with *n^auwriym* (OT:5271)), "it would be impossible to understand why this should take place *upon the mountains*. It would be altogether opposed to human nature, that a child who had so soon to die should make use of a temporary respite to forsake her father altogether. It would no doubt be a reasonable thing that she should ask permission to enjoy life for two months longer before she was put to death; but that she should only think of bewailing her virginity, when a sacrificial death was in prospect, which would rob her father of his only child, would be contrary to all the ordinary feelings of the human heart. Yet, inasmuch as the history lays special emphasis upon her bewailing her virginity, this must have stood in some peculiar relation to the nature of the vow. When a maiden *bewails* her virginity, the reason for this can only be that she will have to remain a bud that has not been allowed to unfold itself, prevented, too, not by death, but by life" (*P. Cassel* , p. 473).

And this is confirmed by the expression, to bewail her virginity "*upon the mountains*." "If life had been in question, the same tears might have been shed at home. But her lamentations were devoted to her virginity, and such lamentations could not be uttered in the town, and in the presence of men. Modesty required the solitude of the mountains for these. The virtuous heart of the maiden does not open itself in the ears of all; but only in sacred silence does it pour out its lamentations of love" (*P. Cassel* , p. 476).

And so, again, the still further clause in the account of the fulfilment of the vow,

"and she knew no man," is not in

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

harmony with the assumption of a sacrificial death. This clause would add nothing to the description in that case, since it was already known that she was a virgin. The words only gain their proper sense if we connect them with the previous clause, he "did with her according to the vow which he had vowed," and understand them as describing what the daughter did in fulfilment of the vow. The father fulfilled his vow upon her, and she knew no man; i.e., he fulfilled the vow through the fact that she knew no man, but dedicated her life to the Lord, as a spiritual burnt-offering, in a lifelong chastity. It was this willingness of the daughter to sacrifice herself which the daughters of Israel went every year to celebrate-namely, upon the mountains whither her friends had gone with her to lament her virginity, and which they commemorated there four days in the year.

And the idea of a spiritual sacrifice is supported not only by the words, but also most decisively by the fact that the historian describes the fulfilment of the vow in the words "he did to her according to his vow," in such a manner as to lead to the conclusion that he regarded the act itself as laudable and good. But a prophetic historian could never have approved of a human sacrifice; and it is evident that the author of the book of Judges does not conceal what was blameable even in the judges themselves, from his remarks concerning the conduct of Gideon (Judg 8:27), which was only a very small offence in comparison with the abomination of a human sacrifice. To this we have to add the difficulties connected with such an act. The words "he did to her according to his vow" presuppose undoubtedly that Jephthah offered his daughter as *`owlaah* (OT:5930) to Jehovah. But burnt-offerings, that is to say bleeding burnt-offerings, in which the victim was slaughtered and burnt upon the altar, could only be offered upon the lawful altar at the tabernacle, or before the ark, through the medium of the Levitical priests, unless the sacrifice itself had been occasioned by some extraordinary manifestation of God; and that we cannot for a moment think of here.

But is it credible that a priest or the priesthood should have consented to offer a sacrifice upon the altar of Jehovah which was denounced in the law as the greatest

abomination of the heathen? This difficulty cannot be set aside by assuming that Jephthah put his daughter to death, and burned her upon some secret altar, without the assistance and mediation of a priest; for such an act would not have been described by the prophetic historian as a fulfilment of the vow that he would offer a burnt-offering to the Lord, simply because it would not have been a sacrifice offered to Jehovah at all, but a sacrifice slaughtered to Moloch.

(Note: **Auberlen's** remarks upon this subject are very good. "The history of Jephthah's daughter," he says, "would hardly have been thought worth preserving in the Scriptures if the maiden had been really offered in sacrifice; for, in that case, the event would have been reduced, at the best, into a mere family history, without any theocratic significance, though in truth it would rather have been an anti-theocratic *abomination* , according to Deut 12:31 (cf. 18:9; Lev 18:21; 20:1-5). Jephthah's action would in that case have stood upon the same platform as the incest of Lot (Gen 19:30ff.), and would owe its adoption into the canon simply to genealogical considerations, or others of a similar kind. But the very opposite is the case here; and if, from the conclusion of the whole narrative in Judg 11:39-40, the object of it is supposed to be simply to explain the origin of the feast that was held in honour of Jephthah's daughter, even this would tell against the ordinary view. In the eye of the law the whole thing would still remain an abomination, and the canonical Scriptures would not stoop to relate and beautify an institution so directly opposed to the law.")

All these circumstances, when rightly considered, almost compel us to adopt the spiritual interpretation of the words, "offer as a burnt-offering." It is true that no exactly corresponding parallelisms can be adduced from the Old Testament in support of the spiritual view; but the germs of this view, as met with in the Psalms and the writings of the prophets, are contained in the demand of God addressed to Abraham to offer Him his only son Isaac as a burnt-offering, when compared with the issue of Abraham's temptation—namely, that God accepted his willingness to offer up his son as a completed sacrifice, and then supplied him with a ram to offer up as a bleeding sacrifice in the place of his son. As this fact teaches that what God demands is not a corporeal but a spiritual sacrifice, so the rules laid down in the law respecting the redemption of the first-born belonging to the Lord, and of persons vowed

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

to Him (Ex 13:1,13; Num 18:15-16; Lev 27:1ff.), show clearly how the Israelites could dedicate themselves and those who belonged to them to the Lord, without burning upon the altar the persons who were vowed to Him. And lastly, it is evident, from the perfectly casual reference to the women who ministered at the tabernacle (Ex 38:8; 1 Sam 2:22), that there were persons in Israel who dedicated their lives to the Lord at the sanctuary, by altogether renouncing the world.

And there can be no doubt that Jephthah had such a dedication as this in his mind when he uttered his vow; at all events in case the Lord, to whom he left the appointment of the sacrifice, should demand the offering up of a human being. The word *`owlaah* (OT:5930) does not involve the idea of burning, like our word burnt-offering, but simply that of going up upon the altar, or of complete surrender to the Lord. *`owlaah* (OT:5930) is a whole offering, as distinguished from the other sacrifices, of which only a part was given up to the Lord. When a virgin, therefore, was set apart as a spiritual *`owlaah* (OT:5930), it followed, as a matter of course, that henceforth she belonged entirely to the Lord: that is to say, was to remain a virgin for the remainder of her days. The fact that Nazarites contracted marriages, even such as were dedicated by a vow to be Nazarites all their lives, by no means warrants the conclusion that virgins dedicated to the Lord by a vow were also free to marry if they chose.

It is true that we learn nothing definite from the Old Testament with regard to this spiritual sacrificial service; but the absence of any distinct statements upon the subject by no means warrants our denying the fact. Even with regard to the spiritual service of the women at the tabernacle we have no precise information; and we should not have known anything about this institution, if the women themselves had not offered their mirrors in the time of Moses to make the holy laver, or if we had not the account of the violation of such women by the sons of Eli. In this respect, therefore, the remarks of *Clericus*, though too frequently disregarded, are very true: "It was not to be expected, as I have often observed, that so small a volume as the Old Testament should contain all the customs of the

Hebrew, and a full account of all the things that were done among them. There are necessarily many things alluded to, therefore, which we do not fully understand, simply because they are not mentioned elsewhere."

Judges 12:1-3

And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward, and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee? we will burn thine house upon thee with fire.

Jephthah's War with the Ephraimites, and Office of Judge. - V. 1. The jealousy of the tribe of Ephraim, which was striving after the leadership, had already shown itself in the time of Gideon in such a way that nothing but the moderation of that judge averted open hostilities. And now that the tribes on the east of the Jordan had conquered the Ammonites under the command of Jephthah without the co-operation of the Ephraimites, Ephraim thought it necessary to assert its claim to take the lead in Israel in a very forcible manner. The Ephraimites gathered themselves together, and went over *tsaapownaah* (OT:6828). This is generally regarded as an appellative noun (*northward*); but in all probability it is a proper name, "to *Zaphon*," the city of the Gadites in the Jordan valley, which is mentioned in Josh 13:27 along with Succoth, that is to say, according to a statement of the *Gemara*, though of a very uncertain character no doubt, *Amathou's* (*Joseph. Ant.* xiii. 13, 5, xiv. 5, 4; Bell. Judg. i. 4, 2, *Reland*, Pal. pp. 308 and 559-60), the modern ruins of *Amata* on the Wady *Rajîb* or *Ajlun*, the situation of which would suit this passage very well.

They then threatened Jephthah, because he had made war upon the Ammonites without them, and said, "*We will*

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

They then threatened Jephthah, because he had made war upon the Ammonites without them, and said, "*We will burn thy house over thee with fire.*" Their arrogance and threat Jephthah opposed most energetically. He replied (vv. 2, 3), "*A man of strife have I been, I and my people on the one hand, and the children of Ammon on the other, very greatly,*" i.e., I and my people had a severe conflict with the Ammonites. "*Then I called you, but ye did not deliver me out of their hand; and when I saw that thou (Ephraim) didst not help me, I put my life in my hand*" (i.e., I risked my own life: see 1 Sam 19:5; 28:21; Job 13:14. The *Kethibh 'iys"maah* comes from *yaasam* (OT:3455): cf. Gen 24:33), "*and I went against the Ammonites, and Jehovah gave them into my hand.*" Jephthah's appeal to the Ephraimites to fight against the Ammonites it not mentioned in ch. 11, probably for no other reason than because it was without effect. The Ephraimites, however, had very likely refused their co-operation simply because the Gileadites had appointed Jephthah as commander without consulting them. Consequently the Ephraimites had no ground whatever for rising up against Jephthah and the Gileadites in this haughty and hostile manner; and Jephthah had a perfect right not only to ask them, "*Wherefore are ye come up against me now (lit. 'this day'), to fight against me?*" but to resist such conduct with the sword.

Judges 12:4

Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim: and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the

Ephraimites, and among the Manassites.

He therefore gathered together all the men (men of war) of Gilead and smote the Ephraimites, because they had said, "*Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim in the midst of Ephraim and Manasseh.*" The meaning of these obscure words is probably the following: Ye Gileadites are a mob gathered together from Ephraimites that

have run away; "ye are an obscure set of men, men of no name, dwelling in the midst of two most noble and illustrious tribes" (*Rosenmüller*). This contemptuous speech did not apply to the tribes of Reuben and Gad as such, but simply to the warriors whom Jephthah had gathered together out of Gilead. For the words are not to be rendered *erepti Ephraim* , "the rescued of Ephraim," as they are by *Seb. Schmidt* and *Stud.* , or to be understood as referring to the fact that the Gileadites had found refuge with the Ephraimites during the eighteen years of oppression on the part of the Ammonites, since such an explanation is at variance with the use of the word *paaliyT* (OT:6412), which simply denotes a fugitive who has escaped from danger, and not one who has sought and found protection with another. The Ephraimites had to pay for this insult offered to their brethren by a terrible defeat.

Judges 12:5-6

And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay;

When the Gileadites had beaten the Ephraimites, they took the fords of the Jordan before the Ephraimites (or towards Ephraim: see Judg 3:28; 7:24), to cut off their retreat and prevent their return to their homes. And "*when fugitives of Ephraim wanted to cross, the men of Gilead asked them, Art thou Ephrathi,*" i.e., an

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Ephraimite? *And if he said no* , they made him pronounce the word *Shibboleth* (a stream or flood, as in Ps 69:3,16; not an ear of corn, which is quite unsuitable here); *"and if he said, Sibboleth, not taking care to pronounce it correctly, they laid hold of him and put him to death at the fords of the Jordan."* In this manner there fell at that time, i.e., during the whole war, 42,000 Ephraimites. The *"fugitives of Ephraim"* were the Ephraimites who had escaped from the battle and wished to return home. The expression is used here in its ordinary sense, and not with the contemptuous sense in which the Ephraimites had used it in v. 4. From this history we learn quite casually that the Ephraimites generally pronounced *sh* (shin) like *s* (samech). *heekiyn* (OT:3559) is used elliptically for *leeb* (OT:3820) *heekiyn* (OT:3559), to direct his heart to anything, pay heed (compare 1 Sam 23:22; 1 Chron 28:2 , with 2 Chron 12:14; 30:19).

Judges 12:7

And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then died Jephthah the Gileadite, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.

Jephthah judged Israel six years, though most probably only the tribes on the east of the Jordan. When he died, he was buried in one of the towns of Gilead. The plural *gil^aaad* (OT:1568) *b^aaareey* (OT:5892) is used quite indefinitely, as in Gen 13:12; Neh 6:2, etc. (see *Ges. Lehrgeb.* p. 665), simply because the historian did not know the exact town.

The Judges Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon. Ch. 12:8-15.

Judges 12:8-15

And after him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel.

Of these three judges no particular deeds are related, just as in the case of Tola and Jair (see the remarks on Judg 10:1). But it certainly follows from the expression '*acharaayw* (OT:310) *wayish^apot* (OT:8199) (vv. 8, 11, 13) that they were one after another successors of Jephthah, and therefore that their office of judge also extended simply over the tribes on the east of the Jordan, and perhaps the northern tribes on this side.

Verse 8-10. **Ibzan** sprang from *Bethlehem*, - hardly, however, the town of that name in the tribe of Judah, as *Josephus* affirms (Ant. v. 7, 13), for that is generally distinguished either as Bethlehem "of Judah" (Judg 17:7,9; Ruth 1:2; 1 Sam 17:12), or Bethlehem *Ephratah* (Mic 5:1), but probably Bethlehem in the tribe of Zebulun (Josh 9:15). He had thirty sons and thirty daughters, the latter of whom he sent away *hachuwtsaah* (OT:2351) (out of his house), i.e., gave them in marriage, and brought home thirty women in their places from abroad as wives for his sons. He judged Israel seven years, and was buried in Bethlehem.

Verse 11-12. His successor was *Elon* the Zebulunite, who died after filling the office of judge for ten years, and

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

was buried at *Aijalon* , in the land of Zebulun. This *Aijalon* has probably been preserved in the ruins of *Jalûn* , about four hours' journey to the east of Akka, and half an hour to the S.S.W. of Mejdél Kerun (see *V. de Velde* , Mem. p. 283).

Verse 13-15. He was followed by the judge *Abdon* , the son of Hillel of *Pirathon*. This place, where Abdon died and was buried after holding the office of judge for eight years, was in the land of Ephraim, on the mountains of the Amalekites (v. 15). It is mentioned in 2 Sam 23:30 and 1 Chron 11:31 as the home of Benaiah the hero; it is the same as *Farathoo'* (read *Faratho'n*) in 1 Macc. 9:50, and *Joseph. Ant.* xiii. 1, 3, and has been preserved in the village of *Feráta* , about two hours and a half to the S.S.W. of Nabulus (see *Rob. Bibl. Res.* p. 134, and *V. de Velde* , Mem. p. 340). On the riding of his sons and daughters upon asses, see at Judg 10:4.

Samson's Life, and Conflicts with the Philistines. Ch. 13-16.

Whilst Jephthah, in the power of God, was delivering the tribes on the east of the Jordan from the oppression of the Ammonites, the oppression on the part of the Philistines continued uninterruptedly for forty years in the land to the west of the Jordan (Judg 13:1), and probably increased more and more after the disastrous war during the closing years of the high-priesthood of Eli, in which the Israelites suffered a sad defeat, and even lost the ark of the covenant, which was taken by the Philistines (1 Sam 4). But even during this period, Jehovah the God of Israel did not leave himself without witness, either in the case of His enemies the Philistines, or in that of His people Israel. The triumphant delight of the Philistines at the capture of the ark was soon changed into great and mortal terror, when Dagon their idol had fallen down from its place before the ark of God and was lying upon the threshold of its temple with broken head and arms; and the inhabitants of Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron, to which the ark was taken, were so severely smitten with boils by the hand of Jehovah, that the princes of the Philistines felt constrained to send the ark, which brought nothing but harm to their people, back into the land of the

Israelites, and with it a trespass-offering (1 Sam 5-6). At this time the Lord had also raised up a hero for His people in the person of *Samson*, whose deeds were to prove to the Israelites and Philistines that the God of Israel still possessed the power to help His people and smite His foes.

The life and acts of *Samson*, who was to begin to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines, and who judged Israel for twenty years under the rule of the Philistines (Judg 13:5 and 15:20), are described in ch. 13-16 with an elaborate fulness which seems quite out of proportion to the help and deliverance which he brought to his people. His birth was foretold to his parents by an appearance of the angel of the Lord, and the boy was set apart as a Nazarite from his mother's womb. When he had grown up, the Spirit of Jehovah began to drive him to seek occasions for showing the Philistines his marvellous strength, and to inflict severe blows upon them in a series of wonderful feats, until at length he was seduced by the bewitching Delilah to make known to her the secret of his supernatural strength, and was betrayed by her into the power of the Philistines, who deprived him of the sight of his eyes, and compelled him to perform the hardest and most degraded kinds of slave-labour.

From this he was only able to escape by bringing about his own death, which he did in such a manner that his enemies were unable to triumph over him, since he killed more of them at his death than he had killed during the whole of his life before. And whilst the small results that followed from the acts of this hero of God do not answer the expectations that might naturally be formed from the miraculous announcement of his birth, the nature of the acts which he performed appears still less to be such as we should expect from a hero impelled by the Spirit of God. His actions not only bear the stamp of adventure, foolhardiness, and wilfulness, when looked at outwardly, but they are almost all associated with love affairs; so that it looks as if Samson had dishonoured and fooled away the gift

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

entrusted to him, by making it subservient to his sensual lusts, and thus had prepared the way for his own ruin, without bringing any essential help to his people.

"The man who carried the gates of Gaza up to the top of the mountain was the slave of a woman, to whom he frivolously betrayed the strength of his Nazarite locks. These locks grew once more, and his strength returned, but only to bring death at the same time to himself and his foes" (*Ziegler*). Are we to discern in such a character as this a warrior of the Lord? Can Samson, the promised son of a barren woman, a Nazarite from his birth, be the head and flower of the Judges? We do not pretend to answer these questions in the affirmative; and to justify this view we start from the fact, which *Ewald* and *Diestel* both admit to be historical, that the deep earnest background of Samson's nature is to be sought for in his Nazarite condition, or rather that it is in this that the distinctive significance of his character and of his life and deeds as judge all culminates. The Nazarite was not indeed what *Bertheau* supposes him to have been, "a man separated from human pursuits and turmoil;" but the significance of the Nazarite condition was to be found in a consecration of the life to God, which had its roots in living faith, and its outward manifestations negatively, in abstinence from everything unclean, from drinking wine, and even from fruit of the vine of every description, and positively, in wearing the hair uncut.

In the case of Samson this consecration of the life to God was not an act of his own free will, or a vow voluntarily taken; but it was imposed upon him by divine command from his conception and birth. As a Nazarite, i.e., as a person vowed to the Lord, he was to begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines; and the bodily sign of his Nazarite condition-namely, the hair of his head that had never been touched by the scissors-was the vehicle of his supernatural strength with which he smote the Philistines. In Samson the Nazarite, however, not only did the Lord design to set before His people a man towering above the fallen generation in heroic strength, through his firm faith in and confident reliance upon the gift of

God committed to him, opening up before it the prospect of a renewal of its own strength, that by this type he might arouse such strength and ability as were still slumbering in the nation; but Samson was to exhibit to his age generally a picture on the one hand of the strength which the people of God might acquire to overcome their strongest foes through faithful submission to the Lord their God, and on the other hand of the weakness into which they had sunk through unfaithfulness to the covenant and intercourse with the heathen. And it is in this typical character of Samson and his deeds that we find the head and flower of the institution of judge in Israel.

The judges whom Jehovah raised up in the interval between Joshua and Samuel were neither military commanders nor governors of the nation; nor were they authorities instituted by God and invested with the government of the state. They were not even chosen from the heads of the nation, but were called by the Lord out of the midst of their brethren to be the deliverers of the nation, either through His Spirit which came upon them, or through prophets and extraordinary manifestations of God; and the influence which they exerted, after the conquest and humiliation of the foe and up to the time of their death, upon the government of the nation and its affairs in general, was not the result of any official rank, but simply the fruit and consequence of their personal ability, and therefore extended for the most part only to those tribes to whom they had brought deliverance from the oppression of their foes.

The tribes of Israel did not want any common secular ruler to fulfil the task that devolved upon the nation at that time (see pp. 172f.). God therefore raised up even the judges only in times of distress and trouble. For their appearance and work were simply intended to manifest the power which the Lord could confer upon His people through His spirit, and were designed, on the one hand, to encourage Israel to turn seriously to its God, and by holding fast to His covenant to obtain the power to conquer all its foes; and, on the other hand, to alarm their enemies, that they might not attribute to their idols the power which they possessed to subjugate the Israelites, but might learn to fear the omnipotence of the true God. This divine power which was displayed by the judges culminated in Samson. When the Spirit

of God came upon him, he performed such mighty deeds as made the

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

haughty Philistines feel the omnipotence of Jehovah. And this power he possessed by virtue of his condition as a Nazarite, because he had been vowed or dedicated to the Lord from his mother's womb, so long as he remained faithful to the vow that had been imposed upon him.

But just as his strength depended upon the faithful observance of his vow, so his weakness became apparent in his natural character, particularly in his intrigues with the daughters of the Philistines; and in this weakness there was reflected the natural character of the nation generally, and of its constant disposition to fraternize with the heathen. Love to a Philistine woman in Timnath not only supplied Samson with the first occasion to exhibit his heroic strength to the Philistines, but involved him in a series of conflicts in which he inflicted severe blows upon the uncircumcised. This impulse to fight against the Philistines came from Jehovah (Judg 14:4), and in these conflicts Jehovah assisted him with the power of His Spirit, and even opened up a fountain of water for him at Lehi in the midst of his severe fight, for the purpose of reviving his exhausted strength (Judg 15:19). On the other hand, in his intercourse with the harlot at Gaza, and his love affair with Delilah, he trod ways of the flesh which led to his ruin. In his destruction, which was brought about by his forfeiture of the pledge of the divine gift entrusted to him, the insufficiency of the judgeship in itself to procure for the people of God supremacy over their foes became fully manifest; so that the weakness of the judgeship culminated in Samson as well as its strength. The power of the Spirit of God, bestowed upon the judges for the deliverance of their people, was overpowered by the might of the flesh lusting against the spirit.

This special call received from God will explain the peculiarities observable in the acts which he performed-not only the smallness of the outward results of his heroic acts, but the character of adventurous boldness by which they were distinguished. Although he had been set apart as a Nazarite from his mother's womb, he as not to complete the deliverance of his people from the hands of the Philistines, but simply to commence, it, i.e., to show to the people, by the manifestation of supernatural

heroic power, the possibility of deliverance, or to exhibit the strength with which a man could slay a thousand foes. To answer this purpose, it was necessary that the acts of Samson should differ from those of the judges who fought at the head of military forces, and should exhibit the stamp of confidence and boldness in the full consciousness of possession divine and invincible power.

But whilst the spirit which prevailed in Israel during the time of the judges culminated in the nature and deeds of Samson both in its weakness and strength, the miraculous character of his deeds, regarded simply in themselves, affords no ground for pronouncing the account a mere legend which has transformed historical acts into miracles, except from a naturalistic point of view, which rejects all miracles, and therefore denies *a priori* the supernatural working of the living God in the midst of His people. The formal character of the whole of the history of Samson, which the opponents of the biblical revelation adduce for the further support of this view, does not yield any tenable evidence of its correctness. The external rounding off of the account proves nothing more than that Samson's life and acts formed in themselves a compact and well-rounded whole. But the assertion, that "well-rounded circumstances form a suitable framework for the separate accounts, and that precisely twelve acts are related of Samson, which are united into beautiful pictures and narrated in artistic order" (*Bertheau*), is at variance with the actual character of the biblical account. In order to get exactly twelve heroic acts, *Bertheau* has to fix the stamp of a heroic act performed by Samson himself upon the miraculous help which he received from God through the opening up of a spring of water (Judg 15:18-19), and also to split up a closely connected event, such as his breaking the bonds three times, into three different actions.

(Note: On these grounds, *L. Diestel* , in the article *Samson* in *Herzog's Cycl.*, has rejected *Bertheau's* enumeration as unsatisfactory; and also the division proposed by *Ewald* into five acts with three turns in each, because, in order to arrive at this grouping, *Ewald* is not only obliged to refer the general statement in Judg 13:25, "the Spirit of God began to drive Samson," to some heroic deed which is not described, but has also to assume that in the case of one act (the carrying away of the gates at Gaza) the last two steps of the legend are omitted from the present account, although in all

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

the rest *Diestel* follows *Ewald's* view almost without exception. The views advanced by *Ewald* and *Bertheau* form the foundation of *Roskoff's* Monograph, "the legend of Samson in its origin, form, and signification, and the legend of Hercules," in which the legend of Samson is regarded as an Israelitish form of that of Hercules.)

If we simply confine ourselves to the biblical account, the acts of Samson may be divided into two parts. The *first* (ch. 14 and 15) contains those in which Samson smote the Philistines with gradually increasing severity; the *second* (ch. 16) those by which he brought about his own fall and ruin. These are separated from one another by the account of the time that his judgeship lasted (Judg 15:20), and this account is briefly repeated at the close of the whole account (Judg 16:31). The *first* part includes six distinct acts which are grouped together in twos: viz., (1 and 2) the killing of the lion on the way to Timnath, and the slaughter of the thirty Philistines for the purpose of paying for the solution of his riddle with the clothes that he took off them (ch. 14); (3 and 4) his revenge upon the Philistines by burning their crops, because his wife had been given to a Philistine, and also by the great slaughter with which he punished them for having burned his father-in-law and wife (Judg 15:1-8); (5 and 6) the bursting of the cords with which his countrymen had bound him for the purpose of delivering him up to the Philistines, and the slaying of 1000 Philistines with the jaw-bone of an ass (Judg 15:9-19).

The **second** part of his life comprises only three acts: viz., (1) taking off the town gates of Gaza, and carrying them away (Judg 16:1-3); (2) breaking the bonds with which Delilah bound him three separate times (Judg 16:4-14); and (3) his heroic death through pulling down the temple of Dagon, after he had been delivered into the power of the Philistines through the treachery of Delilah, and had been blinded by them (Judg 16:15-31). In this arrangement there is no such artistic shaping or rounding off of the historical materials apparent, as could indicate any mythological decoration. And lastly, the popular language of Samson in proverbs, rhymes, and a play upon words, does not warrant us in maintaining that the popular legend invented this mode of expressing his thoughts, and put the words into his

mouth. All this leads to the conclusion, that there is no good ground for calling in question the historical character of the whole account of Samson's life and deeds.

(Note: No safe or even probable conjecture can be drawn from the character of the history before us, with reference to the first written record of the life of Samson, or the sources which the author of our book of Judges made use of for this portion of his work. The recurrence of such expressions as *yaacheel* (OT:2490) followed by an infinitive (Judg 13:5,25; 16:19,22), *patiy* (OT:6601) (ch. 14:15; 16:5), *heetsiyq* (OT:6693) (Judg 14:17; 16:16, etc.), upon which *Bertheau* lays such stress, arises from the actual contents of the narrative itself. The same expressions also occur in other places where the thought requires them, and therefore they form no such peculiarities of style as to warrant the conclusion that the life of Samson was the subject of a separate work (*Ewald*), or that it was a fragment taken from a larger history of the wars of the Philistines (*Bertheau*).)

Judges 13:1

And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.

Birth of Samson. - V. 1. The oppression of the Israelites by the Philistines, which is briefly hinted at in Judg 10:7, is noticed again here with the standing formula, "*And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord,*" etc. (cf. Judg 10:6; 4:1; 3:12), as an introduction to the account of the life and acts of *Samson*, who began to deliver Israel from the hands of these enemies. Not only the birth of Samson, but the prediction of his birth, also fell, according to v. 5, within the period of the rule of the Philistines over Israel. Now, as their oppression lasted

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

forty years, and Samson judged Israel for twenty years during that oppression (Judg 15:20; 16:31), he must have commenced his judgeship at an early age, probably before the completion of his twentieth year; and with this the statement in ch. 14, that his marriage with a Philistine woman furnished the occasion for his conflicts with these enemies of his people, fully agrees. The end of the forty years of the supremacy of the Philistines is not given in this book, which closes with the death of Samson. It did not terminate till the great victory which the Israelites gained over their enemies under the command of Samuel (1 Sam 7). Twenty years before this victory the Philistines had sent back the ark which they had taken from the Israelites, after keeping it for seven months in their own land (1 Sam 7:2, and 6:1). It was within these twenty years that most of the acts of Samson occurred. His first affair with the Philistines, however, namely on the occasion of his marriage, took place a year or two before this defeat of the Israelites, in which the sons of Eli were slain, the ark fell into the hands of the Philistines, and the high priest Eli fell from his seat and broke his neck on receiving the terrible news (1 Sam 4:18). Consequently Eli died a short time after the first appearance of Samson (see p. 206).

Judges 13:2-5

And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not.

Whilst the Israelites were given into the hands of the Philistines on account of their sins, and were also severely oppressed in Gilead on the part of the Ammonites, the angel of the Lord appeared to the wife of Manoah, a Danite from *Zorea*, i.e., *Sur'a*, on the western slope of the mountains of Judah (see at Josh 15:33). *Mishpachath Dani* (the family of the Danites) is used interchangeably with *shebet Dani* (the tribe of the Danites: see Judg 18:2,11, and 18:1,30), which may be explained on this ground, that according to Num 26:42-43, all the Danites formed but one family, viz., the family of the Shuhamites. The angel of the Lord announced to this

woman, who was barren, "*Thou wilt conceive and bear a son. And now beware, drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean: for, behold, thou wilt conceive and bear a son, and no razor shall come upon his head; for a vowed man of God (Nazir) will the boy be from his mother's womb,*" i.e., his whole life long, "*to the day of his death,*" as the angel expressly affirmed, according to v. 7.

The three prohibitions which the angel of the Lord imposed upon the woman were the three things which distinguished the condition of a Nazarite (see at Num 6:1-8, and the explanation given there of the Nazarite vow). The only other thing mentioned in the Mosaic law is the warning against defilement from contact with the dead, which does not seem to have been enforced in the case of Samson. When the angel added still further, "*And he (the Nazarite) will begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines,*" he no doubt intended to show that his power to effect this deliverance would be closely connected with his condition as a Nazarite. The promised son was to be a Nazarite all his life long, because he was to begin to deliver Israel out of the power of his foes. And in order that he might be so, his mother was to share in the renunciations of the Nazarite vow during the time of her pregnancy. Whilst the appearance of the angel of the Lord contained the practical pledge that the Lord still acknowledged His people, though He had given them into the hands of their enemies; the message of the angel contained this lesson and warning for Israel, that it could only obtain deliverance from its foes by seeking after a life of consecration to the Lord, such as the Nazarites pursued, so as to realize the idea of the priestly character to which Israel had been called as the people of Jehovah, by abstinence from the *deliciae carnis* , and everything that was unclean, as being emanations of sin, and also by a complete self-surrender to the Lord (see Pentateuch, p. 674).

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 13:6-7

Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name:

The woman told her husband of this appearance: "*A man of God*," she said (lit., *the man of God*, viz., the one just referred to), "*came to me, and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very terrible; and I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name*," etc. "*Man of God*" was the expression used to denote a prophet, or a man who stood in immediate intercourse with God, such as Moses and others (see at Deut 33:1). "*Angel of God*" is equivalent to "angel of the Lord" (Judg 2:1; 6:11), the angel in whom the invisible God reveals himself to men. The woman therefore imagined the person who appeared to her to have been a prophet, whose majestic appearance, however, had produced the impression that he was a superior being; consequently she had not ventured to ask him either his name or where he came from.

Judges 13:8-9

Then Manoah intreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.

Being firmly convinced of the truth of this announcement, and at the same time reflecting upon the obligation which it imposed upon the parents, Manoah prayed to the Lord that He would let the man of God whom He had sent come to them again, to teach them what they were to do to the boy that should be born, i.e., how they should treat him. *hayuwlaad* (OT:3205), according to the *Keri hayulaad*

(OT:3205), is a participle *Pual* with the *m* dropped (see *Ewald* , §169, *b.*). This prayer was heard. The angel of God appeared once more to the woman when she was sitting alone in the field without her husband.

Judges 13:10-12

And the woman made haste, and ran, and shewed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the other day.

Then she hastened to fetch her husband, who first of all inquired of the person who had appeared, "*Art thou the man who said to the woman*" (sc., what has been related in vv. 3-5)? And when this was answered in the affirmative, he said still further (v. 12), "*Should thy word then come to pass, what will be the manner of the*

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

boy, and his doing?" The plural *d^abaareyk^a* (OT:1697) is construed *ad sensum* with the singular verb, because the words form one promise, so that the expression is not to be taken distributively, as *Rosenmüller* supposes. This also applies to v. 17, *Mishpat*, the right belonging to a boy, i.e., the proper treatment of him.

Judges 13:13-14

And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware.

The angel of the Lord then repeated the instructions which he had already given to the woman in v. 4, simply adding to the prohibition of wine and strong drink the caution not to eat of anything that came from the vine, in accordance with Num 6:3.

Judges 13:15

And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee.

As Manoah had not yet recognised in the man the angel of the Lord, as is observed by way of explanation in v. 16, he wished, like Gideon (Judg 6:18), to give a hospitable entertainment to the man who had brought him such joyful tidings, and therefore said to him, "*Let us detain thee, and prepare a kid for thee.*" The construction *l^apaaneyk^a* (OT:6440) *na`aseh* (OT:6213) is a pregnant one: "prepare and set before thee." On the fact itself, see Judg 6:19.

Judges 13:16

And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread: and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the LORD. For Manoah knew not that he was an angel of the LORD.

The angel of the Lord replied, "*If thou wilt detain me (sc., that I may eat), I will not eat of thy food ('aakal (OT:398) with b^a , to eat thereat, i.e., thereof, as in Ex 12:43; Lev 22:11); but if thou wilt prepare a burnt-offering for Jehovah, then offer it.*"

Judges 13:17

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour?

Manoah then asked his name: *shim^akaa* (OT:8034) *miy* (OT:4310), lit., "Who is thy name?" *miy* (OT:4310) inquires after the person; *maah* (OT:4100), the nature of quality (see *Ewald*, §325, a.). "For if thy word come to pass, we will do thee honour." This was the reason why he asked after his name. *kibeed*, to honour by presents, so as to show one's self grateful (see Num 22:17,37; 24:11).

Judges 13:18

And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?

The angel replied, "Why askest thou then after my name? truly it is wonderful." The *Kethibh pl'y* is the adjectival form *pil^aiy* (OT:6383) from *pele'* (OT:6382), for which the *Keri* has *peliy* (OT:6383), the pausal form of *p^aliy* (OT:6383) (from the radical *paalaah* (OT:6395) = *paalaa'* (OT:6381)). The word therefore is not the proper name of the angel of the Lord, but expresses the character of his name; and as the name simply denotes the nature, it expresses the peculiarity of his nature also. It is to be understood in an absolute sense - "absolutely and supremely wonderful" (*Seb. Schmidt*) - as a predicate belonging to God alone (compare the term "Wonderful" in Isa 9:6), and not to be toned down as it is by *Bertheau*, who explains it as signifying "neither easy to utter nor easy to comprehend."

Judges 13:19-20

So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD: and the angel did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on.

Manoah then took the kid and the *minchah* , i.e., according to Num 15:4ff., the meat-offering belonging to the burnt-offering, and offered it upon the rock, which is called an altar in v. 20, because the angel of the Lord, who is of one nature with God, had sanctified it as an altar through the miraculous acceptance of the sacrifice. *la`asowt* (OT:6213) *map`li'* (OT:6381), "*and wonderfully* (miraculously) *did he act*" (*hip`liy'* (OT:6381) followed by the infinitive with *l^a* as in 2 Chron 26:15). These words form a circumstantial clause, which is not to be attached, however, to the subject of the principal clause, but to *layhaaowh* (OT:3068): "Manoah offered the sacrifice to the Lord, whereupon He acted to do wonderfully, i.e., He performed a wonder or miracle, and Manoah and his wife saw it" (see *Ewald* , Lehrb. §341, *b.* , p. 724, note). In what the miracle consisted is explained in v. 20, in the words, "*when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar;*" that is to say, in the fact that a flame issued from the rock, as in the case of Gideon's sacrifice (Judg 6:21), and consumed the sacrifice. And the angel of the Lord ascended in this flame. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell upon their faces to the earth (sc., in worship), because they discovered from the miracle that it was the angel of the Lord who had appeared to them.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 13:21-23

But the angel of the LORD did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was an angel of the LORD.

From that time forward the Lord did not appear to them again. But Manoah was afraid that he and his wife should die, because they had seen God (on this belief, see the remarks on Gen 16:13 and Ex 33:20). His wife quieted his fears, however, and said, "*Jehovah cannot intend to kill us, as He has accepted our sacrifice, and has shown us all this*" (the twofold miracle). "*And at this time He has not let us see such things as these.*" *kaa`eet* (OT:6256), at the time in which we live, even if such things may possibly have taken place in the hoary antiquity.

Judges 13:24

And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him.

The promise of God was fulfilled. the boy whom the woman bare received the name of *Samson*. *shim^ashown* (OT:8123) (LXX, *Sampsoo'n* (NT:4546)) does not mean sun-like, hero of the sun, from *shemesh* (OT:8121) (the sun), but, as *Josephus* explains it (Ant. v. 8, 4), *ischuro's* (NT:2478), the strong or daring one, from *shim^ashowm* , from the intensive from *shim^asheem* , from *shaameem* (OT:8074), in its original sense to be strong or daring, not "to devastate." *shaadad* (OT:7703) is an analogous word: *lit.* to be powerful, then to act powerfully, to devastate. The boy grew under the blessing of God (see 1 Sam 2:21).

Judges 13:25

And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

When he had grown up, the Spirit of Jehovah began to thrust him in the camp of Dan. *paa`am* (OT:6471), to thrust, denoting the operation of the Spirit of God within him, which took possession of him suddenly, and impelled him to put forth supernatural powers. *Mahaneh-dan* , the camp of Dan, was the name given to the district in which the Danites who emigrated, according to Judg 18:12, from the inheritance of their tribe, had pitched their encampment *behind* , i.e., to the west of, *Kirjath-jearim* , or according to this verse, between Zorea and Eshtaol. The situation cannot be determined precisely, as the situation of Eshtaol itself has not been discovered yet (see at Josh 15:33). It was there that Samson lived with his parents, judging from Judg 16:31. The meaning of this verse,

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

which forms the introduction to the following account of the acts of Samson, is simply that Samson was there seized by the Spirit of Jehovah, and impelled to commence the conflict with the Philistines.

Judges 14:1-2

And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines.

Samson's First Transactions with the Philistines. - Vv. 1-9. At Tibnath, the present *Tibne*, an hour's journey to the south-west of Sur'a (see at Josh 15:10), to which Samson had gone down from Zorea or Mahaneh-dan, he saw a daughter of the Philistines who pleased him; and on his return he asked his parents to take her for him as a wife (*laaqach* (OT:3947), to take, as in Ex 21:9).

Judges 14:3-4

Then his father and his mother said unto him, Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well.

His parents expressed their astonishment at the choice, and asked him whether there was not a woman among the daughters of his brethren (i.e., the members of his own tribe), or among all his people, that he should want to fetch one from the Philistines, the uncircumcised. But Samson repeated his request, because the daughter of the Philistines pleased him. The aversion of his parents to the marriage was well founded, as such a marriage was not in accordance with the law. It is true that the only marriages expressly prohibited in Ex 34:16 and Deut 7:3-4, are marriages with Canaanitish women; but the reason assigned for this prohibition

was equally applicable to marriages with daughters of the Philistines. In fact, the Philistines are reckoned among the Canaanites in Josh 13:3 upon the very same ground. But Samson was acting under a higher impulse, whereas his parents did not know that it was from Jehovah, i.e., that Jehovah had so planned it; "*for Samson was seeking an opportunity on account of the Philistines,*" i.e., an occasion to quarrel with them, because, as is afterwards added in the form of an explanatory circumstantial clause, the Philistines had dominion over Israel at that time. *to'anaah* (OT:8385), *hap leg* , an opportunity (cf. *hit^aaneh* , 2 Kings 5:7).

Judges 14:5-6

Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnath, and came to the vineyards of Timnath: and, behold, a young lion roared against him.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

When Samson went down with his parents to Timnath, a young lion came roaring towards him at the vineyards of that town. Then the Spirit of Jehovah came upon him, so that he tore the lion in pieces as a kid is torn (*lit.* "like the tearing in pieces of the kid"), although he had nothing, i.e., no weapon, in his hand. David, when a shepherd, and the hero Benaiah, also slew lions (1 Sam 17:34-35; 2 Sam 23:20); and even at the present day Arabs sometimes kill lions with a staff (see *Winer*, *Bibl. R. W. Art. Löwe*). Samson's supernatural strength, the effect of the Spirit of Jehovah, which came upon him, was simply manifested in the fact that he tore the lion in pieces without any weapon whatever in his hand. But he said nothing about it to his parents, who were not eyewitnesses of the deed. This remark is introduced in connection with what follows.

Judges 14:7

And he went down, and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well.

When he came to Timnath he talked with the girl, and she pleased him. He had only *seen* her before (v. 1); but now that his parents had asked for her, he talked with her, and found the first impression that he had received of her fully confirmed.

Judges 14:8

And after a time he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcase of the lion: and, behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion.

When some time had elapsed after the betrothal, he came again to fetch her (take her home, marry her), accompanied, as we learn from v. 9, by his parents. On the way *"he turned aside (from the road) to see the carcase of the lion; and behold a*

swarm of bees was in the body of the lion, also honey." The word *mapelet* (OT:4658), which only occurs here, is derived from *naapal* (OT:5307), like *ptoo'ma* (NT:4430) from *pi'ptoo* (NT:4098), and is synonymous with *n^abeelaah* (OT:5038), *cadaver*, and signifies not the mere skeleton, as bees would not form their hive in such a place, but the carcass of the lion, which had been thoroughly dried up by the heat of the sun, without passing into a state of putrefaction. "In the desert of Arabia the heat of a sultry season will often dry up all the moisture of men or camels that have fallen dead, within twenty-four hours of their decease, without their passing into a state of decomposition and putrefaction, so that they remain for a long time like mummies, without change and without stench" (*Rosenmüller*, *Bibl. Althk.* iv. 2, p. 424). In a carcass dried up in this way, a swarm of bees might form their hive, just as well as in the hollow trunks of trees, or clefts in the rock, or where wild bees are accustomed to form them, notwithstanding the fact that bees avoid both dead bodies and carrion (see *Bochart, Hieroz, ed. Ros.* iii. p. 355).

Judges 14:9

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 14:9

And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat: but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcase of the lion.

Samson took it (the honey) in his hands, ate some of it as he went, and also gave some to his father and mother to eat, but did not tell them that he had got the honey out of the dead body of the lion; for in that case they would not only have refused to eat it as being unclean, but would have been aware of the fact, which Samson afterwards took as the subject of the riddle that he proposed to the Philistines. *raadaah* (OT:7287), to tread, to tread down; hence to get forcible possession of, not to break or to take out, neither of which meanings can be established. The combination of *raadaah* (OT:7287) and *'el-kapaayw* is a pregnant construction, signifying to obtain possession of and take into the hands.

Judges 14:10-20

So his father went down unto the woman: and Samson made there a feast; for so used the young men to do.

Samson's Wedding and Riddle. - V. 10. When his father had come down to the girl (sc., to keep the wedding, not merely to make the necessary preparations for his marriage), Samson prepared for a feast there (in Timnath), according to the usual custom (for so used the young men to do).

Verse 11. "**And when they saw him, they fetched thirty friends, and they were with him.**" The parents or relations of the bride are the subject of the first clause. They invited thirty of their friends in Timnath to the marriage feast, as "children of

the bride-chamber" (Matt 9:15), since Samson had not brought any with him. The reading *kir^aowtaam* (OT:7200) from *raa'aah* (OT:7200) needs no alteration, though *Bertheau* would read *keer^aotaam* from *yaaree'* (OT:3372), in accordance with the rendering of the LXX (*Cod. Al.*) and *Josephus* , *en* (NT:1722) *too'* (NT:3588) *fobei'sthai* (NT:5399) *autou's* (NT:846). Fear of Samson would neither be in harmony with the facts themselves, nor with the words *'itow* (OT:854) *wayih^ayuw* (OT:1961), "*they were with him,*" which it is felt to be necessary to paraphrase in the most arbitrary manner "they watched him."

Verse 12-14. At the wedding feast Samson said to the guests, "*I will give you a riddle. If you show it to me during the seven days of the meal (the wedding festival), and guess it, I will give you thirty sedinim (*sindo'nes* (NT:4616), *tunicae* , i.e., clothes worn next to the skin) and thirty changes of garments (costly dresses, that were frequently changed: see at Gen 45:22); but if ye cannot show it to me, ye shall give me the same number of garments.*" The custom of proposing riddles at banquets by way of entertainment is also to be met with among the ancient Grecians. (For proofs from *Athenaeus*, *Pollux*, *Gellius* , see *Bochart* , Hieroz. P. ii. 1.

ii. c. 12; and *K. O. Müller* , Dorier, ii. p. 392). As the guests consented to this proposal, Samson gave them the following riddle (v. 14): "***Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness.***" This riddle they could not show, i.e., solve, for three days. That is to say, they occupied themselves for three days in trying to find the solution; after that they let the matter rest until the appointed term was drawing near.

Verse 15-16. On the seventh day they said to Samson's wife, "*Persuade thy husband to show us the riddle,*"

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

sc., through thee, without his noticing it, *"lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire. Have ye invited us to make us poor; is it not so?"* In this threat the barbarism and covetousness of the Philistines came openly to light.

hal^ayaar^asheenuw (OT:3423) without *Metheg* in the *yaa* is the *inf. Kal* of *yaarash* (OT:3423), to make poor—a meaning derived from inheriting, not the *Piel* of *yaarash* (OT:3423) = *ruwsh* (OT:7326), to be poor. *halo'*, *nonne*, strengthens the interrogative clause, and has not the signification "here" = *halom* (OT:1988).

Samson's wife, however, wept over him, i.e., urged him with tears in her eyes, and said, *"Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not; thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people (my countrymen), and hast not shown it to me."*

chad^ataah (OT:2330) is from *chuw^d* (OT:2330). Samson replied, that he had not even shown it to his father and mother, *"and shall I show it to thee?"*

Verse 17. **"Thus his wife wept before him the seven days of the banquet."** This statement is not at variance with that in v. 15, to the effect that it was only on the seventh day that the Philistine young men urged her with threats to entice Samson to tell the riddle, but may be explained very simply in the following manner. The woman had already come to Samson every day with her entreaties from simple curiosity; but Samson resisted them until the seventh day, when she became more urgent than ever, in consequence of this threat on the part of the Philistines. And *"Samson showed it to her, because she lay sore upon him;"* whereupon she immediately betrayed it to her countrymen.

Verse 18. Thus on the seventh day, before the sun went down (*char^acaah* (OT:2775) = *cherec* (OT:2776), Judg 8:13; Job 9:7, with a toneless *ah*, a softening down of the feminine termination: see *Ewald*, §173, *h.*), the men of the city (i.e., the thirty young men who had been invited) said to Samson, "What is sweeter than honey, and what stronger than a lion?" But Samson saw through the whole thing, and replied, *"If ye had not ploughed with my heifer, ye had not hit upon (guessed) my riddle,"* - a proverbial saying, the meaning of which is perfectly clear.

Verse 19. Nevertheless he was obliged to keep his promise (v. 12). Then the Spirit of Jehovah came upon him. He went down to Ashkelon, slew thirty men of them, i.e., of the Ashkelonites, took their clothes (*chaliytsowt* , *exuviae*: see 2 Sam 2:21), and gave the changes of garments to those who had shown the riddle. This act is described as the operation of the Spirit of Jehovah which came upon Samson, because it showed to the Philistines the superior power of the servants of Jehovah. It was not carnal revenge that had impelled Samson to the deed. It was not till the deed itself was done that his anger was kindled; and even then it was not against the Philistines, to whom he had been obliged to pay or give the thirty garments, but against his wife, who had betrayed his secret to her countrymen, so that he returned to his father's house, viz., without his wife.

Verse 20. "**And Samson's wife was given to his friend, whom he had chosen as a friend.**" *meereea`* is not doubt to be understood here in the sense of "the friend of the bridegroom" (John 3:29), *ho numfagoogo's* (LXX), the conductor of the bride-namely, one of the thirty companions (v. 10), whom Samson had entrusted with this office at the marriage festival. The faithlessness of the Philistines towards the Israelites was no doubt apparent here; for even if Samson went home enraged at the treacherous behaviour of his wife, without taking her with him, he did not intend to break the marriage tie, as Judg 15:1-2 clearly shows. So that instead of looking at the wrong by which Samson felt himself aggrieved, and trying to mitigate his wrath, the parents of the woman made the breach irreparable by giving their daughter as a wife to his companion.

Judges 15:1-2

But it came to pass within a while after, in the time of wheat harvest, that Samson visited his wife with

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

But it came to pass within a while after, in the time of wheat harvest, that Samson visited his wife with a kid; and he said, I will go in to my wife into the chamber. But her father would not suffer him to go in.

Further Acts of Samson. - V. 1-8. *His Revenge upon the Philistines.* - V. 1. Some time after, Samson visited his wife in the time of the wheat harvest with a kid—a customary present at that time (Gen 38:17) - and wished to go into the chamber (the women's apartment) to her; but her father would not allow him, and said, "*I thought thou hatedst her, and therefore gave her to thy friend (Judg 14:20): behold her younger sister is fairer than she; let her be thine in her stead.*"

Judges 15:3

And Samson said concerning them, Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure.

Enraged at this answer, Samson said to them (i.e., to her father and those around him), "*Now am I blameless before the Philistines, if I do evil to them.*" **nīqaah** (OT:5352) with **min** (OT:4480), to be innocent away from a person, i.e., before him (see Num 32:22). Samson regarded the treatment which he had received from his father-in-law as but one effect of the disposition of the Philistines generally towards the Israelites, and therefore resolved to avenge the wrong which he had received from one member of the Philistines upon the whole nation, or at all events upon the whole of the city of Timnath.

Judges 15:4-5

And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails.

He therefore went and caught three hundred *shualim* , i.e., jackals, animals which resemble foxes and are therefore frequently classed among the foxes even by the common Arabs of the present day (see *Niebuhr* , Beschr. v. Arab. p. 166). Their European name is derived from the Persian *schaghal*. These animals, which are still found in great quantities at Joppa, Gaza, and in Galilee, herd together, and may easily be caught (see *Rosenmüller* , Bibl. Althk. iv. 2, pp. 155ff.). He then took torches, turned tail to tail, i.e., coupled the jackals together by their tails, putting a torch between the two tails, set the torches on fire, and made the animals run into the fields of standing corn belonging to the Philistines. Then he burned "*from the shocks of wheat to the standing grain and to the olive gardens,*" i.e., the shocks of wheat as well as the standing corn and the olive plantations. *zayit* (OT:2132) *kerem* (OT:3754) are joined together in the construct state.

Judges 15:6

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 15:6

Then the Philistines said, Who hath done this? And they answered, Samson, the son in law of the Timnite, because he had taken his wife, and given her to his companion. And the Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire.

The Philistines found out at once, that Samson had done them this injury because his father-in-law, the Timnite, had taken away his wife and given her to his companion. They therefore avenged themselves by burning her and her father—probably by burning his house down to the ground, with its occupants within it—an act of barbarity and cruelty which fully justified Samson's war upon them.

Judges 15:7

And Samson said unto them, Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease.

Samson therefore declared to them, "*If ye do such things, truly (*kiy* (OT:3588)) when I have avenged myself upon you, then will I cease,*" i.e., I will not cease till I have taken vengeance upon you.

Judges 15:8

And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter: and he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam.

"Then he smote them hip and thigh (*lit.* 'thigh upon hip;' *`al* (OT:5921) as in Gen 32:12), a great slaughter." *showq* (OT:7785), thigh, strengthened by *`al-*

yaareek^a, is a second accusative governed by the verb, and added to define the word *'owtaam* (OT:853) more minutely, in the sense of "on hip and thigh;" whilst the expression which follows, *g^adowlaah* (OT:1419) *makaah* (OT:4347), is added as an adverbial accusative to strengthen the verb *wayak^a* (OT:5221). Smiting hip and thigh is a proverbial expression for a cruel, unsparing slaughter, like the German "cutting arm and leg in two," or the Arabic "war in thigh fashion" (see *Bertheau in loc.*). After smiting the Philistines, Samson went down and dwelt in the cleft of the rock *Etam*. There is a town of *Etam* mentioned in 2 Chron 11:6, between Bethlehem and Tekoah, which was fortified by Rehoboam, and stood in all probability to the south of Jerusalem, upon the mountains of Judah. But this *Etam*, which *Robinson* (Pal. ii. 168) supposes to be the village of *Urtas*, a place still inhabited, though lying in ruins, is not to be thought of here, as the Philistines did not go up to the mountains of Judah (v. 9), as *Bertheau* imagines, but simply came forward and encamped in Judah. The *Etam* of this verse is mentioned in 1 Chron 4:32, along with Ain Rimmon and other Simeonitish towns, and is to be sought for on the border of the Negeb and of the mountains of Judah, in the neighbourhood of *Khuweilifeh* (see *V. de Velde*, Mem. p. 311). The expression "he went down" suits this place very well, but not the *Etam* on the mountains of Judah, to which he would have had to go up, and not down, from Timnath.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 15:9-17

Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi.

Samson is delivered up to the Philistines, and smites them with the jaw-bone of an Ass.

Verse 9. The Philistines came ("went up," denoting the advance of an army: see at Josh 8:1) to avenge themselves for the defeat they had sustained from Samson; and having encamped in Judah, spread themselves out in *Lechi* (*Lehi*). *Lechi* (*l^achiy* (OT:3895), in pause *lechiy* (OT:3896), i.e., a jaw), which is probably mentioned again in 2 Sam 23:11, and, according to v. 17, received the name of *Ramath-lechi* from Samson himself, cannot be traced with any certainty, as the early church tradition respecting the place is utterly worthless. *Van de Velde* imagines that it is to be found in the flattened rocky hill *el Lechieh*, or *Lekieh*, upon which an ancient fortification has been discovered, in the middle of the road from *Tell Khewelfeh* to *Beersheba*, at the south-western approach of the mountains of Judah.

Verse 10-12. When the Judaeans learned what was the object of this invasion on the part of the Philistines, three thousand of them went down to the cleft in the rock Etam, to bind Samson and deliver him up to the Philistines. Instead of recognising in Samson a deliverer whom the Lord had raised up for them, and crowding round him that they might smite their oppressors with his help and drive them out of the land, the men of Judah were so degraded, that they cast this reproach at Samson: "***Knowest thou not that the Philistines rule over us? Wherefore hast thou done this*** (the deed described in v. 8)? *We have come down to bind thee, and deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines.*" Samson replied, "Swear to me that ye will not fall upon me yourselves." *paaga`* (OT:6293) with *b^a*, to thrust at a person, fall upon

him, including in this case, according to v. 13, the intention of killing.

Verse 13. When they promised him this, he let them bind him with two new cords and lead him up (into the camp of the Philistines) out of the rock (i.e., the cleft of the rock).

Verse 14. But when he came to Lechi, and the Philistines shouted with joy as they came to meet him, the Spirit of Jehovah came upon him, *"and the cords on his arms became like two that had been burnt with fire, and his fetters melted from his hands."* The description rises up to a poetical parallelism, to depict the triumph which Samson celebrated over the Philistines in the power of the Spirit of Jehovah.

Verse 15-16. As soon as he was relieved of his bands, he seized upon a fresh jaw-bone of an ass, which he found there, and smote therewith a thousand men. He himself commemorated this victory in a short poetical strain (v. 16): *"With the ass's jaw-bone a heap, two heaps; with the ass's jaw-bone I smote a thousand men."* The form of the word *chamowr* (OT:2543) = *chomer* (OT:2563) is chosen on account of the resemblance to *chamowr* (OT:2543), and is found again at 1 Sam 16:20. How Samson achieved this victory is not minutely described. But the words "a heap, two heaps," point to the conclusion that it did not take place in one encounter, but in several. The supernatural strength with which Samson rent asunder the fetters bound upon him, when the Philistines thought they had him safely in their power, filled them with fear and awe as before a superior being, so that they fled, and he pursued them, smiting one heap after another, as he overtook them, with an ass's jaw-bone which he found in the

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

way. The number given, viz., a thousand, is of course a round number signifying a very great multitude, and has been adopted from the song into the historical account.

Verse 17. When he had given utterance to his saying, he threw the jaw-bone away, and called the place *Ramath-lechi*, i.e., the jaw-bone height. This seems to indicate that the name *Lechi* in v. 9 is used proleptically, and that the place first received its name from this deed of Samson.

Judges 15:18-20

And he was sore athirst, and called on the LORD, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?

The pursuit of the Philistines, however, and the conflict with them, had exhausted Samson, so that he was very thirsty, and feared that he might die from exhaustion; for it was about the time of the wheat-harvest (v. 1), and therefore hot summer weather. Then he called to the Lord, "*Thou hast through (**b^ayad** (OT:3027)) "Thy servant given this great deliverance; and now I shall die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised!"* From this prayer we may see that Samson was fully conscious that he was fighting for the cause of the Lord. And the Lord helped him out of this trouble. God split the hollow place at Lechi, so that water came out of it, as at Horeb and Kadesh (Ex 17:6, and Num 20:8,11). The word *mak^ateesh* (OT:4388), which is used in Prov 27:22 to signify a mortar, is explained by rabbinical expositors as denoting the socket of the teeth, or the hollow place in which the teeth are fixed, like the Greek *holmi'skos*, *mortariolum*, according to *Pollux*, Onom. ii.

c. 4, §21.

Accordingly many have understood the statement made here, as meaning that God caused a fountain to flow miraculously out of the socket of a tooth in the jaw-bone which Samson had thrown away, and thus provided for his thirst. This view is the one upon which Luther's rendering, "God split a tooth in the jaw, so that water came out," is founded, and it has been voluminously defended by *Bochart* (Hieroz. l. ii. c. 15). But the expression *balechiy* (OT:3895) '*asher* (OT:834), "the *maktesh* which is at *Lechi*," is opposed to this view, since the tooth-socket in the jaw-bone of the ass would be simply called *hal^achiy* (OT:3895) *mak^atesh* (OT:4388) or *balechiy* (OT:3895) *mak^ateesh* (OT:4388); and so is also the remark that this fountain was still in existence in the historian's own time. And the article proves nothing to the contrary, as many proper names are written with it (see *Ewald*, §277, c.).

Consequently we must follow *Josephus* (Ant. v. 8), who takes *hamak^ateesh* (OT:4388) as the name given to the opening of the rock, which was cleft by God to let water flow out. "If a rocky precipice bore the name of jaw-bone (*lechi*) on account of its shape, it was a natural consequence of this figurative epithet, that the name *tooth-hollow* should be given to a hole or gap in the rock" (*Studer*). Moreover, the same name, *Maktesh* , occurs again in Zeph 1:11, where it is applied to a locality in or near Jerusalem. The hollow place was split by *Elohim* , although it was to *Jehovah* that Samson had prayed, to indicate that the miracle was wrought by God as the Creator and Lord of nature. Samson drank, and his spirit returned, so that he revived again. Hence the fountain received the name of *En-hakkore* , "the crier's well which is at Lechi," unto this day. According to the accents, the last clause does not belong to *balechiy* (OT:3895) (in Lechi), but to *wgw' qaaraa'* (OT:7121) (he called, etc.). It received the name given to it unto this day. This *implies* , of course, that the spring itself was in existence when our book was composed. - In v. 20 the account of the judicial labours of Samson are brought to a close, with the remark that Samson judged Israel in the days of the Philistines, i.e., during their rule, for twenty years. What more

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

is recorded of him in ch. 16 relates to his fall and ruin; and although even in this he avenged himself upon the Philistines, he procured no further deliverance for Israel. It is impossible to draw any critical conclusions from the position in which this remark occurs, as to a plurality of sources for the history of Samson.

Judges 16:1-3

Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there an harlot, and went in unto her.

Samson's Fall and Death. - Samson's judicial labours reached their highest point when he achieved his great victory over the Philistines at Lechi. Just as his love to the daughter of a Philistine had furnished him with the occasion designed by God for the manifestation of his superiority to the uncircumcised enemies of Israel, so the degradation of that love into sensual lust supplied the occasion for his fall which is related in this chapter. "Samson, when strong and brave, strangled a lion; but he could not strangle his own love. He burst the fetters of his foes, but not the cords of his own lusts. He burned up the crops of others, and lost the fruit of his own virtue when burning with the flame enkindled by a single woman." (*Ambros. Apol. ii., David. c. iii.*)

Verse 1-3. **His Heroic Deed at Gaza.** - Samson went to Gaza in the full consciousness of his superiority in strength to the Philistines, and there went in unto a harlot whom he saw. For Gaza, see Josh 13:3. '*el* (OT:413) *bow*' (OT:935) is used in the same sense as in Gen 6:4 and 38:16. It is not stated in this instance, as in Judg 14:4, that it was of the Lord.

Verse 2. When this was told to the Gazites, they surrounded him (the object to the verb is to be supplied from the following word *low* (OT:3807a)) and laid wait for him all night at the city gate, but they kept themselves quiet during the night,

saying, "*Till the dawning ('owr (OT:216), infin.) of the morning,*" sc., we can wait, "*then will we kill him.*" For this construction, see 1 Sam 1:22. The verb *wayugad* (OT:5046), "it was told" (according to the LXX and *Chald.*: cf. Gen 22:20), or *wayo'm^aruw* (OT:559), "they said," is wanting before *laa`azaatiym* (OT:5841), and must have fallen out through a copyist's error. The verb *hit^achaareesh* has evidently the subordinate idea of giving themselves up to careless repose; for if the watchmen who were posted at the city gate had but watched in a regular manner, Samson could not have lifted out the closed gates and carried them away. But as they supposed that he would not leave the harlot before daybreak, they relied upon the fact that the gate was shut, and probably feel asleep.

Verse 3. But at midnight Samson got up, and "laying hold of the folding wings of the city, gate, as well as the two posts, tore them out of the ground with his herculean strength, together with the bar that fastened them, and carried them up to the top of the mountain which stands opposite to Hebron." *`al-p^aneey* merely means in the direction towards, as in Gen 18:16, and does not signify that the mountain was in the front of Hebron or in the immediate neighbourhood (see Deut 32:49, where Mount Nebo, which was on the other side of the Jordan, and at least four geographical miles from Jericho, is said to have been over against, it, and the same expression is employed). The distance from Gaza to Hebron was about nine geographical miles. To the east of Gaza there is a range of hills which runs from north to south. The highest of them all is one which stands somewhat isolated, about half an hour to the south-east of the town, and is called *el Montar* from a wely which is found upon the top of it. From this hill there is a splendid prospect over the whole of the surrounding country. Hebron itself is not visible from this hill, but the mountains of Hebron are. According to an ancient tradition, it was to the summit of this hill that Samson carried the city gates; and both *Robinson* (Pal. ii. 377) and *V. de Velde* regard this tradition as by no means improbable,

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

although the people of Gaza are not acquainted with it. "The city gate of the Gaza of that time was probably not less than three-quarters of an hour from the hill *el Montar*; and to climb this peak with the heavy gates and their posts and bar upon his shoulders through the deep sand upon the road, was a feat which only a Samson could perform" (*V. de Velde*).

Judges 16:4-21

And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

Samson and Delilah. - V. 4. After this successful act, Samson gave himself up once more to his sensual lusts. He fell in love with a woman in the valley of *Sorek*, named *Delilah* (i.e., the weak or pining one), to whose snares he eventually succumbed. With reference to the valley of *Sorek*, *Eusebius* affirms in the *Onom.* (*s. v. Dooree'ch*), that there was a village called *Baree'ch* (*l. Cafa'r sooree'ch* according to *Jerome*) near Zorea, and *en* (NT:1722) *hori'ois* (NT:3725) (*l. borei'ois* according to *Jerome*, who has *ad septentrionalem plagam*); and also (*s. v. Dooree'k*) that this place was near to Eshtaol. Consequently the *Sorek* valley would have to be sought for somewhere in the neighbourhood of Samson's birthplace (Judg 13:1), and the dwelling-place of his family (v. 31).

Verse 5. The princes of the Philistines offered Delilah a considerable sum (they would give her one thousand and one hundred shekels of silver each, i.e., a thousand shekels or more: cf. Judg 17:2) if she would persuade Samson, and bring out from him "whereby his strength was great," and whereby they could overpower and bind him, *l^aanowtow* (OT:6031), to bend him, i.e., to oppress him. The Philistine princes thought that Samson's supernatural strength arose from something external, which he wore or carried about with him as an amulet. There was a certain truth at the foundation of this heathen superstition, inasmuch as this

gift of divine grace was really bound up with the possession of a corporeal pledge, the loss of which was followed by the immediate loss of the gift of God (see at v. 17).

Verse 6-7. Allured by the reward in prospect, Delilah now sought to get from him the secret of his strength. But he deceived her three times by false statements. He first of all said to her (v. 7), "*If they bound me with strings that have not been dried, I should be weak and like one of the men*" (i.e., like any other man). *yeter* (OT:3499) signifies a sinew or string, e.g., a bow-string, Ps 11:2, and in the different dialects either a bow-string or the string of a harp or guitar. As a distinction is made here between the *y^ataariym* (OT:3499) and the *`abotiym* (OT:5688) in v. 11, the strings intended here are those of catgut or animal sinew. The number *seven* is that of a divine act, answering to the divine power which Samson possessed.

Verse 8-9. When Delilah told this to the princes of the Philistines, they brought the seven strings required, and Delilah bound Samson with them. "*And the spy sat in the room (laah (OT:3807a), dat. com., lit. 'to her,' i.e.) to help her.*" namely, without Samson knowing it, as Delilah had certainly not told him that she should betray the secret of his strength to the Philistines. He was there, no doubt, that he might be at hand and overpower the fettered giant as soon as it became apparent that his strength was gone. She then cried out to him, "*Philistines upon thee, Samson!*" And he snapped the strings as one would snap a cord in two "when it smells fire," i.e., is held to the fire.

Verse 10-12. The second deception: Samson had himself bound with new cords, which had not yet been used for any purpose, and these also he burst from his arms like a thread.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Verse 13-14. The third deception: "*If thou weavest together the seven locks of my hair with the warp. And she drove it in with the plug.*" These words are difficult to explain, partly because several technical terms are used which have more than one meaning, and partly because the account itself is contracted, both Samson's advice and her fulfilment of it being only given in a partial form, so that the one has to be completed from the other. In v. 19, the only other passage in which *mach^alaapowt* (OT:4253) occurs, it no doubt means the plaits into which Samson's long flowing hair was plaited. *hamaceket* only occurs here (vv. 13 and 14), and probably means the woven cloth, or rather what was still upon the loom, the warp of the cloth, *di'asma* (LXX). Accordingly the meaning of the verse would be this: If thou weavest the seven plaits of my hair along with the warp upon the loom. The commentators are all agreed that, according to these words, there must be something wanting in the account, though they are not of one opinion as to whether the binding of Samson is fully given here, and all that has to be supplied is the clause "*Then shall I be weak,*" etc. (as in vv. 7 and 11), or whether the words *bayaateed* (OT:3489) *watit^aqa`* (OT:8628) add another fact which was necessary to the completeness of the binding, and if so, how these words are to be understood.

In **Bertheau's** opinion, the words "*and she thrust with the plug*" probably mean nothing more than that she made a noise to wake the sleeping Samson, because it is neither stated here that she forced the plug into the wall or into the earth to fasten the plaits with (LXX, *Jerome*), nor that her thrusting with the plug contributed in any way to the further fastening of the hair. These arguments are sound no doubt, but they do not prove what is intended. When it is stated in v. 14b, that "he tore out the weaver's plug and the cloth," it is certainly evident that the plug served to fasten the hair to the cloth or to the loom. Moreover, not only would any knocking with the plug to waken Samson with the noise have been altogether superfluous, as the loud cry, "Philistines upon thee, Samson," would be amply sufficient for this; but it is extremely improbable that a fact with so little bearing upon the main facts would be introduced here at all.

We come therefore to the same conclusion as the majority of commentators, viz., that the words in question are to be understood as referring to something that was done to fasten Samson still more securely. *hayaateed* (OT:3489) = *haa'ereg* (OT:708) *hay^atad* (OT:3489) (v. 14) does not mean the roller or weaver's beam, to which the threads of the warp were fastened, and round which the cloth was rolled when finished, as *Bertheau* supposes, for this is called '*or^agiym m^anowr* in 1 Sam 17:7; nor the *spa'thee* of the Greeks, a flat piece of wood like a knife, which was used in the upright loom for the same purpose as our comb or press, viz., to press the weft together, and so increase the substance of the cloth (*Braun, de vestitu Sacerd.* p. 253); but the comb or press itself which was fastened to the loom, so that it could only be torn out by force. To complete the account, therefore, we must supply between vv. 13 and 14, "And if thou fastenest it (the woven cloth) with the plug (the weaver's comb), I shall be weak like one of the other men; and she wove the seven plaits of his hair into the warp of the loom."

Then follows in v. 14, "*and fastened the cloth with the weaver's comb.*" There is no need, however, to assume that what has to be supplied fell out in copying. We have simply an ellipsis, such as we often meet with. When Samson as wakened out of his sleep by the cry of "Philistines upon thee," he tore out the weaver's comb and the warp (sc.,) from the loom, with his plaits of hair that had been woven in. The reference to his sleeping warrants the assumption that Delilah had also performed the other acts of binding while he was asleep. We must not understand the account, however, as implying that the three acts of binding followed close upon one another on the very same day. Several days may very probably have elapsed between them. In this third deception Samson had already gone so far in his presumptuous trifling with the divine gift entrusted to him, as to suffer the hair of his head to be meddled with, though it was sanctified to the Lord. "It would seem as though this act of sin ought to have brought him to reflection. But as that was not the case, there remained but one short step more to bring him to thorough treachery towards the Lord" (*O. v. Gerlach*).

Verse 15. This last step was very speedily to follow. - V. 15. After this triple

deception, Delilah said to him, "*How*

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Verse 15. This last step was very speedily to follow. - V. 15. After this triple deception, Delilah said to him, "*How canst thou say, I love thee, as thine heart is not with me*" (i.e., not devoted to me)?

Verse 16. With such words as these she plagued him every day, so that his soul became impatient even to death (see ch. 10;16). The *hap leg 'aalats* (OT:509) signifies in Aramaean, to press or plague. The form is *Piel*, though without the reduplication of the *l* and *Chateph-patach* under (see *Ewald*, §90, b.).

Verse 17. "**And he showed her all his heart,**" i.e., he opened his mind thoroughly to her, and told her that no razor had come upon his head, because he was a Nazarite from his mother's womb (cf. Judg 13:5,7). "*If I should be shave, my strength would depart from me, and I should be weak like all other men.*"

Verse 18. When Delilah saw (i.e., perceived, namely from his words and his whole behaviour while making this communication) that he had betrayed the secret of his strength, she had the princes of the Philistines called: "***Come up this time,...for he had revealed to her all his heart.***" This last clause is not to be understood as having been spoken by Delilah to the princes themselves, as it is by the Masorites and most of the commentators, in which case *laah* (OT:3807a) would have to be altered into *liy* (OT:3807a); but it contains a remark of the writer, introduced as an explanation of the circumstance that Delilah sent for the princes of the Philistines now that she was sure of her purpose. This view is confirmed by the word *w^aaaluw* (OT:5927) (came up) which follows, since the use of the perfect instead of the imperfect with *vav consec.* can only be explained on the supposition that the previous clause is a parenthetical one, which interrupts the course of the narrative, and to which the account of the further progress of the affair could not be attached by the historical tense (*waya`aluw* (OT:5927)).

(Note: The **Keri** reading *liy* (OT:3807a) arose simply from a misunderstanding, although it is found in

many MSS and early editions, and is without any critical worth. The Masorites overlooked the fact that the main point is all that is related of the message of Delilah to the princes of the Philistines, namely that they were to come this time, and that the rest can easily be supplied from the context. *Studer* admits how little *w^a aaluw* (OT:5927) suits that view of the clause which the *Keri* reading *liy* (OT:3807a) requires, and calls it "syntactically impossible." He proposes, however, to read *waya`aluw* (OT:5927), without reflecting that this reading is also nothing more than a change which is rendered necessary by the alteration of *laah* (OT:3807a) into *liy* (OT:3807a), and has no critical value.)

The princes of the Philistines came up to Delilah on the receipt of this communication, bringing the money, the promised reward of her treachery (v. 5), in their hands.

Verse 19. **"Then she made him sleep upon her knees, and called to the man,"** possibly the man lying in wait (vv. 9 and 12), that she might not be alone with Samson when cutting off his hair; and she cut off the seven plaits of his hair, and began to afflict him, as his strength departed from him now.

Verse 20. She then cried out, *"Philistines upon thee, Samson!"* And he awaked out of his sleep, and thought (*"said,"* i.e., to himself), *"I will go away as time upon time* (this as at other times), *and shake myself loose,"* sc., from the fetters or from the hands of the Philistines; *"but he knew not that Jehovah had departed from him."* These last words are very important to observe in order to form a correct idea of the affair. Samson had said to Delilah, "If my hair were cut off, *my strength* would depart from me" (v. 17). The historian observes, on the other hand, that *"Jehovah had departed from him."* The superhuman strength of Samson did not reside in his hair as hair, but in the fact that Jehovah was with or near him. But Jehovah was with him so long as he maintained his condition as a Nazarite. As soon as he broke away from this by sacrificing the hair which he wore in honour of the Lord, Jehovah departed from him, and with Jehovah went his strength.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

(Note: "Samson was strong because he was dedicated to God, as long as he preserved the signs of his dedication. But as soon as he lost those signs, he fell into the utmost weakness in consequence. The whole of Samson's misfortune came upon him, therefore, because he attributed to himself some portion of what God did through him. God permitted him to lose his strength, that he might learn by experience how utterly powerless he was without the help of God. We have no better teachers than our own infirmities." - *Berleb. Bible.*)

Verse 21. The Philistines then seized him, put out his eyes, and led him to Gaza fettered with double brass chains. The chains are probably called *nechushtaim* (double brass) because both hands of both feet were fettered with them. King Zedekiah, when taken prisoner by the Chaldeans, was treated in the same manner (2 Kings 25:7). There Samson was obliged to turn the mill in the prison, and grind corn (the participle *Tocheen* (OT:2912) expresses the continuance of the action). Grinding a handmill was the hardest and lowest kind of slave labour (compare Ex 11:5 with 12:29); and both Greeks and Romans sentenced their slaves to this as a punishment (see *Od.* xx. 105ff., vii. 103-4; *Terent.* Phorm. ii. 1, 19, Andr. i, 2. 29), and it is still performed by female slaves in the East (see *Chardin* in *Harmar's* Beob. üb. d. Orient. iii. 64).

Judges 16:22-31

Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven.

Samson's Misery, and His Triumph in Death. - V. 22. The hair of his head began to grow, as he was shaven. In the word *ka'asher* (OT:834), *as* (from the time when he was shaven), there is an indication that Samson only remained in his ignominious captivity till his hair began to grow again, i.e., visibly to grow. What follows agrees with this.

Verse 23,24. The captivity of this dreaded hero was regarded by the Philistines as a

great victory, which their princes resolved to celebrate with a great and joyous sacrificial festival in honour of their god *Dagon*, to whom they ascribed this victory. "*A great sacrifice*," consisting in the offering up of a large number of slain sacrifices. "*And for joy*," viz., to give expression to their joy, i.e., for a joyous festival. *Dagon*, one of the principal deities of the Philistines, was worshipped at Gaza and Ashdod (2 Sam 5:2ff., and 1 Macc. 10:83), and, according to Jerome on Isa 46:1, in the rest of the Philistine towns as well. It was a fish-deity (*daagown* (OT:1712), from *daag* (OT:1709), a fish), and in shape resembled the body of a fish with the head and hands of a man (1 Sam 5:4). It was a male deity, the corresponding female deity being *Atargatis* (2 Macc. 12:26) or *Derceto*, and was a symbol of water, and of all the vivifying forces of nature which produce their effects through the medium of water, like the Babylonian *Aoda'koon*, one of the four *Oannes*, and the Indian *Vishnu* (see *Movers*, Phöniz. i. pp. 143ff., 590ff., and *J. G. Müller* in *Herzog's Cycl.*).

Verse 24. All the people took part in this festival, and sang songs of praise to the god who had given the enemy, who had laid waste their fields and slain many of their countrymen, into their hands.

Verse 25-27. When their hearts were merry (*y^aTowb* (OT:2896), *inf.* of *yaaTab* (OT:3190)), they had Samson

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

fetched out of the prison, that he might make sport before them, and "put him between the pillars" of the house or temple in which the triumphal feast was held. Then he said to the attendant who held his hand, "*Let me loose, and let me touch the pillars upon which the house is built, that I may lean upon it.*" **heeymiysheeny** is the imperative *Hiphil* of the radical verb **yaamash** (OT:3237), which only occurs here; and the *Keri* substitutes the ordinary form **haamiysh** (OT:376) from **muwsh** (OT:4184). "*But the house,*" adds the historian by way of preparation for what follows, "*was filled with men and women: all the princes of the Philistines also were there; and upon the roof were about three thousand men and women, who feasted their eyes with Samson's sports*" (**raa'aah** (OT:7200) with **b^a** , used to denote the gratification of looking).

Verse 28. Then Samson prayed to Jehovah, "*Lord Jehovah, remember me, and only this time make me strong. O God, that I may avenge myself (with) the revenge of one of my two eyes upon the Philistines,*" i.e., may take vengeance upon them for the loss of only one of my two eyes (**mish^ateey** (OT:8147), without *Dagesh lene* in the **t** : see *Ewald* , §267, *b.*) - a sentence which shows how painfully he felt the loss of his two eyes, "a loss the severity of which even the terrible vengeance which he was meditating could never outweigh" (*Bertheau*).

Verse 29-30. After he had prayed to the Lord for strength for this last great deed, he embraced the two middle pillars upon which the building was erected, leant upon them, one with his right hand, the other with the left (viz., embracing them with his hands, as these words also belong to **yil^apot** (OT:3943)), and said, "*let my soul die with the Philistines.*" He then bent (the two pillars) with force, and the house fell upon the princes and all the people who were within. So far as the fact itself is concerned, there is no ground nor questioning the possibility of Samson's bringing down the whole building with so many men inside by pulling down two middle columns, as we have no accurate acquaintance with the style of its architecture. In all probability we have to picture this temple of Dagon as resembling the modern Turkish kiosks, namely as consisting of a "spacious hall,

the roof of which rested in front upon four columns, two of them standing at the ends, and two close together in the centre. Under this hall the leading men of the Philistines celebrated a sacrificial meal, whilst the people were assembled above upon the top of the roof, which was surrounded by a balustrade" (*Faber* , Archäol. der. Hebr. p. 444, cf. pp. 436-7; and *Shaw* , Reisen, p. 190).

The ancients enter very fully into the discussion of the question whether Samson committed suicide or not, though without arriving at any satisfactory conclusion. *O. v. Gerlach* , however, has given the true answer. "Samson's deed," he says, "was not suicide, but the act of a hero, who sees that it is necessary for him to plunge into the midst of his enemies with the inevitable certainty of death, in order to effect the deliverance of his people and decide the victory which he has still to achieve. Samson would be all the more certain that this was the will of the Lord, when he considered that even if he should deliver himself in any other way cut of the hands of the Philistines, he would always carry about with him the mark of his shame in the blindness of his eyes-a mark of his unfaithfulness as the servant of God quite as much as of the double triumph of his foes, who had gained a spiritual as well as a corporeal victory over him." Such a triumph as this the God of Israel could not permit His enemies and their idols to gain. The Lord must prove to them, even through Samson's death, that the shame of his sin was taken from him, and that the Philistines had no cause to triumph over him. Thus Samson gained the greatest victory over his foes in the moment of his own death. The terror of the Philistines when living, he became a destroyer of the temple of their idol when he died. Through this last act of his he vindicated the honour of Jehovah the God of Israel, against Dagon the idol of the Philistines. "*The dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.*"

Verse 31. This terrible blow necessarily made a powerful impression upon the Philistines, not only plunging them into deep mourning at the death of their princes and so many of their countrymen, and the destruction of the temple of Dagon, but filling them with fear and terror at the omnipotence of the God of the Israelites. Under these circumstances it is conceivable enough that the brethren and relatives of Samson were able to come to Gaza, and fetch away the body of the fallen hero,

to bury it in his father's grave between Zorea and Eshtaol (see Judg 13:25).

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

- In conclusion, it is once more very appropriately observed that Samson had judged Israel twenty years (cf. Judg 15:20).

III. IMAGE-WORSHIP OF MICAH AND THE DANITES; INFAMOUS CONDUCT

OF THE INHABITANTS OF GIBEAH; VENGEANCE TAKEN UPON THE TRIBE OF BENJAMIN.

Ch. 17-21.

The death of Samson closes the body of the book of Judges, which sets forth the history of the people of Israel under the judges in a continuous and connected form. The two accounts, which follow in ch. 17-21, of the facts mentioned in the heading are attached to the book of Judges in the form of *appendices*, as the facts in question not only belonged to the times of the judges, and in fact to the very commencement of those times (see p. 176), but furnished valuable materials for forming a correct idea of the actual character of this portion of the Israelitish history. The *first* appendix (ch. 17-18) - viz., the account of the introduction of image-worship, or of the worship of Jehovah under the form of a molten image, by the Ephraimite Micah, and of the seizure of this image by the Danites, who emigrated from their own territory when upon their march northwards, and the removal of it to the city of *Laish-Dan*, which was conquered by them-shows us how shortly after the death of Joshua the inclination to an idolatrous worship of Jehovah manifested itself in the nation, and how this worship, which continued for a long time in the north of the land, was mixed up from the very beginning with sin and unrighteousness.

The **second** (ch. 19-21) - viz., the account of the infamous act which the inhabitants of Gibeah attempted to commit upon the Levite who stayed there for the night, and which they actually did perform upon his concubine, together with

its consequences, viz., the war of vengeance upon the tribe of Benjamin, which protected the criminals-proves, on the one hand, what deep roots the moral corruptions of the Canaanites had struck among the Israelites at a very early period, and, on the other hand, how even at that time the congregation of Israel as a whole had kept itself free and pure, and, mindful of its calling to be the holy nation of God, had endeavoured with all its power to root out the corruption that had already forced its way into the midst of it.

These two occurrences have no actual connection with one another, but they are both of them narrated in a very elaborate and circumstantial manner; and in both of them we not only find Israel still without a king (Judg 17:6; 18:1, and 19:1; 21:25), and the will of God sought by a priest or by the high priest himself (Judg 18:5-6; 20:18,23,27), but the same style of narrative is adopted as a whole, particularly the custom of throwing light upon the historical course of events by the introduction of circumstantial clauses, from which we may draw the conclusion that they were written by the same author. On the other hand, they do not contain any such characteristic marks as could furnish a certain basis for well-founded conjectures concerning the author, or raise *Bertheau's* conjecture, that he was the same person as the author of Judg 1:1-2:5, into a probability. For the frequent use of the perfect with *w^a* (compare Judg 20:17,33,37-38,40-41,48; 21:1,15, with Judg 1:8,16,21,25, etc.) can be fully explained from the contents themselves; and the notion that the perfect is used here more frequently for the historical imperfect with *vav consec.* rests upon a misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the passages in question.

The other and not very numerous expressions, which are common to ch. 17-21 and ch. 1, are not sufficiently characteristic to supply the proof required, as they are also met with elsewhere: see, for example, *baa'eesh* (OT:784) *shilach* (OT:7971) (Judg 1:8; 20:48), which not only occurs again in 2 Kings 8:12 and Ps 74:7, but

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

does not even occur in both the appendices, *baa'eesh* (OT:784) *saarap* (OT:8313) being used instead in Judg 18:27. So much, however, may unquestionably be gathered from the exactness and circumstantiality of the history, viz., that the first recorder of these events, whose account was the source employed by the author of our book, cannot have lived at a time very remote from the occurrences themselves. On the other hand, there are not sufficient grounds for the conjecture that these appendices were not attached to the book of the Judges till a later age. For it can neither be maintained that the object of the first appendix was to show how the image-worship which Jeroboam set up in his kingdom at Bethel and Dan had a most pernicious origin, and sprang from the image-worship of the Ephraimite Micah, which the Danites had established at Laish, nor that the object of the second appendix was to prove that the origin of the pre-Davidic kingdom (of Saul) was sinful and untheocratic, i.e., opposed to the spirit and nature of the kingdom of God, as *Auberlen* affirms (Theol. Stud. u. Kr. 1860).

The identity of the golden calf set up by Jeroboam at Dan with the image of Jehovah that was stolen by the Danites from Micah the Ephraimite and set up in Laish-Dan, is precluded by the statement in Judg 18:31 respecting the length of time that this image-worship continued in Dan (see the commentary on the passage itself). At the most, therefore, we can only maintain, with *O. v. Gerlach*, that "both (appendices) set forth, according to the intention of the author, the misery which arose during the wild unsettled period of the judges from the want of a governing, regal authority." This is hinted at in the remark, which occurs in both appendices, that at that time there was no king in Israel, and every one did what was right in his own eyes (Judg 17:6; 21:25). This remark, on the other hand, altogether excludes the time of the falling away of the ten tribes, and the decline of the later kingdom, and is irreconcilable with the assumption that these appendices were not added to the book of the Judges till after the division of the kingdom, or not till the time of the Assyrian or Babylonian captivity.

Image-Worship of Micah the Ephraimite, and Its Removal to Laish-

Dan. Ch. 17-18.

Micah's Image-Worship. - The account of the image-worship which Micah established in his house upon the mountains of Ephraim is given in a very brief and condensed form, because it was simply intended as an introduction to the account of the establishment of this image-worship in Laish-Dan in northern Palestine. Consequently only such points are for the most part given, as exhibit in the clearest light the sinful origin and unlawful character of this worship.

Judges 17:1-10

And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah.

Verse 1-3. A man of the mountains of Ephraim named Micah (*miykaay^{huw}* (OT:4319), vv. 1, 4, when contracted into *miykaah* (OT:4318), vv. 5, 8, etc.), who set up this worship for himself, and "respecting whom the Scriptures do not think it worth while to add the name of his father, or to mention the family from which he sprang" (*Berleb. Bible*), had stolen 1100 shekels of silver (about £135) from his mother. This is very apparent from the words which he spoke to his mother (v. 2): "*The thousand and hundred shekels of silver which were taken from thee* (the singular *luqach* (OT:3947) refers to the silver), *about which thou cursedst and spakest of also in mine ears* (i.e., didst so utter the curse that among others I also heard it), *behold, this silver is with me; I have taken it.*" *'aalaah* (OT:423), to swear, used to denote a malediction or curse (cf. *'aalaah* (OT:423) *qowl* (OT:6963), Lev 5:1). He seems to have been impelled to make this confession by the fear of his mother's curse. But his mother praised him for it - "*Blessed be my son of Jehovah,*" - partly because she saw in it a proof that there still existed a germ of the fear of God, but in all probability chiefly because she was about to dedicate the silver to Jehovah; for, when her son had given it back to her, she said (v. 3), "*I have sanctified the silver to the*

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Lord from my hand for my son, to make an image and molten work." The perfect *hiq^adash^atiy* (OT:6942) is not to be taken in the sense of the pluperfect, "I had sanctified it," but is expressive of an act just performed: I have sanctified it, I declare herewith that I do sanctify it. "*And now I give it back to thee,*" namely, to appropriate to thy house of God.

Verse 4. Hereupon-namely, when her son had given her back the silver ("he restored the silver unto his mother" is only a repetition of v. 3a, introduced as a link with which to connect the appropriation of the silver) - the mother took 200 shekels and gave them to the goldsmith, who made an image and molten work of them, which were henceforth in Micah's house. The 200 shekels were not quite the fifth part of the whole. What she did with the rest is not stated; but from the fact that she dedicated the silver generally, i.e., the whole amount, to Jehovah, according to v. 3, we may infer that she applied the remainder to the maintenance of the image-worship.

(Note: There is no foundation for *Bertheau's* opinion, that the 200 shekels were no part of the 1100, but the trespass-money paid by the son when he gave his mother back the money that he had purloined, since, according to **Lev. 5:24**, when a thief restored to the owner any stolen property, he was to add the fifth of its value. There is no ground for applying this law to the case before us, simply because the taking of the money by the son is not even described as a theft, whilst the mother really praises her son for his open confession.)

Pesel and **massecah** (image and molten work) are joined together, as in Deut 27:15. The difference between the two words in this instance is very difficult to determine. *Pesel* signifies an idolatrous image, whether made of wood or metal. *Massecah*, on the other hand, signifies a cast, something poured; and when used in the singular, is almost exclusively restricted to the calf cast by Aaron or Jeroboam. It is generally connected with *`eegel* (OT:5695), but it is used in the same sense without this definition (e.g., Deut 9:12). This makes the conjecture a very natural one, that the two words together might simply denote a likeness of Jehovah, and,

judging from the occurrence at Sinai, a representation of Jehovah in the form of a molten calf. But there is one obstacle in the way of such a conjecture, namely, that in Judg 18:17-18, *massecah* is separated from *pesel*, so as necessarily to suggest the idea of two distinct objects. But as we can hardly suppose that Micah's mother had two images of Jehovah made, and that Micah had both of them set up in his house of God, no other explanation seems possible than that the *massecah* was something belonging to the *pesel*, or image of Jehovah, but yet distinct from it—in other words, that it was the pedestal upon which it stood. The *pesel* was at any rate the principal thing, as we may clearly infer from the fact that it is placed in the front rank among the four objects of Micah's sanctuary, which the Danites took with them (Judg 18:17-18), and that in ch. 18:30-31, the *pesel* alone is mentioned in connection with the setting up of the image-worship in Dan. Moreover, there can hardly be any doubt that *pesel*, as a representation of Jehovah, was an image of a bull, like the golden calf which Aaron had made at Sinai (Ex 32:4), and the golden calves which Jeroboam set up in the kingdom of Israel, and one of which was set up in Dan (1 Kings 12:29).

Verse 5-6. His mother did this, because her son Micah had a house of God, and had had an ephod and teraphim made for himself, and one of his sons consecrated to officiate there as a priest. *miykaah* (OT:4318) *haa'iysh* (OT:376) (the man Micah) is therefore placed at the head absolutely, and is connected with what follows by *low* (OT:3807a): "**As for the man Micah, there was to him** (he had) a house of God." The whole verse is a circumstantial clause explanatory of what precedes, and the following verbs *waya`as* (OT:6213), *way^amalee'* (OT:4390), and *way^ahiy* (OT:1961), are simply a continuation of the first clause, and therefore to be rendered as pluperfects. Micah's *beth Elohim* (house of God) was a domestic temple belonging to Micah's house, according to Judg 18:15-18. '*et-yaad milee'*, to fill the hand, i.e., to invest with the priesthood, to institute as priest (see at Lev 7:37). The *ephod* was an imitation of the high priest's shoulder-dress (see at Judg 8:27). The *teraphim* were images of household gods, penates, who were worshipped as the givers of earthly prosperity, and as oracles (see at Gen 31:19). - In v. 6 it is observed, in explanation of this unlawful conduct, that at that time there was no king in

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Israel, and every one did what was right in his own eyes.

Verse 7-9. Appointment of a Levite as Priest. - Vv. 7ff. In the absence of a Levitical priest, Micah had first of all appointed one of his sons as priest at his sanctuary. He afterwards found a Levite for this service. A young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who, being a Levite, stayed (*gaar* (OT:1481)) there (in Bethlehem) as a stranger, left this town to sojourn "*at the place which he should find,*" sc., as a place that would afford him shelter and support, and came up to the mountains of Ephraim to Micah's house, "making his journey,"

i.e., upon his journey. (On the use of the *inf. constr.* with *l^a* in the sense of the Latin *gerund in do*, see *Ewald*, §280, *d.*) Bethlehem was not a Levitical town. The young Levite from Bethlehem was neither born there nor made a citizen of the place, but simply "sojourned there," i.e., dwelt there temporarily as a stranger.

The further statement as to his descent (*mishpachath Judah*) is not to be understood as signifying that he was a descendant of some family in the tribe of Judah, but simply that he belonged to the Levites who dwelt in the tribe of Judah, and were reckoned in all civil matters as belonging to that tribe. On the division of the land, it is true that it was only to the priests that dwelling-places were allotted in the inheritance of this tribe (Josh 21:9-19), whilst the rest of the Levites, even the non-priestly members of the family of Kohath, received their dwelling-places among the other tribes (Josh 21:20ff.). At the same time, as many of the towns which were allotted to the different tribes remained for a long time in the possession of the Canaanites, and the Israelites did not enter at once into the full and undisputed possession of their inheritance, it might easily so happen that different towns which were allotted to the Levites remained in possession of the Canaanites, and consequently that the Levites were compelled to seek a settlement in other places. It might also happen that individuals among the Levites themselves, who were disinclined to perform the service assigned them by the law, would remove from the Levitical towns and seek some other occupation elsewhere

(see also at Judg 18:30).

(Note: There is no reason, therefore, for pronouncing the words *y^huwdaah* (OT:3063) *mimish^hpachat* (OT:4940) (of the family of Judah) a gloss, and erasing them from the text, as *Houbigant* proposes. The omission of them from the *Cod. Vat.* of the LXX, and from the Syriac, is not enough to warrant this, as they occur in the *Cod. Al.* of the LXX, and their absence from the authorities mentioned may easily be accounted for from the difficulty which was felt in explaining their meaning. On the other hand, it is impossible to imagine any reason for the interpolation of such a gloss into the text.)

Judges 17:10-13

And Micah said unto him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten shekels of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals. So the Levite went in.

Micah made this proposal to the Levite: "*Dwell with me, and become my father and priest; I will give thee ten shekels of silver yearly, and fitting out with clothes and maintenance.*" *'aab* (OT:1), *father*, is an honourable title give to a priest as a paternal friend and spiritual adviser, and is also used with reference to prophets in 2 Kings 6:21 and 13:14, and applied to Joseph in Gen 45:8. *layaamiym* (OT:3117), *for the days*, sc., for which a person was engaged, i.e., for the year (cf. 1 Sam 27:7, and Lev 25:29). "*And the Levite went,*" i.e., went to Micah's house. This meaning is evident from the context. The repetition of the subject, "the Levite," precludes our connecting it with the following verb *wayow'el* (OT:2974). - In vv. 11-13 the result is summed up. The Levite

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

resolved (see at Deut 1:5) to dwell with Micah, who treated him as one of his sons, and entrusted him with the priesthood at his house of God. And Micah rejoiced that he had got a Levite as priest, and said, "*Now I know that Jehovah will prosper me.*" This belief, or, to speak more correctly, superstition, for which Micah was very speedily to atone, proves that at that time the tribe of Levi held the position assigned it in the law of Moses; that is to say, that it was regarded as the tribe elected by God for the performance of divine worship.

Judges 18:1

In those days there was no king in Israel: and in those days the tribe of the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in; for unto that day all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel.

The Image-Worship Removed to Laish-Dan. - Vv. 1-10. *Spies sent out by the tribe of Dan* , to seek for a place suitable for a settlement, and their success.

Verse 1. This took place at a time when Israel had no king, and the tribe of the Danites sought an inheritance for themselves to dwell in, because until that day no such portion had fallen to them among the tribes as an inheritance. To the expression *naap^alaah* (OT:5307) *lo'* (OT:3808) (had not fallen) we must supply *nachalaah* (OT:5159) as the subject from the previous clause; and *b^anachalaah* (OT:5159) signifies in the character of a *nachalah* , i.e., of a possession that could be transmitted as hereditary property from father to son. *naapal* (OT:5307), to fall, is used with reference to the falling of the lot (vid., Num 34:2; Josh 13:6, etc.). The general statement, that as yet no inheritance had fallen to the tribe of Dan by lot, has its limitation in the context. As the Danites, according to v. 2, sent out five men from Zorea and Eshtaol, and, according to v. 11, six hundred men equipped for fight went out to Laish, which the spies had discovered to be a place well fitted for a settlement, and had settled there, it is very evident from this that the Danites were

not absolutely without an inheritance, but that hitherto they had not received one sufficient for their wants.

The emigrants themselves were already settled in Zorea and Eshtaol, two of the towns that had fallen to the tribe of Dan by lot (Josh 19:41). Moreover, the six hundred equipped Danites, who went out of these towns, were only a very small part of the tribe of Danites, which numbered 64,400 males of twenty years old and upwards at the last census (Num 26:43). For a tribe of this size the land assigned by Joshua to the tribe of Dan, with all the towns that it contained, was amply sufficient. But from Judg 1:34 we learn that the Amorites forced the Danites into the mountains, and would not allow them to come down into the plain. Consequently they were confined to a few towns situated upon the sides or tops of the mountains, which did not supply all the room they required. Feeling themselves too weak to force back the Canaanites and exterminate them, one portion of the Danites preferred to seek an inheritance for themselves somewhere else in the land.

This enterprise and emigration are described in vv. 2ff. The time cannot be determined with perfect certainty, as all that can be clearly inferred from v. 12, as compared with Judg 13:25, is, that it took place some time before the days of Samson. Many expositors have therefore assigned it to the period immediately following the defeat of Jabin by Barak (Judg 4:24), because it was not till after the overthrow of this powerful king of the Canaanites that conquests were possible in the north of Canaan, and the tribe of Dan at that time still remained in ships (Judg 5:17), so that it had not yet left the territory assigned it by the sea-shore (Josh 19). But these arguments have neither of them any force; for there is nothing surprising in the fact that Danites should still be found by the sea-shore in the

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

time of Deborah, even if Danite families from Zorea and Eshtaol had settled in Laish long before, seeing that these emigrants formed but a small fraction of the whole tribe, and the rest remained in the possessions assigned them by Joshua. Moreover, the strengthening of the force of the Canaanites, and the extension of their dominion in the north, did not take place till 150 years after Joshua, in the days of Jabin; so that long before Jabin the town of Laish may have been conquered by the Danites, and taken possession of by them. In all probability this took place shortly after the death of Joshua, as we may infer from v. 30 (see the exposition of this verse).

Judges 18:2

And the children of Dan sent of their family five men from their coasts, men of valour, from Zorah, and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land, and to search it; and they said unto them, Go, search the land: who when they came to mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah, they lodged there.

To spy out and explore the land for the object mentioned, the Danites sent out five brave men "out of their (the Danites') ends," i.e., from their whole body (vid., 1 Kings 12:31; 13:33, and the commentary on Gen 19:4). They came up to the mountains of Ephraim, and as far as Micah's house, where they passed the night.

Judges 18:3-6

When they were by the house of Micah, they knew the voice of the young man the Levite: and they turned in thither, and said unto him, Who brought thee hither? and what makest thou in this place? and what hast thou here?

When they were at Micah's house and recognised the voice of the young Levite, i.e., heard his voice, and perceived from his dialect that he was not a native of these

mountains, they turned aside there, sc., from the road into the house, near to which they rested, and asked him, *"Who brought thee hither, and what doest thou at this place? what hast thou to do here?"* When he told them his history ("thus and thus," *lit.* according to this and that; cf. 2 Sam 11:25; 1 Kings 14:5), they said to him, *"Ask God, we pray thee, that we may learn whether our way will be prosperous."* ***bee'lohiym*** (OT:430) ***shaa'al*** (OT:7592), used for asking the will of God, as in Judg 1:1, except that here the inquiry was made through the medium of the imitation of the ephod and the worship of an image. And he said to them, sc., after making inquiry of the divine oracle, *"Go in peace; straight before Jehovah is your way,"* i.e., it is known and well-pleasing to Him (vid., Prov 5:21; Jer 17:16).

Judges 18:7

Then the five men departed, and came to Laish, and saw the people that were therein, how they dwelt

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

careless, after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure; and there was no magistrate in the land, that might put them to shame in any thing; and they were far from the Zidonians, and had no business with any man.

Thus the five men proceeded to *Laish* , which is called *Leshem* in Josh 19:47, and was named *Dan* after the conquest by the Danites-a place on the central source of the Jordan, the present *Tell el Kadi* (see at Josh 19:47) - and saw the people of the town dwelling securely after the manner of the Sidonians, who lived by trade and commerce, and did not go out to war. *yowshebet* (OT:3427) is the predicate to '*et-haa`aam* , and the feminine is to be explained from the fact that the writer had the population before his mind (see *Ewald* , §174, *b.*); and the use of the masculine in the following words *uwboTeeach* (OT:982) *shoqeeT* (OT:8252), which are in apposition, is not at variance with this. The connection of *yowshebet* (OT:3427) with *b^aqir^abaah* (OT:7130), which *Bertheau* revives from the earlier commentators, is opposed to the genius of the Hebrew language. *uwboTeeach* (OT:982) *shoqeeT* (OT:8252), "*living quietly and safely there.*" *wgw' w^aeeyn-mak^aliym* , "*and no one who seized the government to himself did any harm to them in the land.*" *hik^aliym* (OT:3212), to shame, then to do an injury (1 Sam 25:7). *daabaar* (OT:1697) *mak^aliym* (OT:3637), shaming with regard to a thing, i.e., doing any kind of injury. *`etsar* (OT:6114), dominion, namely tyrannical rule, from *`aatsar* (OT:6113), *imperio coercere*. The rendering "riches" (*theesauro's* (NT:2344), LXX), which some give to this word, is founded simply upon a confounding of *`etsar* (OT:6114) with *'owtsaar* (OT:214). *yaarash* (OT:3423) does not mean "to possess," but "to take possession of," and that by force (as in 1 Kings 21:18). "*And they were far from the Sidonians,*" so that in the event of a hostile invasion they could not obtain any assistance from this powerful city. *Grotius* draws the very probable conclusion from these words, that *Laish* may have been a colony of the Sidonians. "*And they had nothing to do with (other) men,*" i.e., they did not live in any close association with the inhabitants of other towns, so as to be able to obtain assistance from any other quarter.

Judges 18:8-9

And they came unto their brethren to Zorah and Eshtaol: and their brethren said unto them, What say ye?

On their return, the spies said to their fellow-citizens, in reply to the question '*atem* (OT:859) *maah* (OT:4100), "What have you accomplished?" "Up, let us go up against them (the inhabitants of Laish), for the land is very good, and ye are silent," i.e., standing inactive (1 Kings 22:3; 2 Kings 7:9). "Be not slothful to go (to proceed thither), to come and take possession of the land!"

Judges 18:10

When ye go, ye shall come unto a people secure, and to a large land: for God hath given it into your hands; a place where there is no want of any thing that is in the earth.

"When ye arrive, ye will come to a secure people (i.e., a people living in careless security, and therefore very

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

easy to overcome); *and the land is broad on both sides* (i.e., furnishes space to dwell in, and also to extend: vid., Gen 34:21; 1 Chron 4:40); *for God has given it into your hand.*" They infer this from the oracular reply they had received from the Levite (v. 6). *"A place where there is no want of anything that is in the land (of Canaan)."*

Judges 18:11-12

And there went from thence of the family of the Danites, out of Zorah and out of Eshtaol, six hundred men appointed with weapons of war.

Removal of Six Hundred Danites to Laish-Robbery of Micah's Images-Conquest of Laish, and Settlement There. - Vv. 11, 12. In consequence of the favourable account of the spies who returned, certain Danites departed from Zorea and Eshtaol, to the number of 600 men, accoutred with weapons of war, with their families and their possessions in cattle and goods (see v. 21), and encamped by the way at Kirjath-jearim (i.e., Kuriyet Enab; see Josh 9:17), in the tribe territory of Judah, at a place which received the permanent name of *Mahaneh Dan* (camp of Dan) from that circumstance, and was situated behind, i.e., to the west of, Kirjath-jearim (see at Judg 13:25). The fact that this locality received a standing name from the circumstance described, compels us to assume that the Danites had encamped there for a considerable time, for reasons which we cannot determine from our want of other information. The emigrants may possibly have first of all assembled here, and prepared and equipped themselves for their further march.

Judges 18:13

And they passed thence unto mount Ephraim, and came unto the house of Micah.

From this point they went across to the mountains of Ephraim, and came to Micah's house, i.e., to a place near it.

Judges 18:14

Then answered the five men that went to spy out the country of Laish, and said unto their brethren, Do ye know that there is in these houses an ephod, and teraphim, and a graven image, and a molten image? now therefore consider what ye have to do.

Then the five men who had explored the land, viz., Laish (*Laish* is in apposition to *haa'aarets* (OT:776), the land), said to their brethren (tribe-mates), "*Know ye that in these houses* (the village or place where Micah dwelt) *there are an ephod and teraphim, and image and molten work* (see at Judg 17:4-5)? *and now know what ye will do.*" The meaning of these last words is very easily explained: do not lose this opportunity of obtaining a

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

worship of our own for our new settlement.

Judges 18:15

And they turned thitherward, and came to the house of the young man the Levite, even unto the house of Micah, and saluted him.

Then they turned from the road thither, and went to the house of the young Levite, the house of Micah, and asked him (the Levite) concerning his health, i.e., saluted him in a friendly manner (see Gen 43:27; Ex 18:7, etc.).

Judges 18:16

And the six hundred men appointed with their weapons of war, which were of the children of Dan, stood by the entering of the gate.

The 600 men, however, placed themselves before the door.

Judges 18:17-19

And the five men that went to spy out the land went up, and came in thither, and took the graven image, and the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image: and the priest stood in the entering of the gate with the six hundred men that were appointed with weapons of war.

Then the five spies went up, sc., into Micah's house of God, which must therefore have been in an upper room of the building (see 2 Kings 23:12; Jer 19:13), and took the image, ephod, etc., whilst the priest stood before the door with the 600

armed men. With the words *wgw' baa'uw* (OT:935) the narrative passes from the aorist or historical tense *waya`aluw* (OT:5927) into the perfect. "The perfects do not denote the coming and taking on the part of the five men as a continuation of the previous account, but place the coming and taking in the same sphere of time as that to which the following clause, 'and the priest stood,' etc., belongs" (*Bertheau*). But in order to explain what appears very surprising, viz., that the priest should have stood before the gate whilst his house of God was being robbed, the course which the affair took is explained more clearly afterwards in vv. 18, 19, in the form of a circumstantial clause.

Consequently the verbs in these verses ought to be rendered as pluperfects, and the different clauses comprised in one period, v. 18 forming the protasis, and v. 19 the apodosis. *"Namely, when those (five) men had come into Micah's house, and had taken the image of the ephod, etc., and the priest had said to them, What are ye*

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

doing? they had said to him, Be silent, lay thy hand upon thy mouth and go with us, and become a father and priest to us (see Judg 17:10). Is it better to be a priest to the house of a single man, or to a tribe and family in Israel?" The combination *haa'eepowd* (OT:646) *pecel* (OT:6459) (the ephod-pesel), i.e., the image belonging to the ephod, may be explained on the ground, that the use of the ephod as a means of ascertaining the will of God presupposes the existence of an image of Jehovah, and does not prove that the ephod served as a covering for the *Pesel*. The priest put on the ephod when he was about to inquire of God. The *'ow* (OT:176) in the second question is different from *'im* (OT:518), and signifies "or rather" (see Gen 24:55), indicating an improvement upon the first question (see *Ewald*, §352, a.). Consequently it is not a sign of a later usage of speech, as *Bertheau* supposes. The word *uwl^amish^apaachaah* (OT:4940) (unto a family) serves as a more minute definition or limitation of *l^asheebeT* (OT:7626) (to a tribe).

Judges 18:20

And the priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod, and the teraphim, and the graven image, and went in the midst of the people.

Then was the priest's heart glad (merry; cf. Judg 19:6,9; Ruth 3:7), and he took the ephod, etc., and came amongst the people (the Danites). The first clause of this verse is attached to the supplementary statement in vv. 18, 19, for the purpose of linking on the further progress of the affair, which is given in the second clause; for, according to v. 17, the priest could only receive the ephod, etc., into his charge from the hands of the Danites, since they had taken them out of Micah's God's house.

Judges 18:21

So they turned and departed, and put the little ones and the cattle and the

carriage before them.

The 600 Danites then set out upon their road again and went away; and they put the children, the cattle, and the valuable possessions in front, because they were afraid of being attacked by Micah and his people from behind. *haTap* (OT:2945), "the little ones," includes both women and children, as the members of the family who were in need of protection (see at Ex 12:37). *k^abuwdaah* (OT:3520) is literally an adjective, signifying splendid; but here it is a neuter substantive: the valuables, not the heavy baggage. The 600 men had emigrated with their families and possessions.

Judges 18:22-23

And when they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men that were in the houses near to

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Micah's house were gathered together, and overtook the children of Dan.

The two clauses of v. 22 are circumstantial clauses: "*When they* (the 600) *had got to some distance from Micah's house, and the men who were in the houses by Micah's house were called together, and had overtaken the Danites, they* (i.e., Micah and his people, whom he had called together from the neighbourhood to pursue the emigrants) *called to the Danites; and they turned their faces, and said to Micah, What is to thee* (what is the matter), *that thou hast gathered together?*"

Judges 18:24-25

And he said, Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and ye are gone away: and what have I more? and what is this that ye say unto me, What aileth thee?

And when he replied, "*Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and have departed; what is there still to me* (what have I left)? *and how can ye say to me, What is to thee?*" they ordered him to be silent, lest he should forfeit his life: "*Let not thy voice be heard among us, lest men of savage disposition* (*nepesh* (OT:5315) *maareey* (OT:4751) as in 2 Sam 17:8) *should fall upon thee* (vid., Judg 15:12; 8:21, etc.), *and thou shouldst not save thy life and that of thy household,*" i.e., shouldst bring death upon thyself and thy family. *w^aaacap^ataah* (OT:622) is also dependent upon *pen* (OT:6435).

Judges 18:26

And the children of Dan went their way: and when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back unto his house.

Then the Danites went their way; but Micah, seeing that they were stronger than he, turned back and returned home.

Judges 18:27-29

And they took the things which Micah had made, and the priest which he had, and came unto Laish, unto a people that were at quiet and secure: and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and burnt the city with fire.

And they (the Danites) had taken what Micah had made, i.e., his idols and his priest, and they fell upon Laish (*`al* (OT:5921) *bow'* (OT:935), to come over a person, to fall upon him, as in Gen 34:25), a people living quietly and

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

free from care (vid., v. 7), smote them with the edge of the sword (see at Gen 34:26), and burned down the city (cf. Josh 6:24), as it had no deliverer in its isolated condition (v. 28a; cf. v. 7). It was situated *"in the valley which stretches to Beth-rehob."* This valley is the upper part of the *Huleh* lowland, through which the central source of the Jordan (*Leddán*) flows, and by which *Laish-Dan* , the present *Tell el Kadi* , stood (see at Josh 19:47). *Beth-rehob* is most probably the same place as the *Rehob* mentioned in Num 13:21, and the *Beth-rehob* of 2 Sam 10:6, which is there used to designate a part of Syria, and for which *Rehob* only is also used in v. 8. *Robinson* (Bibl. Res. pp. 371ff.) supposes it to be the castle of *Hunin* or *Honin* , on the south-west of *Tell el Kadi*; but this is hardly correct (see the remarks on Num 13:21, Pent. p. 709). The city, which lay in ashes, was afterwards rebuilt by the Danites, and called *Dan* , from the name of the founder of their tribe; and the ruins are still to be seen, as already affirmed, on the southern slope of the *Tell el Kadi* (see *Rob. Bibl. Res.* pp. 391-2, and the comm. on Josh 19:47).

Judges 18:30,31

And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land.

Establishment of the Image-worship in Dan. - After the rebuilding of Laish under the name of Dan, the Danites set up the *pesel* or image of Jehovah, which they had taken with them out of Micah's house of God. *"And Jehonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Moses, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites till the day of the captivity of the land."* As the Danites had taken the Levite whom Micah had engaged for his private worship with them to Dan, and had promised him the priesthood (vv. 19 and 27), *Jehonathan* can hardly be any other than this Levite. He was a son of Gershom, the son of Moses (Ex 2:22; 18:3; 1 Chron 23:14-15). Instead of *ben-mosheh* , our Masoretic text has *ben-m^anasheh*

with a hanging *n* . With regard to this reading, the *Talmud* (Baba bathr.f. 109b) observes: "Was he a son of Gershom, or was he not rather a son of Moses? as it is written, the sons of Moses were Gershom and Eliezer (1 Chron 23:14), but because he did the deeds of Manasseh (the idolatrous son of Hezekiah, 2 Kings 21) the Scripture assigns him to the family of Manasseh." On this *Rabbabar bar Channa* observes, that "the prophet (i.e., the author of our book) studiously avoided calling Gershom *the son of Moses* , because it would have been ignominious to Moses to have had an ungodly son; but he calls him *the son of Manasseh* , raising the *n* , however, above the line, to show that it might either be inserted or omitted, and that he was the son of either *m^anasheh* (OT:4519) (Manasseh) or *mosheh* (OT:4872) (Moses) - of Manasseh through imitating his impiety, of Moses by descent" (cf. *Buxtorfi Tiber.* p. 171).

Later Rabbins say just the same. *R. Tanchum* calls the writing *Menasseh* , with a hanging *nun* , a *cowp^ariym tiquwn* , and speaks of *ben Mosheh* as *Kethibh* , and *ben Menasseh* as *Keri*. *Ben Mosheh* is therefore unquestionably the original reading, although the other reading *ben Menasseh* is also very old, as it is to be found in the *Targums* and the *Syriac* and *Sept.* versions, although some *Codd.* of the LXX have the reading *uhiou' Moou'see'* (vid., *Kennic. dissert. gener. in V. T.* §21).

(Note: These two readings of the LXX seem to be fused together in the text given by *Theodoret* (*quaest.* xxvi.): *Boona'than ga'r feesi'n uhio's Manassee' uhiou' Gersoo'm uhiou' Moosee'*)

Jerome also has *fili Moysi*. At the same time, it does not follow with certainty from the reading *ben Gershom* that

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Jehonathan was actually a son of Gershom, as *ben* frequently denotes a grandson in such genealogical accounts, unknown fathers being passed over in the genealogies. There is very little probability of his having been a son, for the simple reason, that if Jehonathan was the same person as Micah's high priest-and there is no ground for doubting this-he is described as *na`ar* (OT:5288) in Judg 17:7; 18:3,15, and therefore was at any rate a young man, whereas the son of Gershom and grandson of Moses would certainly have passed the age of youth by a few years after the death of Joshua. This Jehonathan and his sons performed the duties of the priesthood at Dan *haa'aarets g^lowt `ad-yowm* . This statement is obscure. *haa'aarets* (OT:776) *g^lowt* (OT:1540) can hardly mean anything else than the carrying away of the people of the land into exile, that is to say, of the inhabitants of Dan and the neighbourhood at least, since *gaalaah* (OT:1540) is the standing expression for this.

Most of the commentators suppose the allusion to be to the Assyrian captivity, or primarily to the carrying away by Tiglath-Pileser of the northern tribes of Israel, viz., the population of Gilead, Galilee, and the tribe of Naphtali, in the midst of which Laish-Dan was situated (2 Kings 15:29). But the statement in v. 31, "*And they set them up Micah's graven image, which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh,*" is by no means reconcilable with such a conclusion. We find the house of God, i.e., the Mosaic tabernacle, which the congregation had erected at Shiloh in the days of Joshua (Josh 18:1), still standing there in the time of Eli and Samuel (1 Sam 1:3ff., Judg 3:21; 4:3); but in the time of Saul it was at Nob (1 Sam 21), and during the reign of David at Gibeon (1 Chron 16:39; 21:29). Consequently "the house of God" only stood in Shiloh till the reign of Saul, and was never taken there again. If therefore Micah's image, which the Danites set up in Dan, remained there as long as the house of God was at Shiloh, Jonathan's sons can only have been there till Saul's time at the longest, and certainly cannot have been priests at this sanctuary in Dan till the time of the Assyrian captivity.

(Note: The impossibility of reconciling the statement as to time in v. 31 with the idea that "the captivity of the land" refers to the Assyrian captivity, is admitted even by *Bleek* (Einl. p. 349), who

adopts *Houbigant's* conjecture, viz., *haa'aarown* (OT:727) *g^alowt* (OT:1540), "the carrying away of the ark.")

There are also other historical facts to be considered, which render the continuance of this Danite image-worship until the Assyrian captivity extremely improbable, or rather preclude it altogether. Even if we should not lay any stress upon the fact that the Israelites under Samuel put away the Baalim and Astartes in consequence of his appeal to them to turn to the Lord (1 Sam 7:4), it is hardly credible that in the time of David the image-worship should have continued at Dan by the side of the lawful worship of Jehovah which he restored and organized, and should not have been observed and suppressed by this king, who carried on repeated wars in the northern part of his kingdom. Still more incredible would the continuance of this image-worship appear after the erection of Solomon's temple, when all the men of Israel, and all the elders and heads of tribes, came to Jerusalem, at the summons of Solomon, to celebrate the consecration of this splendid national sanctuary (1 Kings 5-7).

Lastly, the supposition that the image-worship established by the Danites at Dan still continued to exist, is thoroughly irreconcilable with the fact, that when Jeroboam established the kingdom of the ten tribes he had two golden calves made as images of Jehovah for the subjects of his kingdom, and set up one of them at Dan, and appointed priests out of the whole nation who were not of the sons of Levi. If an image-worship of Jehovah had been still in existence in Dan, and conducted by Levitical priests. Jeroboam would certainly not have established a second worship of the same kind under priests who were not Levitical. All these difficulties preclude our explaining the expression, "the day of the captivity of the land," as referring to either the Assyrian or Babylonian captivity. It can only refer to some event which took place in the last years of Samuel, or the first part of the reign of Saul. David Kimchi and many others have interpreted the expression as relating to the carrying away of the ark by the Philistines, for which the words *miyis^araa'eel* (OT:3478) *kaabowd* (OT:3519) *gaalaah* (OT:1540) are used in 1 Sam 4:21-22 (e.g., *Hengstenberg* , Beitr. vol. ii. pp. 153ff.; *Hävernick* , Einl. ii. 1, p. 109; *O. v. Gerlach* , and

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Sam 4:21-22 (e.g., *Hengstenberg* , Beitr. vol. ii. pp. 153ff.; *Hävernick* , Einl. ii. 1, p. 109; *O. v. Gerlach* , and others).

With the carrying away of the ark of the covenant, the tabernacle lost its significance as a sanctuary of Jehovah. We learn from Ps 78:59-64 how the godly in Israel regarded that event. They not only looked upon it as a casting away of the dwelling-place of God at Shiloh; but in the fact that Jehovah gave up His might and glory (i.e., the ark) into captivity, they discerned a surrender of the nation into the full power of its foes which resembled a carrying away into captivity. For, apart altogether from the description in Ps 78:62-64, we may infer with certainty from the account of the tyranny which these foes still exercised over the Israelites in the time of Saul (1Sam 13:19-23), that, after this victory, the Philistines may have completely subjugated the Israelites, and treated them as their prisoners. We may therefore affirm with *Hengstenberg* , that "the author looked upon the whole land as carried away into captivity in its sanctuary, which formed as it were its kernel and essence."

If, however, this figurative explanation of *haa'aarets* (OT:776) *g^alowt* (OT:1540) should not be accepted, there is no valid objection to our concluding that the words refer to some event with which we have no further acquaintance, in which the city of Dan was conquered by the neighbouring Syrians, and the inhabitants carried away into captivity. For it is evident enough from the fact of the kings of *Zoba* being mentioned, in 1 Sam 14:47, among the different enemies of Israel against whom Saul carried on war, that the Syrians also invaded Israel in the tie of the Philistine supremacy, and carried Israelites away out of the conquered towns and districts. The Danite image-worship, however, was probably suppressed and abolished when Samuel purified the land and people from idolatry, after the ark had been brought back by the Philistines (1 Sam. 2ff.).

War of the Congregation with the Tribe of Benjamin on Account of the Crime at Gibeah. Ch. 19-20.

This account belongs to the times immediately following the death of Joshua, as we may see from the fact that Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the contemporary of Joshua, was high priest at that time (Judg 20:28). In ch. 19 we have an account of the infamous crime committed by the inhabitants of Gibeah, which occasioned the war; in ch. 20 the war itself; and in ch. 21 an account of what was afterwards done by the congregation to preserve the tribe of Benjamin, which was almost annihilated by the war.

Judges 19:1-2

And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of mount Ephraim, who took to him a concubine out of Bethlehemjudah.

Verse 1-2. Infamous Crime of the Inhabitants of Gibeah. - Vv. 1-14. At the time when there was no king in Israel, a Levite, who sojourned (i.e., lived outside a Levitical town) in the more remote parts of the mountains of Ephraim, took to himself a concubine out of Bethlehem in Judah, who proved unfaithful to him, and then returned to her father's house. *har-'ep^arayim yar^kteey*, the hinder or outermost parts of the mountains of Ephraim, are the northern extremity of these mountains; according to v. 18, probably the neighbourhood of Shiloh. *`aalaayw* (OT:5921) *tiz^aneh* (OT:2181), "*she played the harlot out beyond him,*" i.e., was unfaithful to her husband, *and then went away from him,*" back to her father's house.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 19:3-4

And her husband arose, and went after her, to speak friendly unto her, and to bring her again, having his servant with him, and a couple of asses: and she brought him into her father's house: and when the father of the damsel saw him, he rejoiced to meet him.

Some time afterwards, namely at the end of four months (*haadaashiym* 'ar^abaa`aah is in apposition to *yaamiym* (OT:3117), and defines more precisely the *yaamiym* (OT:3117), or days), her husband went after her, "to speak to her to the heart," i.e., to talk to her in a friendly manner (see Gen 34:3), and to reconcile her to himself again, so that she might return; taking with him his attendant and a couple of asses, for himself and his wife to ride upon. The suffix attached to *lahashiybow* refers to *libaah* (OT:3820), "to bring back her heart," to turn her to himself again. The *Keri hashiybaah* is a needless conjecture. "And she brought him into her father's house, and her father received his son-in-law with joy, and constrained him (*yachazeq-bow* , lit. held him fast) to remain there three days." It is evident from this that the Levite had succeeded in reconciling his wife.

Judges 19:5-6

And it came to pass on the fourth day, when they arose early in the morning, that he rose up to depart: and the damsel's father said unto his son in law, Comfort thine heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way.

Also on the fourth day, when he was about to depart in the morning, the Levite yielded to the persuasion of his father-in-law, that he would first of all strengthen his heart again with a bit of bread (*leeb* (OT:3820) *caa`ad* (OT:5582) as in Gen 18:5; the imperative form with o is unusual); and then afterwards, whilst they were

eating and drinking, he consented to stay another night.

Judges 19:7

And when the man rose up to depart, his father in law urged him: therefore he lodged there again.

When he rose up to go, his father-in-law pressed him; then he turned back (*wayaashaab* (OT:7725) is quite in place, and is not to be altered into *wayeesheb* (OT:3427), according to the LXX and one Heb. Cod.), and remained there for the night.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 19:8

And he arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart: and the damsel's father said, Comfort thine heart, I pray thee. And they tarried until afternoon, and they did eat both of them.

And even in the morning of the fifth day he suffered himself to be induced to remain till the afternoon. *hit^amah^am^ahuw* (OT:4102) is an imperative, "Tarry till the day turns," i.e., till mid-day is past.

Judges 19:9-10

And when the man rose up to depart, he, and his concubine, and his servant, his father in law, the damsel's father, said unto him, Behold, now the day draweth toward evening, I pray you tarry all night: behold, the day groweth to an end, lodge here, that thine heart may be merry; and to morrow get you early on your way, that thou mayest go home.

When at length he rose up, with his concubine and his attendant, to go away, the father entreated his daughter once more: "*Behold the day has slackened to become evening, spend the night here! Behold the declining of the day, spend the night here,*" etc. *chanowt* (OT:2589) inf. of *chaanaah* (OT:2583), to bend, incline. The interchange of the plural and singular may be explained from the simple fact that the Levite was about to depart with his wife and attendant, but that their remaining or departing depended upon the decision of the man alone. But the Levite did not consent to remain any longer, but set out upon the road, and came with his companions to before Jebus, i.e., Jerusalem, which is only two hours from Bethlehem (compare *Rob. Pal. ii. 375 and 379*). *`ad-nokach*, to before Jebus, for the road from Bethlehem to Shiloh went past Jerusalem.

Judges 19:11-13

And when they were by Jebus, the day was far spent; and the servant said unto his master, Come, I pray thee, and let us turn in into this city of the Jebusites, and lodge in it.

But as the day had gone far down when they were by Jebus (*rad* (OT:7286), third *pers. perf.* , either of *yaarad* (OT:3381) with *y* dropped like *tataah* (OT:5414) in 2 Sam 22:41 for *naatataah* (OT:5414), or from *raadad* (OT:7286) in the sense of *yaarad* (OT:3381)), the attendant said to his master, "*Come, let us turn aside into this Jebusite city, and pass the night in it.*" But his master was unwilling to enter a city of the foreigners (*naak^ariy* (OT:5237) is a genitive), where there were none of the sons of Israel, and would pass over to Gibeah. "*Come (l^ak^a = l^akaah* (OT:3212), Num 23:13), *we will draw near to one of the places* (which he immediately names), *and pass the night in Gibeah or Ramah.*" These two towns, the present *Jeba* and *er Râm* , were not a full hour's journey apart, and stood opposite to one another, only about two and a half or three hours from Jerusalem (see at

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Josh 18:25,28).

Judges 19:14

And they passed on and went their way; and the sun went down upon them when they were by Gibeah, which belongeth to Benjamin.

Then they went forward, and the sun went down upon them as they were near (at) Gibeah of Benjamin.

Judges 19:15-30

And they turned aside thither, to go in and to lodge in Gibeah: and when he went in, he sat him down in a street of the city: for there was no man that took them into his house to lodging.

And they turned aside thither to pass the night in Gibeah; and he (the Levite) remained in the market-place of the town, as no one received them into his house to pass the night.

Verse 16-19. Behold, there came an old man from the field, who was of the mountains of Ephraim, and dwelt as a stranger in Gibeah, the inhabitants of which were Benjaminites (as is observed here, as a preliminary introduction to the account which follows). When he saw the traveller in the market-place of the town, he asked him whither he was going and whence he came; and when he had heard the particulars concerning his descent and his journey, he received him into his house. *holeek^a 'aniy y' w^aet-beeyt* (v. 18), "*and I walk at the house of Jehovah, and no one receives me into his house*" (*Seb. Schm.* , etc.); not "I am going to the house of Jehovah" (*Ros., Berth.* , etc.), for *'eet* (OT:853) *haalak^a* (OT:3212) does

not signify to go to a place, for which the simple accusative is used either with or without *h* local. It either means "to go through a place" (Deut 1:19, etc.), or "to go with a person," or, when applied to things, "to go about with anything" (see Job 31:5, and *Ges. Thes.* p. 378).

Moreover, in this instance the Levite was not going to the house of Jehovah (i.e., the tabernacle), but, as he expressly told the old man, from Bethlehem to the outermost sides of the mountains of Ephraim. The words in question explain the reason why he was staying in the market-place. Because he served at the house of Jehovah, no one in Gibeah would receive him into his house,

(Note: As *Seb. Schmidt* correctly observes, "the argument is taken from the indignity shown him: the Lord thinks me worthy to minister to Him, as a Levite, in His house, and there is not one of the people of the Lord who thinks me worthy to receive his hospitality.") although, as he adds in v. 19, he had everything with him that was requisite for his wants. "*We have both straw and fodder for our asses, and bread and wine for me and thy maid, and for the young man with thy servants. No want of anything at all,*" so as to cause him to be burdensome to his host. By the words "thy maid" and "thy servants" he means himself and his concubine, describing himself and his wife, according to the obsequious style of the East in olden times, as servants of the man from whom he was expecting a

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

welcome.

Verse 20. The old man replied, "Peace to thee," assuring him of a welcome by this style of greeting; "*only all thy wants upon me,*" i.e., let me provide for them. Thus the friendly host declined the offer made by his guest to provide for himself. "*Only do not pass the night in the market-place.*"

Verse 21. He then took him into his house, mixed fodder for his asses (*yaabowl* from *baalal* (OT:1101), a *denom.* verb from *baaliyl* , to make a mixture, to give fodder to the beasts), and waited upon his guest with washing of feet, food, and drink (see Gen 18:4ff., Judg 19:2).

Verse 22. Whilst they were enjoying themselves, some worthless men of the city surrounded the house, knocking continuously at the door (*hit^adapeeq* , a form indicative of gradual increase), and demanding of the master of the house that he would bring out the man who had entered his house, that they might know him-the very same demand that the Sodomites had made of Lot (Gen 19:6ff.). The construct state *b^aneey-b^aliya`al 'an^asheey* is used instead of *b^aneey-bl' 'anaashiym* (Deut 13:14, etc.), because *bly`l bny* is regarded as *one* idea: people of worthless fellows. Other cases of the same kind are given by *Ewald* , Lehrb. §289, c.

Verse 23-24. The old man sought, as Lot had done, to defend his guests from such a shameful crime by appealing to the sacred rights of hospitality, and by giving up his own virgin daughter and the concubine of his guest (see the remarks on Gen 19:7-8). *n^abaalaah* (OT:5039), *folly* , used to denote shameful licentiousness and whoredom, as in Gen 34:7 and Deut 22:21. *'owtaam* (OT:853) *`anuw* (OT:6031), "humble them." The masculine is used in *'owtaam* (OT:853) and *laahem* (OT:3807a) as the more general gender, instead of the more definite feminine, as in Gen 39:9; Ex 1:21, etc.

Verse 25. But as the people would not listen to this proposal, the man (no doubt the master of the house, according to v. 24) took his (the guest's) concubine (of course with the consent of his guest) and led her out to them, and they abused her the whole night. It is not stated how it was that they were satisfied with this; probably because they felt too weak to enforce their demand. *b^a hit^a aleel* (OT:5953), to exercise his power or wantonness upon a person (see Ex 10:2).

Verse 26. When the morning drew on (i.e., at the first dawn of day), the woman fell down before the door of the house in which *'adowneyhaa* (OT:113), "her lord," i.e., her husband, was, and lay there till it was light, i.e., till sunrise.

Verse 27-28. There her husband found her, when he opened the house-door to go his way (having given up all thought of receiving her back again from the barbarous crowd), *"lying before the house-door, and her hands upon the threshold"* (i.e., with outstretched arms), and giving no answer to his word, having died, that is to say, in consequence of the ill-treatment of the night. He then took the corpse upon his ass to carry it to his place, i.e., to his home.

Verse 29-30. As soon as he arrived there, he cut up the body, according to its bones (as they cut slaughtered animals in pieces: see at Lev 1:6), into twelve pieces, and sent them (the corpse in its pieces) into the whole of the territory of Israel, i.e., to all the twelve tribes, in the hope that every one who saw it would say: No such thing has happened or been seen since the coming up of Israel out of Egypt until this day. Give ye heed to it (*shiyмуw* (OT:8085) for *leeb* (OT:3820) *siymuw* (OT:7760)); make up your minds and say on, i.e., decide how this unparalleled wickedness is to be punished. Sending the dissected pieces of the corpse to the tribes was a

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

symbolical act, by which the crime committed upon the murdered woman was placed before the eyes of the whole nation, to summon it to punish the crime, and was naturally associated with a verbal explanation of the matter by the bearer of the pieces. See the analogous proceeding on the part of Saul (1 Sam 11:7), and the Scythian custom related by *Lucian* in *Toxaris*, c. 48, that whoever was unable to procure satisfaction for an injury that he had received, cut an ox in pieces and sent it round, whereupon all who were willing to help him to obtain redress took a piece, and swore that they would stand by him to the utmost of their strength.

The perfects *w^aaamar* (OT:559) - *w^ahaayaah* (OT:1961) (v. 30) are not used for the imperfects *c. vav consec. wayo'mer* (OT:559) - *way^ahiy* (OT:1961), as *Hitzig* supposes, but as simple perfects (*perfecta conseq.*), expressing the result which the Levite expected from his conduct; and we have simply *lee'mor* (OT:559) before *w^ahaayaah* (OT:1961), which is often omitted in lively narrative or animated conversation (compare, for example, Ex 8:5 with Judg 7:2). The perfects are used by the historian instead of imperfects with a simple *vav* , which are commonly employed in clauses indicating intention, "because what he foresaw would certainly take place, floated before his mind as a thing already done" (*Rosenmüller*). The moral indignation, which the Levite expected on the part of all the tribes at such a crime as this, and their resolution to avenge it, are thereby exhibited not merely as an uncertain conjecture, but a fact that was sure to occur, and concerning which, as ch. 20 clearly shows, he had not deceived himself.

Judges 20:1-11

Then all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was gathered together as one man, from Dan even to Beersheba, with the land of Gilead, unto the LORD in Mizpeh.

War with Benjamin on the Part of All the Other Tribes. - The expectation of the

Levite was fulfilled. The congregation of Israel assembled at Mizpeh to pass sentence upon Gibeah, and formed the resolution that they would not rest till the crime was punished as it deserved (vv. 1-10). But when the Benjaminites refused to deliver up the offenders in Gibeah, and prepared to offer resistance, the other tribes began to make war upon Gibeah and Benjamin (vv. 11-19), but were twice defeated by the Benjaminites with very great loss (vv. 20-28). At length, however, they succeeded by an act of stratagem in taking Gibeah and burning it to the ground, and completely routing the Benjaminites, and also in putting to death all the men and cattle that they found in the other towns of this tribe, and laying the towns in ashes, whereby the whole of the tribe of Benjamin was annihilated, with the exception of a very small remnant (vv. 29-48).

Verse 1-2. **Decree of the Congregation concerning Gibeah.** - Vv. 1, 2. All the Israelites went out (rose up from their dwelling-places) to assemble together as a congregation like one man; all the tribes from Dan, the northern boundary of the land (i.e., Dan-laish, Judg 18:29), to Beersheba, the most southerly town of Canaan (see at Gen 21:31), and the land of Gilead, i.e., the inhabitants of the land to the east of the Jordan, "*to Jehovah at Mizpeh*" in Benjamin, i.e., the present *Nebi-samwil*, in the neighbourhood of Kirjath-jearim, on the western border of the tribe of Benjamin (see at Josh 18:26). It by no means follows with certainty from the expression "*to Jehovah*," that there was a sanctuary at Mizpeh, or that the ark of the covenant was taken thither, but simply that the meeting took place in the sight of Jehovah, or that the congregation assembled together to hold a judicial court, which they held in the name of Jehovah, analogous to the expression *el-Elohim* in ex. Judg 21:6; 22:7. It was not essential to a judicial proceeding that the ark should be present. At this assembly the *pinnoth* (the corner-pillars) of the whole nation presented themselves, i.e., the heads and fathers as the supports of the congregation or of the

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

sate organism (vid., 1 Sam 14:38; Isa 19:13), even of all the tribes of Israel four hundred thousand men on foot, drawing the sword, i.e., armed foot soldiers ready for battle.

Verse 3. "**The Benjaminites heard that the children of Israel** (the rest of the Israelites, the eleven tribes) *had come up to Mizpeh;*" but they themselves were not found there. This follows from the fact that nothing is said about the Benjaminites coming, and still more clearly from v. 13, where it is stated that the assembled tribes sent men to the Benjaminites, after holding their deliberations and forming their resolutions, to call them to account for the crime that had been committed in the midst of them. Consequently the question with which the whole affair was opened, "*Say, how did this wicked deed take place?*" is not to be regarded as addressed to the two parties, the inhabitants of Gibeah of the Benjaminites *and* the Levite (*Bertheau*), but as a summons to all who were assembled to relate what any one knew respecting the occurrence.

Verse 4-7. Then the Levite, the husband of the murdered woman, described the whole affair. *hagib^aaah* (OT:1389) *ba`aleey* (OT:1167), the owners or citizens of Gibeah (see at Judg 9:2). "*Me they intended to kill:*" the Levite draws this conclusion from what had happened to his wife; the men of Gibeah had not expressed any such intention in Judg 19:22. "*All the country (lit. field) of the inheritance of Israel,*" i.e., all the land of the Israelites. *zimaah* (OT:2154) is applied to the vice of lewdness, as in Lev 18:17, which was to be punished with death. *wgw' laakem* (OT:3807a) *haabuw* (OT:3051), "*give yourselves (laakem* (OT:3807a) as *dat. comm.*) *word and counsel here,*" i.e., make up your minds and pass sentence (vid., 2 Sam 16:20). *halom* (OT:1988), here, where you are all assembled together.

Verse 8-10. Then all the people rose up as one man, saying, "*We will not any of us go into his tent, neither will we any of us return to his house,*" sc., till this crime is

punished. The sentence follows in v. 9: "*This is the thing that we will do,*" i.e., this is the way in which we will treat Gibeah: "*against it by lot*" (sc., we will act). The *Syriac* gives the sense correctly-We will cast lots upon it; but the LXX quite erroneously supply *anabeeso'metha* (we will go up); and in accordance with this, many expositors connect the words with v. 10 in the following sense: "We will choose one man out of every ten by lot, to supply the army with the necessary provision during the expedition." This is quite a mistake, because in this way a subordinate point, which only comes into consideration in connection with the execution of the sentence, would be made the chief point, and the sentence itself would not be given at all.

The words "*against it by lot*" contain the resolution that was formed concerning the sinful town, and have all the enigmatical brevity of judicial sentences, and are to be explained from the course laid down in the Mosaic law with regard to the Canaanites, who were to be exterminated, and their land divided by lot among the Israelites. Consequently the meaning is simply this: "Let us proceed with the lot against Gibeah," i.e., let us deal with it as with the towns of the Canaanites, conquer it, lay it in ashes, and distribute its territory by lot. In v. 10 a subordinate circumstance is mentioned, which was necessary to enable them to carry out the resolution that had been made. As the assembled congregation had determined to keep together for the purpose of carrying on war (v. 8), it was absolutely necessary that resources should be provided for those who were actively engaged in the war. For this purpose they chose one man in every ten "*to fetch provision for the people,*" *l'bow'aam* (OT:935) *la`asowt* (OT:6213), "*that they might do on their coming to Gibeah of Benjamin according to all the folly which had been done in Israel,*" i.e., might punish the wickedness in Gibeah as it deserved.

Verse 11. Thus the men of Israel assembled together against Gibeah, united as one man. *chabeeriyim* (OT:2270), *lit.* as comrades, simply serves to strengthen the expression "as one man." With this remark, which indicates briefly the carrying out of the resolution that was adopted, the account of the meeting of the congregation is brought to a close; but the actual progress of the affair is really anticipated, inasmuch as what is related in vv. 12-21 preceded the expedition in order of time.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 20:12-13

And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, What wickedness is this that is done among you?

Before the tribes of Israel entered upon the war, they sent men to all the tribes of Benjamin, who were to demand that the culprits in Gibeah should be given up to be punished, that the evil might thus be exterminated from Israel, according to the law in Deut 22:22 as compared with Judg 13:6 and 17:12. "*The tribes of Benjamin*" are the same as "the families of Benjamin:" the historian pictured to himself the different divisions of the tribe of Benjamin as warlike powers about to carry on a war with the other tribes of Israel. The word *shebet* (tribe) is used in a different way in Num 4:18. But the Benjaminites would not hearken to the voice of their brethren, the other tribes of Israel. The *Keri* (sons of Benjamin) is a needless alteration, since *Benjamin* may be construed with the plural as a collective term. By refusing this just demand on the part of the other tribes, the Benjaminites took the side of the culprits in Gibeah, and compelled the congregation to make war upon the whole tribe.

Judges 20:14-16

But the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together out of the cities unto Gibeah, to go out to battle against the children of Israel.

Both sides now made their preparations. The Benjaminites assembled together at Gibeah out of their different towns, and "*were mustered 26,000 men drawing the sword, beside the inhabitants of Gibeah they were mustered, 700 picked men*" (*hig^apaaq^aduw*, with the reduplication dropped, like the *Hothpael* in Num 1:47). "*Out of all this people there were 700 picked men, lamed in the right hand, all*

these (were) slinging with a stone (hitting) at a hair's breadth without fail." These statements are not quite clear. Since, according to the distinct words of v. 16, the 700 slingers with their left hands were "out of the whole people," i.e., out of the whole number of fighting men mentioned in v. 16, they cannot be the same as the 700 chosen men referred to in v. 15, notwithstanding the similarity in the numbers and the expression "chosen men." The obscurity arises chiefly from the word *hit^apaaq^aduw* (OT:6485) in v. 15, which is separated by the Masoretic accents from *m' sh^aba`* (OT:7651), and connected with the previous words: "***Beside the inhabitants of Gibeah they*** (the men of the towns of Benjamin) *were mustered.*" On the other hand, the earlier translators took the clause as a relative one: "Beside the inhabitants of Gibeah, who were mustered 700 men."

And this seems absolutely necessary, because otherwise the following words, "700 picked men," would stand without any connection; whilst we should certainly expect at least to find the *cop. vav*, if these 700 men were not inhabitants of Gibeah. But even if *hit^apaaq^aduw* (OT:6485) should be taken as a simple repetition of *wayit^apaaq^aduw* (OT:6485), according to the analogy of Deut 3:5 and 1 Kings 5:30, the statement which follows could not be understood in any other way than as referring to the number of the fighting men of Gibeah. There is something striking too in the fact that only Benjaminites "out of the cities" are mentioned, and that emphasis is laid

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

upon this by the repetition of the expression "out of the cities" (vv. 14, 15). Some have inferred from this, that the Benjaminites as the rulers had settled in the towns, whilst the Canaanites who had been subdued settled as dependants in the villages (*Bertheau*); or that the Benjaminites had formed military brotherhoods, the members of which lived unmarried in the towns, and that this may possibly account for the abominable crime to which the inhabitants of Gibeah were addicted, and in relation to which the whole tribe took their part (*O. v. Gerlach*). But such inferences as these are extremely uncertain, as the cities may be mentioned *a potiori* for all the places inhabited by this tribe.

There is another difficulty in the numbers. According to vv. 14, 15, the total number of the fighting men of Benjamin amounted to 26,000 and 700, without reckoning Gibeah. But, according to the account of the battle, 25,100 were slain (v. 35), viz., 18,000 in the principal engagement, 5000 as a gleaning, and 200 in the pursuit, i.e., 25,000 men in all (vv. 44-46), and only 600 were left, who fled into the desert to the rock Rimmon (v. 47). According to these accounts, the whole tribe would have contained only $25,100 + 600 = 25,700$ fighting men, or $25,000 + 600 = 25,600$. Accordingly, in v. 15, the LXX (*Cod. Al.* etc.) and *Vulgate* give only 25,000 men; whilst the rest of the ancient versions have 26,000, in agreement with the Masoretic text. *Josephus* (Ant. v. 2, 10) also gives the number of fighting men in Benjamin as 25,600, of whom 600 were splendid slingers; but he has merely taken the numbers from vv. 44-47.

Now, although mistakes do frequently occur in the numbers given, it is a most improbable supposition that we have a mistake of this kind (26,000 for 25,000) in the instance before us, since even the latter number would not agree with vv. 44ff.; and the assumption, that in vv. 35 and 44ff. we have an account of *all* the Benjaminites who fell, finds no support whatever in the history itself. In the verses referred to we have simply a statement of the number of Benjaminites who fell in the defeat which they sustained on the third day, whereas the victories which they gained on the first and second days could hardly have been obtained without some

loss on their part; on the contrary, we may confidently assume that they would not lose less than a thousand men, though these are not mentioned in the brief account before us. The other difference between v. 35 and vv. 44-46, viz., that 25,100 are given in the one and 25,000 in the other, may be explained on the simple assumption that we have only the full thousands mentioned in the latter, whilst the exact number is given in the former. "*Left-handed:*" see at Judg 3:15.

Judges 20:17,18

And the men of Israel, beside Benjamin, were numbered four hundred thousand men that drew sword: all these were men of war.

The forces of the other tribes amounted when numbered to 400,000 men. These numbers (26,000 Benjaminites and 400,000 Israelites) will not appear too great if we consider that the whole of the congregation of Israel took part in the war, with the simple exception of Jabesh in Gilead (Judg 21:8), and that in the time of Moses the twelve tribes numbered more than 600,000 men of twenty years old and upwards (Num 26), so that not much more than two-thirds of the whole of the fighting men went out to the war.

Verse 18. Before opening the campaign the Israelites went to Bethel, to inquire of God which tribe should commence the war, i.e., should fight at the head of the other tribes (on the fact itself, see Judg 1:1); and God appointed the tribe of Judah, as in ch. 1:2. They went to Bethel,

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

(Note: Rendered "the house of God" in the English version. - Tr.) not to Shiloh, where the tabernacle was standing, because that place was too far from the seat of war. The ark of the covenant was therefore brought to Bethel, and Phinehas the high priest inquired of the Lord before it through the Urim and Thummim (vv. 27, 28). Bethel was on the northern boundary of the tribe of Benjamin, and was consecrated to this purpose before any other place by the revelations of God which had been made to the patriarch Jacob there (Gen 28 and 35).

Judges 20:19

And the children of Israel rose up in the morning, and encamped against Gibeah.

Thus equipped, the Israelites proceeded against Gibeah.

Judges 20:20-21

And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin; and the men of Israel put themselves in array to fight against them at Gibeah.

As soon as the Israelites had posted themselves at Gibeah in battle array (*mil^achaamaah* (OT:4421) *`aarak^a* (OT:6186), to put in a row, or arrange the war or conflict, i.e., to put themselves in battle array, 1 Sam 4:2; 17:2, etc.), the Benjaminites came out and destroyed 22,000 men of Israel upon that day. *'ar^atsaah* (OT:776) *hish^achiyt* (OT:7843), to destroy to the earth, i.e., to lay dead upon the ground.

Judges 20:22

And the people the men of Israel encouraged themselves, and set their battle again in array in the place where they put themselves in array the first day.

Notwithstanding this terrible overthrow, the people strengthened themselves, and prepared again for battle, "at the same place" where they had made ready on the first day, "seeking out of pure vainglory to wipe out the stains and the disgrace which their previous defeat had brought upon them" (Berleb. Bible).

Judges 20:23

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 20:23

(And the children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until even, and asked counsel of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother? And the LORD said, Go up against him.)

But before renewing the conflict they went up to Bethel, wept there before Jehovah, i.e., before the sanctuary of the ark, where Jehovah was present in the midst of His people, enthroned between the cherubim, until the evening, and then inquired of the Lord (again through the high priest) "*Shall I again draw near to war with the children of Benjamin my brother*" (i.e., renew the war with him)? The answer ran thus: "*Advance against him.*"

Judges 20:24-25

And the children of Israel came near against the children of Benjamin the second day.

But on the second day also the Benjaminites brought 18,000 of them to the ground. "The second day" is not the day following the first engagement, as if the battles had been fought upon two successive days, but the second day of actual fighting, which took place some days after the first, for the inquiry was made at Bethel as to the will of God between the two engagements.

Judges 20:26

Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the LORD, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.

After this second terrible overthrow, "*the children of Israel*" (*k.e.* those who were engaged in the war), and "*all the people,*" i.e., the rest of the people, those members of the congregation who were not capable of bearing arms, old men and women, came to Bethel, to complain to the Lord of their misfortune, and secure His favour by fasting and sacrifices. The congregation now discovered, from this repeated defeat, that the Lord had withdrawn His grace, and was punishing them. Their sin, however, did not consist in the fact that they had begun the war itself-for the law in Deut 22:22, to which they themselves had referred in v. 13, really required this-but rather in the state of mind with which they had entered upon the war, their strong self-consciousness, and great confidence in their own might and power. They had indeed inquired of God (*Elohim*) who should open the conflict; but they had neglect to humble themselves before Jehovah the covenant God, in the consciousness not only of their own weakness and sinfulness, but also of grief at the moral corruption of their brother-tribe.

It is certainly not without significance, that in v. 18 it is stated that "*they asked God*" (*bee'lohiym* (OT:430) *yish^aaluw* (OT:7592)), i.e., they simply desired a supreme or divine decision as to the question who should lead

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

the van in the war; whereas, after the first defeat, they wept before *Jehovah*, and inquired of *Jehovah* (v. 23), the covenant God, for whose law and right they were about to contend. But even then there were still wanting the humility and penitence, without which the congregation of the Lord could not successfully carry on the conflict against the ungodly. The remark in v. 22, "*The people felt (showed) themselves strong, and added (continued) to set in array the war,*" is thoroughly expressive of the feeling of the congregation. They resolved upon the continuance of the war, in the full consciousness of their superior power and numerical strength; and it was not till afterwards that they complained to the Lord of their misfortune, and inquired whether they should renew the conflict.

The question was followed by a corresponding answer on the part of God, "*Go up against him,*" which certainly sanctioned the continuance of the war, but gave no promise as to the result, because the people, thinking that they might be certain of success, had not inquired about that at all. It was not till after the second severe defeat, when 22,000 and 18,000, the tenth part of the whole army, had fallen, that they humbled themselves before the Lord. They not only wept because of the calamity which had befallen them, but fasted the same day before the Lord—the fasting being the manifest expression of the bending of the heart before God—and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings. The *shelamim* here are not thank-offerings, but supplicatory offerings, presented to implore the gracious assistance of God, and to commemorate the enjoyment of fellowship with the Lord, through the sacrificial meal associated with this sacrifice (as in Judg 21:4; 1 Sam 13:9; 2 Sam 24:25).

Judges 20:27-28

And the children of Israel inquired of the LORD, (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days,

Having made these preparations, they inquired of the Lord whether they should continue the war, and received this reply: "**Go up** (against Benjamin); *for tomorrow I will give it unto thy hand*" (*yaad^akaa* (OT:3027), the hand of the congregation carrying on the war). To this the supplementary remark is appended, that the ark of the covenant was at Bethel in those days, and the high priest served before it. The expression "in those days" implies that the ark of the covenant was only temporarily at Bethel, and therefore had been brought thither from the tabernacle at Shiloh during this war.

Judges 20:29-48

And Israel set liers in wait round about Gibeah.

The Victory on the Third Day's Engagement. - V. 29. The account of this commences with the most important point, so far as their success was concerned: Israel set liers in wait (troops in ambush) round about Gibeah.

Verse 30. They then advanced as on the former occasions.

Verse 31,32. The Benjaminites came out again to meet the people (of Israel), and were drawn away from the

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Verse 31,32. The Benjaminites came out again to meet the people (of Israel), and were drawn away from the town (the perfect *haan^aquw* (OT:5423) without *w* is subordinate to the preceding verb, and defines more precisely the advance itself, whilst the mode in which they were drawn away from the town is not described more fully till vv. 32, 33), and began to smite the beaten of the people (who pretended to fly) as formerly upon the roads (where two roads part), of which one led up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah, into the field (Gibeah is the town at which the battle took place, that is to say, somewhere in the neighbourhood, so that a road might easily run from the field of battle towards the town into the field), "*about* (sc., putting to death) *thirty men of Israel.*" This statement introduces the more precise definition of the *chalaaliym* (OT:2491).

Verse 32. Then the Benjaminites supposed that Israel was beaten by them as before; but the Israelites said: We will flee, and draw it (the tribe of Benjamin) away from the town to the roads (the high-roads mentioned in v. 31). On the *Dagesh dirimens* in *n^ataq^anuwhuw*, see *Ewald*, §92, c.

Verse 33. Carrying out this plan, "all the men of Israel rose up from their places," i.e., left the place they had occupied, drew back, "and set themselves in battle array" in *Baal-thamar*, i.e., palm-place, which still existed, according to the *Onom.*, in the time of *Eusebius*, as a small place in the neighbourhood of Gibeah, bearing the name of *Bethamar*. While this was going on, the ambush of Israel broke forth from its position "from the plains of Geba." The *hap leg ma^aareh* (OT:4629), from *a^araah* (OT:6168) to strip, denotes a naked region destitute of wood. *geba^a* (OT:1387) is the masculine form for *gib^aaah* (OT:1390), and *mima^aareeh-geba^a* a more precise definition of *mim^aqowmow* (OT:4725). This rendering, which is the one given in the Targum, certainly appears the simplest explanation of a word that has been rendered in very different ways, and which the LXX left untranslated as a proper name, *Earaagabe'*. The objection raised to this, viz., that a naked level country was not a place for an ambush, has no force, as there is no necessity to understand the words as signifying that the treeless country formed the actual

hiding-place of the ambush; but the simple meaning is, that when the men broke from their hiding-place, they came from the treeless land towards the town. The rendering given by *Rashi*, *Trem.* , and others, "on account of the tripping of Gibeah," is much less suitable, since, apart from the difficulty of taking *min* (OT:4480) in different senses so close together, we should at least expect to find *haa`iy*r (OT:5892) (the city) instead of *geba`* (OT:1387).

Verse 34. Through the advance of the ambush there came 10,000 picked men of all Israel "from opposite to Gibeah" (who now attacked in the rear the Benjaminites who were pursuing the flying army of Israel); "*and the contest became severe, since they (the Benjaminites) did not know that the calamity was coming upon them.*"

Verse 35. And Jehovah smote Benjamin before Israel (according to His promise in v. 28), so that the Israelites destroyed of Benjamin on that day twenty and five thousand and an hundred men (i.e., twenty-five thousand and upwards).

This was the result of the battle, which the historian gives at once, before entering more minutely into the actual account of the battle itself. He does this in vv. 36-46 in a series of explanations, of which one is attached to the other, for the most part in the form of circumstantial clauses, so that it is not till v. 46 that he again comes to the result already announced in v. 35.

(Note: The opinions expressed by *De Wette* , etc. that v. 35 is spurious, and by *Bertheau* , that vv. 36-46 contain a different account of the battle, simply prove that they have overlooked this peculiarity in the Hebrew mode of writing history, viz., that the generally result of any occurrence is given as early as possible, and then the details follow afterwards; whilst these critics have not

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

succeeded in adducing even apparent differences in support of their opinions.)

Verse 36-38. The Benjaminites, for instance, saw (this is the proper rendering of *wayir^uw* (OT:7200) with *vav consec.* , which merely indicates the order of thought, not that of time) that they were beaten, and the man of Israel vacated the field before Benjamin (*maa^qowm* (OT:4725) *naatan* (OT:5414), to give place by falling back and flying), because they relied upon the ambush which they had placed against Gibeah. The Benjaminites did not perceive this till the ambush fell upon their rear. But the ambush itself, as is added in v. 37 by way of further explanation, hastened and fell (fell as quickly as possible) into Gibeah, and went thither and smote the whole town with the edge of the sword. To this there is added the further explanation in v. 38: "***And the arrangement of the Israelites with the ambush was this: multiply, to cause smoke-rising to ascend*** (i.e., cause a great cloud of smoke to ascend) *out of the city.*" The only objection that can be raised to this view of *hereb* (OT:7235), as the imperative *Hiphil* of *raabaah* (OT:7227), is the suffix *aa-m* attached to *l^ha`alowtaam* (OT:5927), since this is unsuitable to a direct address. This suffix can only be explained by supposing that there is an admixture of two constructions, the direct appeal, and the indirect explanation, that they were to cause to ascend. If this be not admitted, however, we can only follow *Studer* , and erase the suffix as an error of the pen occasioned by the following word *mas^uat* (OT:4864); for the other course suggested by *Bertheau* , namely that *hereb* (OT:7235) should be struck out as a gloss, is precluded by the circumstance that there is no possible way of explaining the interpolation of so apparently unsuitable a word into the text. It certainly stood in the text used by the LXX, though they have most foolishly confounded *hereb* (OT:7235) with *chereb* (OT:2719), and rendered it *ma'chaira* (NT:3162).

Verse 39-41. "**And the men of Israel turned in the battle:**" that is to say, as is afterwards more fully explained in vv. 39, 40, in the form of a long new circumstantial clause, whilst Benjamin had begun to smite, etc. (repeated from vv. 31, 32), and the cloud (*hamas^ueet* (OT:4864) = *he`aashaan* (OT:6227) *mas^uat* (OT:4864), v. 38) had begun to ascend out of the city as a pillar of smoke, and

Benjamin turned back, and behold the whole city ascended towards heaven (in smoke), Israel turned (fighting) and Benjamin was terrified, for it saw that misfortune had come upon it (see v. 34). In v. 41a, the thread of the narrative, which was interrupted by the long circumstantial clause, is again resumed by the repetition of "*and the men of Israel turned.*"

Verse 42-43. The Benjaminites "*now turned (flying) before the Israelites to the way of the desert,*" i.e., no doubt the desert which rises from Jericho to the mountains of Bethel (Josh 16:1). They fled therefore towards the north-east; but the battle had overtaken (reached or seized) them, and those out of the towns (had perished). The difficult expression *meehe`aariym* (OT:5892) *wa'asher* (OT:834), of which very different, and for the most part arbitrary, explanations have been given, can only be in apposition to the suffix attached to the verb: "Benjamin, and in fact those who had come to the help of Gibeah out of the towns of Benjamin" (see vv. 14, 15), i.e., all the Benjaminites. The following words, *wgw' mash^achiytiym* (OT:7843), are a circumstantial clause explanatory of the previous clause, *hdb' w^ahamil^achaamaah* (OT:4421): "*since they* (the men of Israel) *destroyed him* (Benjamin) *in the midst of it.*" The singular suffix *b^atowkow* (OT:8432) does not refer to Benjamin, as this would yield no sense at all, but to the preceding words, "the way of the desert" (see v. 45). - In v. 43 the account is continued by three perfects attached to one another without a copula: "*they enclosed* (hedged round) *Benjamin, pursued him; at the place of rest they trod him down to before Gibeah eastwards.*" *m^anuwchaah* (OT:4496) is not used adverbially in the sense of "quietly," which would not give any fitting meaning, but is an *accus. loci*, and signifies place of rest, as in Num 10:33. The notice "to before Gibeah" refers to all three verbs.

Verse 44. In this battle there fell of Benjamin 18,000 men, all brave men. The '*et* (OT:853) before *kaal-'eeleh* is not a preposition, "*with*" (as the LXX, *Cod. Al.*, and *Bertheau* render it), but a sign of the accusative. It serves to show that the thought which follows is governed by the principal clause, "*so far as all these were concerned, they were brave men.*"

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Verse 45. The remainder fled to the desert, to the rock (of the place) *Rimmon*, which is described in the *Onom.* (*s. v. Remmon*) as a *vicus* fifteen Roman miles to the north of Jerusalem. It has been preserved in the village of *Rummôn*, which stands upon and around the summit of a conical limestone mountain, and is visible in all directions (*Rob. Pal. ii. p. 113*). "*And they (the Israelites) smote as a gleaning upon the roads 5000 men.*" *`owleel* (OT:5768), to have a gleaning of the battle, i.e., to smite or slay, as it were, as a gleaning of the principal battle (vid., Jer 6:9). *Mesilloth* are the high-roads mentioned in v. 31. "*And pursued them to Gideom, and smote of them 2000 more.*" The situation of Gideom, which is only met with here, is not precisely known; but it must have been somewhere between Gibeah and Rimmon, as the rock Rimmon, according to v. 47, afforded a safe place of refuge to the fugitives.

Verse 46-47. On the total number of the slain, see the remarks on v. 15. - In v. 47 the statement already made in v. 45 with regard to the flight is resumed; and it is still further related, that 500 men reached the rock Rimmon, and dwelt there four months, i.e., till the occurrence described in Judg 21:13ff.

Verse 48. The Israelites turned (from any further pursuit of the fugitive warriors of Benjamin) to the children of Benjamin, i.e., to such of the people of the tribe of Benjamin as were unarmed and defenceless, and smote them with the edge of the sword, "*from the town (or towns) onwards, men to cattle (i.e., men, women, children, and cattle), to every one who was found;*" i.e., they cut down men and cattle without quarter, from the towns onwards even to those who were found elsewhere. *kaal-hanim^atsaa' `ad* (to all that was found) corresponds to *mee`iy^r* (OT:5892) (from the city), and *`ad-b^aheemaah m^atim* (men to beast) serves as a more precise definition of the *`iy^r* (OT:5892) (city): everything that was in the city, man and beast. *m^atom* (OT:4974) is pointed wrongfully for *m^atim* (OT:4962), *men*, the reading in several MSS and most of the early editions (see Deut 2:34; 3:6). They also set fire to all the towns that were met with, i.e., all without exception.

Thus they did the same to the Benjaminites as to the Canaanites who were put under the ban, carrying out the ban with the strictest severity.

Preservation of the Tribe of Benjamin The Remnant Provided with Wives. Ch. 21.

Through the extraordinary severity with which the tribes of Israel had carried on the war against Benjamin, this tribe had been reduced to 600 men, and thus brought very near to extermination. Such a conclusion to the sanguinary conflict went to the heart of the congregation. For although, when forming the resolution to punish the unparalleled wickedness of the inhabitants of Gibeah with all the severity of the law, they had been urged on by nothing else than the sacred duty that was binding upon them to root out the evil from their midst, and although the war against the whole tribe of Benjamin was justified by the fact that they had taken the side of the culprits, and had even received the approval of the Lord; there is no doubt that in the performance of this resolution, and the war that was actually carried on, feelings of personal revenge had disturbed the righteous cause in consequence of the defeat which they had twice sustained at the hands of the Benjaminites, and had carried away the warriors into a war of extermination which was neither commanded by the law nor justified by the circumstances, and had brought about the destruction of a whole tribe from the twelve tribes of the covenant nation with the exception of a small vanishing remnant. When the rash deed was done, the congregation began most bitterly to repent. And with repentance there was awakened the feeling of brotherly love, and also a sense of duty to provide for the continuance of the tribe, which had been brought so near to destruction, by finding wives for those who remained, in order that the small remnant might grow into a vigorous tribe again.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 21:1-14

Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpeh, saying, There shall not any of us give his daughter unto Benjamin to wife.

Verse 1-14. The proposal to find wives for the six hundred Benjaminites who remained was exposed to this difficulty, that the congregation had sworn at Mizpeh (as is supplemented in v. 1 to the account in Judg 20:1-9) that no one should give his daughter to a Benjaminite as a wife.

Verse 2-4. After the termination of the war, the people, i.e., the people who had assembled together for the war (see v. 9), went again to Bethel (see at Judg 20:18,26), to weep there for a day before God at the serious loss which the war had brought upon the congregation. Then they uttered this lamentation: "*Why, O Lord God of Israel, is this come to pass in Israel, that a tribe is missing to-day from Israel?*" This lamentation involved the wish that God might show them the way to avert the threatened destruction of the missing tribe, and build up the six hundred who remained. To give a practical expression to this wish, they built an altar the next morning, and offered burnt-offerings and supplicatory offerings upon it (see at Judg 20:26), knowing as they did that their proposal would not succeed without reconciliation to the Lord, and a return to the fellowship of His grace. There is something apparently strange in the erection of an altar at Bethel, since sacrifices had already been offered there during the war itself (Judg 20:26), and this could not have taken place without an altar. Why it was erected again, or another one built, is a question which cannot be answered with any certainty. It is possible, however, that the first was not large enough for the number of sacrifices that had to be offered now.

Verse 5-8. The congregation then resolved upon a plan, through the execution of

which a number of virgins were secured for the Benjaminites. They determined that they would carry out the great oath, which had been uttered when the national assembly was called against such as did not appear, upon that one of the tribes of Israel which had not come to the meeting of the congregation at Mizpeh. The deliberations upon this point were opened (v. 5) with the question, "*Who is he who did not come up to the meeting of all the tribes of Israel, to Jehovah?*" In explanation of this question, it is observed at v. 5, "*For the great oath was uttered upon him that came not up to Jehovah to Mizpeh: he shall be put to death.*" We learn from this supplementary remark, that when important meetings of the congregation were called, all the members were bound by an oath to appear. The meeting at Mizpeh is the one mentioned in Judg 20:1ff.

The "great oath" consisted in the threat of death in the case of any that were disobedient. To this explanation of the question in v. 5a, the further explanation is added in vv. 6, 7, that the Israelites felt compassion for Benjamin, and wished to avert its entire destruction by procuring wives for such as remained. The word *wayinaachamuw* (OT:5162) in v. 6 is attached to the explanatory clause in v. 5b, and is to be rendered as a pluperfect: "*And the children of Israel had shown themselves compassionate towards their brother Benjamin, and said, A tribe is cut off from Israel to-day; what shall we do to them, to those that remain with regard to wives, as we have sworn?*" etc. (compare v. 1). The two thoughts-(1) the oath that those who had not come to Mizpeh should be punished with death (v. 5b), and (2) anxiety for the preservation of this tribe which sprang from compassion towards Benjamin, and was shown in their endeavour to provide such as remained with wives, without violating the oath that none of them would give them their own daughters as wives-formed the two factors which determined the course to be adopted by the congregation. After the statement of these two circumstances, the question of v. 5a, "*Who is the one (only one) of the tribes of Israel which,*" etc., is resumed and answered: "*Behold, there came no one into the camp from Jabesh in Gilead, into the assembly.*" *shib^aTeey* (OT:7626) is used in vv. 8, 5, in a more general sense, as denoting not merely the tribes as such, but the several subdivisions of the tribes.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Verse 9. In order, however, to confirm the correctness of this answer, which might possibly have been founded upon a superficial and erroneous observation, the whole of the (assembled) people were mustered, and not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh was found there (in the national assembly at Bethel). The situation of *Jabesh* in Gilead has not yet been ascertained. This town was closely besieged by the Ammonite *Nahash*, and was relieved by Saul (1 Sam 11:1ff.), on which account the inhabitants afterwards showed themselves grateful to Saul (1 Sam 31:8ff.). *Josephus* calls *Jabesh* the metropolis of Gilead (Ant. vi. 5, 1). According to the *Onom.* (s. v. *Jabis*), it was six Roman miles from Pella, upon the top of a mountain towards Gerasa. *Robinson* (Bibl. Res. p. 320) supposes it to be the ruins of *ed Deir* in the *Wady Jabes*.

Verse 10-12. To punish this unlawful conduct, the congregation sent 12,000 brave fighting men against Jabesh, with orders to smite the inhabitants of the town with the edge of the sword, together with their wives, and children, but also with the more precise instructions (v. 11), "to ban all the men, and women who had known the lying with man" (i.e., to slay them as exposed to death, which implied, on the other hand, that virgins who had not lain with any man should be spared). The fighting men found 400 such virgins in Jabesh, and brought them to the camp at Shiloh in the land of Canaan. *'owtaam* (OT:853) (v. 12) refers to the virgins, the masculine being used as the more common genus in the place of the feminine. *Shiloh*, with the additional clause "in the land of Canaan," which was occasioned by the antithesis *Jabesh in Gilead*, as in Josh 21:2; 22:9, was the usual meeting-place of the congregation, on account of its being the seat of the tabernacle. The representatives of the congregation had moved thither, after the deliberations concerning Jabesh, which were still connected with the war against Benjamin, were concluded.

Verse 13-14. The congregation then sent to call the Benjaminites, who had taken refuge upon the rock Rimmon, and gave them as wives, when they returned (sc., into their own possessions), the 400 virgins of Jabesh who had been preserved

alive. "*But so they sufficed them not*" (*keen* (OT:3651), so, i.e., in their existing number, 400: *Bertheau*). In this remark there is an allusion to what follows.

Judges 21:15-16

And the people repented them for Benjamin, because that the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.

Of the six hundred Benjaminites who had escaped, there still remained two hundred to be provided with wives. To these the congregation gave permission to take wives by force at a festival at Shiloh. The account of this is once more introduced, with a description of the anxiety felt by the congregation for the continuance of the tribe of Benjamin. Vv. 15, 16, and 18 are only a repetition of vv. 6 and 7, with a slight change of expression. The "*breach (perez) in the tribes of Israel*" had arisen from the almost complete extermination of Benjamin. "*For out of Benjamin is (every) woman destroyed,*" viz., by the ruthless slaughter of the whole of the people of that tribe (Judg 20:48). Consequently the Benjaminites who were still unmarried could not find any wives in their own tribe. The fact that four hundred of the Benjaminites who remained were already provided with wives is not noticed here, because it has been stated just before, and of course none of them could give up their own wives to others.

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

Judges 21:17-19

And they said, There must be an inheritance for them that be escaped of Benjamin, that a tribe be not destroyed out of Israel.

Still Benjamin must be preserved as a tribe. The elders therefore said, "*Possession of the saved shall be for Benjamin,*" i.e., the tribe-land of Benjamin shall remain an independent possession for the Benjaminites who have escaped the massacre, so that a tribe may not be destroyed out of Israel. It was necessary therefore, that they should take steps to help the remaining Benjaminites to wives. The other tribes could not give them their daughters, on account of the oath which has already been mentioned in vv. 1 and 7b and is repeated here (v. 18). Consequently there was hardly any other course open, than to let the Benjaminites seize upon wives for themselves. And the elders lent them a helping hand by offering them this advice, that at the next yearly festival at Shiloh, at which the daughters of Shiloh carried on dances in the open air (outside the town), they should seize upon wives for themselves from among these daughters, and promising them that when the thing was accomplished they would adjust it peaceably (vv. 19-22).

The "*feast of Jehovah,*" which the Israelites kept from year to year, was one of the three great annual festivals, probably one which lasted seven days, either the passover or the feast of tabernacles—most likely the former, as the dances of the daughters of Shiloh were apparently an imitation of the dances of the Israelitish women at the Red Sea under the superintendence of Miriam (Ex 15:20). The minute description of the situation of Shiloh (v. 19), viz., "to the north of Bethel, on the east of the road which rises from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south of *Lebonah*" (the present village of *Lubban*, on the north-west of Seilun: see *Rob. Pal.* iii. p. 89), serves to throw light upon the scene which follows, i.e., to show how the situation of Shiloh was peculiarly fitted for the carrying out of the advice given to the Benjaminites; since, as soon as they had issued from their hiding-

places in the vineyards at Shiloh, and seized upon the dancing virgins, they could easily escape into their own land by the neighbouring high-road which led from Bethel to Shechem, without being arrested by the citizens of Shiloh.

Judges 21:20-21

Therefore they commanded the children of Benjamin, saying, Go and lie in wait in the vineyards;

The **Kethibh** *way^atsaw* (OT:6680) in the singular may be explained on the ground that one of the elders spoke and gave the advice in the name of the others. *chaaTap* in v. 21 and Ps 10:9, to seize hold of, or carry off as prey = *chaatap* .

Judges 21:22

And it shall be, when their fathers or their brethren come unto us to complain, that we will say unto

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

And it shall be, when their fathers or their brethren come unto us to complain, that we will say unto them, Be favourable unto them for our sakes: because we reserved not to each man his wife in the war: for ye did not give unto them at this time, that ye should be guilty.

"And when the fathers or brethren of the virgins carried off, come to us to chide with us, we (the elders) will say to them (in your name), Present them to us (*'owtaam* (OT:853) as in v. 12); for we did not receive every one his wife through the war (with Jabesh); for ye have not given them to them; how would ye be guilty." The words "Present them to us," etc., are to be understood as spoken in the name of the Benjaminites, who were accused of the raid, to the relatives of the virgins who brought the complaint. This explains the use of the pronoun in the first person in *chaanuwnuw* (OT:2603) and *laaqach^anuw* (OT:3947), which must not be altered therefore into the third person.

(Note: One circumstance which is decisive against this alteration of the text, is, that the Seventy had the Masoretic text before them, and founded their translation upon it (*eleee'sate* (NT:1653) *heemi'n* (NT:2254) *auta's* (NT:846) *ho'ti* (NT:3754) *ouk* (NT:3756) *ela'bomen* (NT:2983) *anee'r* (NT:435) *gunai'ka* (NT:1135) *autou'* (NT:846) *en* (NT:1722) *too'* (NT:3588) *pole'moo* (NT:4171)). The different rendering of *Jerome* given in the *Vulgate-miseremini eorum! non enim rapuerunt eas jure bellantium atque victorum* - is nothing but an unfortunate and unsuccessful attempt to get rid of the difficulties connected with the readings in the text.)

The two clauses commencing with *kiy* (OT:3588) are co-ordinate, and contain two points serving to enforce the request, "Present them," etc. The first is pleaded in the name of the Benjaminites; the second is adduced, as a general ground on the part of the elders of the congregation, to pacify the fathers and brothers making the complaint, on account of the oath which the Israelites had taken, that none of them would give their daughters as wives to the Benjaminites. The meaning is the following: Ye may have your daughters with the Benjaminites who have taken them by force, for ye have not given them voluntarily, so as to have broken your oath by so doing. In the last clause *kaa`eet* (OT:6256) has an unusual meaning: "at

the time" (or *now*), i.e., *in that case* , ye would have been guilty, viz., if ye had given them voluntarily.

Judges 21:23

And the children of Benjamin did so, and took them wives, according to their number, of them that danced, whom they caught: and they went and returned unto their inheritance, and repaired the cities, and dwelt in them.

The Benjaminites adopted this advice. They took to themselves wives according to their number, i.e., two hundred (according to v. 12, compared with Judg 20:47), whom they caught from the dancing daughters of Shiloh, and returned with them into their inheritance, where they rebuilt the towns that had been reduced to ashes, and dwelt therein.

Judges 21:24,25

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

And the children of Israel departed thence at that time, every man to his tribe and to his family, and they went out from thence every man to his inheritance.

In vv. 24 and 25, the account of this event is brought to a close with a twofold remark: (1) that the children of Israel, i.e., the representatives of the congregation who were assembled at Shiloh, separated and returned every man into his inheritance to his tribe and family; (2) that at that time there was no king in Israel, and every man was accustomed to do what was right in his own eyes. Whether the fathers or brothers of the virgins who had been carried off brought any complaint before the congregation concerning the raid that had been committed, the writer does not state, simply because this was of no moment so far as the history was concerned, inasmuch as, according to v. 22, the complaint made no difference in the facts themselves.

(Note: "No doubt the fathers and brothers of the virgins demanded them both from the Benjaminites themselves, and also from the elders of Israel, or at any rate petitioned that the Benjaminites might be punished: but the elders replied as they had said that they should; and the persons concerned were satisfied with the answer, and so the affair was brought to a peaceable termination." - *Seb. Schmidt.*)

With the closing remark in v. 25, however, with which the account returns to its commencement in Judg 19:1, the prophetic historian sums up his judgment upon the history in the words, "At that time every man did what was right in his own eyes, because there was no king in Israel," in which the idea is implied, that under the government of a king, who administered right and justice in the kingdom, such things could not possibly have happened. This not only refers to the conduct of the Israelites towards Benjamin in the war, the severity of which was not to be justified (see p. 331), but also to their conduct towards the inhabitants of Jabesh, as described in Judg 21:5ff. The congregation had no doubt a perfect right, when all the people were summoned to deliberate upon important matters affecting the welfare of the whole nation, to utter the "great oath" against such as failed to appear, i.e., to threaten them with death and carry out this threat upon such as were

obstinate; but such a punishment as this could only be justly inflicted upon persons who were really guilty, and had rebelled against the congregation as the supreme power, and could not be extended to women and children unless they had also committed a crime deserving of death.

But even if there were peculiar circumstances in the case before us, which have been passed over by our author, who restricts himself simply to points bearing upon the main purpose of the history, but which rendered it necessary that the ban should be inflicted upon all the inhabitants of Jabesh, it was at any rate an arbitrary exemption to spare all the marriageable virgins, and one which could not be justified by the object contemplated, however laudable that object might be. This also applies to the oath taken by the people, that they would not give any of their daughters as wives to the Benjaminites, as well as to the advice given by the elders to the remaining two hundred, to carry off virgins from the festival at Shiloh. However just and laudable the moral indignation may have been, which was expressed in that oath by the nation generally at the scandalous crime of the Gibeites, a crime unparalleled in Israel, and at the favour shown to the culprits by the tribe of Benjamin, the oath itself was an act of rashness, in which there was not only an utter denial of brotherly love, but the bounds of justice were broken through.

When the elders of the nation came to a better state of mind, they ought to have acknowledge their rashness openly, and freed themselves and the nation from an oath that had been taken in such sinful haste. "Wherefore they would have acted far more uprightly, if they had seriously confessed their fault and asked forgiveness of God, and given permission to the Benjaminites to marry freely. In this way there would have been no necessity to cut off the inhabitants of Jabesh from their midst by cruelty of another kind" (*Buddeus*). But if they felt themselves bound in

[<- Previous](#) [First](#) [Next ->](#)

[<- Previous](#) [First](#)

their consciences to keep the oath inviolably, they ought to have commended the matter to the Lord in prayer, and left it to His decision; whereas, by the advice given to the Benjaminites, they had indeed kept the oath in the letter, but had treated it in deed and truth as having no validity whatever.

(from Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament: New Updated Edition, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1996 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.)

[<- Previous](#) [First](#)