



**YOU CAN UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE**

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# INTRODUCTION TO JUDGES

## I. NAME OF THE BOOK

- A. The title comes from the Hebrew VERB *shophetim* (BDB 1047, KB 1622, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE), which meant “to settle a dispute.” This Hebrew term is similar to (R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 680):
  - 1. the Canaanite term for “leader” or “prince” (cf. Amos 2:3)
  - 2. the Phoenician term for “regent”
  - 3. the Akkadian term for “ruler”
  - 4. the Carthaginean term, “chief magistrate”
- B. It was translated in the LXX as *krital* or Judges.
- C. Our English title came from the Vulgate’s *judicum*.
- D. The English title is misleading because these persons do not act in judicial ways but are dynamic local leaders raised up by God, empowered by His Spirit (cf. Jdgs. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 14:6,19; 15:14), to meet the specific purpose of delivering His people from a foreign oppressor (cf. Jdgs. 2:16). A better title might be “Deliverers” (BDB 446, cf. Jdgs. 3:9,15).

## II. CANONIZATION

- A. This is the second book of the second division of the Hebrew canon. It is called the Prophets.
- B. This second division has two sub-divisions:
  - 1. the former prophets which we call the historical books: Joshua – Kings (except Ruth)
  - 2. the latter prophets which we call the prophets: Isaiah – Malachi (except Daniel and Lamentations)

## III. GENRE – This is primarily historical narrative.

## IV. AUTHORSHIP

- A. The Bible itself is silent.
- B. *Baba Bathra* 14b (a book of the Talmud) says Samuel wrote the books which bears his name, Judges, and Ruth.
- C. Judges covers a period of many years (i.e., death of Joshua to birth of Samuel), therefore, there cannot be one eyewitness author.
- D. The book was possibly compiled from:
  - 1. several unnamed written sources such as:
    - a. “The book of the Wars of the Lord,” which is one historical source mentioned in Numbers 21:14

- b. “The book of Jashar,” which is another historical source mentioned in Joshua 10:13 and 2 Samuel 1:18
  - 2. possibly several oral sources. Accurate oral histories were common in the Ancient Near East where writing materials were very expensive and difficult to carry. See John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*, which discusses how oral societies passed on their history and traditions. An example would be: “The Chronicles of Samuel the seer,. . .Nathan the prophet,. . .Gad the seer” in 1 Chr. 29:29.
- E. It seems that the original compiler wrote during the early United Monarchy:
  - 1. Bethlehem is mentioned often, possibly reflecting David’s day (cf. Jdgs. 17:7,8,9; 19:1,2,18 [twice]).
  - 2. Several texts reflect a monarchial period by the phrase “in those days there was no king in Israel” (cf. Jdgs. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). There were kings in all the surrounding nations, though not in Israel.
- F. There is evidence of a later editor:
  - 1. Judges 18:30 reflects:
    - a. the Assyrian exile of the northern ten tribes in 722 B.C. (i.e., the fall of Samaria)
    - b. possibly the capture of the Ark by the Philistines in Eli’s day, 1 Samuel 1-7
  - 2. Jewish tradition asserts that Jeremiah and/or Ezra the scribe edited parts of the OT. The formation of the OT in its current form is lost to us. However, this does not affect the divine inspiration of these OT books. See Special Topic: The Bible (its uniqueness and inspiration) and Special Topic: Inspiration.

## V. DATE

- A. Although written by a compiler, probably during David’s reign, this does not imply that the historical material is not from eyewitness sources. There are two good examples of this:
  - 1. In Jdgs. 1:21 the Jebusites still hold the inner fortress of Jebus (later Jerusalem). David does not conquer this fort until 2 Sam. 5:6ff. See Special Topic: Jebus.
  - 2. In Jdgs. 3:3 Sidon, not Tyre, is listed as the major city of Phoenicia.
- B. The book covers the period of time from immediately after the conquest of Joshua to the birth of Samuel. The beginning date depends on the date of the Exodus (1445 B.C. or 1290 B.C.; see Special Topic: Date of the Exodus), 1350 B.C. or 1200 B.C. The terminus date would be about 1020 B.C., which is the beginning of Saul’s reign (Bright).
- C. If one adds up all of the dates given for the Judges, it comes to 390-410 years. This cannot be taken chronologically sequential because from 1 Kgs. 6:1 the Bible says there were 480 years between the Exodus and the building of Solomon’s Temple, 965 B.C. This means the Judges must have been primarily local leaders and their dates must overlap.
- D. The rebellious events recorded in Judges 17-21 occur at the beginning of the period, which shows the book is out of chronological order.

## VI. HISTORICAL SETTING

- A. The beginning chapters of Judges show us how limited was the conquest of Joshua. Joshua basically defeated the major Canaanite walled cities and their military potential. God left the hard job of occupation to each of the tribes in their own area, Jdgs. 2:6. This strategy was to test the new generation of Israelites who had not seen God’s miracles of the Exodus and Conquest, Jdgs. 2:1-10; 3:1.
- B. The new generation failed the test, Jdgs. 2:11ff; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1; see Special Topic: God Tests His People (OT). God responded to their sin by sending foreign oppressors to punish His people. The people repented and cried out to God for help. God sent a “deliverer.” Then for a period of years the land was peaceful. This is basically the pattern that describes the book of Judges, Jdgs. 2:6-16:31 (sin, sorrow, supplication, salvation, and relapse).

VII. LITERARY UNITS

- A. It seems that the time of the Judges is theologically described in three different ways. These three perspectives form the outline of the book:
1. results of Joshua’s conquest
  2. the need for deliverers
  3. examples of apostasy
- B. Brief Outline of the Book:
1. a brief account of the conquest, Jdgs. 1:1-2:5
  2. the sin, judgment and deliverance of God’s people, Jdgs. 2:6-16:31
  3. three examples of the sins of God’s people that reveal the moral climate of the day:
    - a. Micah’s idolatry, Judges 17
    - b. Dan’s migration, Judges 18
    - c. Gibeah’s sexual sin, Judges 19-21

C. The Major Judges and their enemies:

NAME	TEXT	ENEMY	TIME of PEACE (1) or TIME of JUDGING (2)
1. Othniel	3:7-11	Mesopotamia (Cushan-Rishathaim)	40 yrs. (1)
2. Ehud	3:12-30	Moab (Eglon)	80 yrs. (1)
3. Deborah (Barak)	4:1-24 (prose) 5:1-31 (poetry)	Canaanite (Jabin and Sisera)	40 yrs. (1)
4. Gideon	6 - 8	Midianites & Amalekites	40 yrs. (1)
5. Jephthah	10:17-12:7	Ammonites (& Ephraim)	6 yrs. (2)
6. Samson	13 - 16	Philistines	20 yrs. (2)

D. The Minor Judges:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Text</u>	<u>Enemy</u>	<u>Time of Judging</u>
1. Shamgar	3:31	Philistines	?

2. Tola	10:1-2	?	23 yrs.
3. Jain	10:3-5	?	22 yrs.
4. Ibzan	12:8-10	?	7 yrs.
5. Elon	12:11-12	?	10 yrs.
6. Abdon	12:13-15	?	8 yrs.

- E. Abimelech, 9:1-57:
1. this was a son of Gideon by a concubine
  2. he only affected one city, Shechem
  3. he is different from the other Judges

## VIII. MAIN TRUTHS

- A. This book clearly shows the continuing results of the Fall (see Special Topic: The Fall):
1. Each successive generation violated the Covenant and went after Canaanite fertility gods (see Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the Ancient Near East).
  2. Even in the Promised Land, with its tribal allocations given by God, the tribe of Dan chose to relocate to the extreme north instead of trusting God to defeat the Philistines.
- B. God used pagan peoples to judge His people (later Syria, Assyria, and Babylon). This reflects the cursing sections of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27-29; also note Deut. 7:1-5, 17-26; 20:16-18
- C. This book shows the need for a righteous King (one who reflects YHWH's character) to lead the united tribes (cf. Jdgs. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).
- D. YHWH is faithful even when Israel is not! His people's continual covenant disobedience highlights His character (i.e., mercy, grace, longsuffering, love); see Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel's God (OT).
- E. This book continues the history of the Jewish people which began in Genesis, especially the covenant with Abraham (see Special Topic: Covenant Promises to the Patriarchs).

# JUDGES 1

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Jerusalem Is Captured	The Continuing Conquest of Canaan	The Period of the Judges (1:1-2:5)	The Tribe of Judah and Simeon Capture Adoni-bezek	The Settlement of Judah, Simeon, Caleb and the Kenites
1:1-7	1:1-7	1:1-7	1:1 1:2 1:3-7	1:1-8
1:8-10	1:8-15	1:8-15	The Tribe of Judah Conquers Jerusalem and Hebron 1:8-10	1:9-15
Capture of Other Cities			Othniel Conquers the City of Debir	
1:11-15			1:11-15	
1:16-21	1:16-21	1:16-21	The Victories of the Tribe of Judah and Benjamin 1:16-21	1:16 1:17-19 1:20-21
1:22-26	1:22-26	1:22-26	The Tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh Conquer Bethel The Tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh Capture Bethel 1:22-26	The Capture of Bethel 1:22-26
Places Not Conquered	Incomplete Conquest of the Land		People Who Were Not Driven Out by the Israelites	The Northern Tribes
1:27-28	1:27-28	1:27-28	1:27-28	1:27-35
1:29	1:29	1:29	1:29	
1:30	1:30	1:30	1:30	
1:31-32	1:31-32	1:31-32	1:31-32	
1:33	1:33	1:33	1:33	
1:34-36	1:34-36	1:34-36	1:34-35 1:36	1:36

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

## CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. The author gives the old and new names of the cities taken by the Israelites. This shows he lived after the events but close enough to know the Canaanite names.

<u>Old Name</u>	<u>New Name</u>
1. Kiriath-arba, Jdgs. 1:10	Hebron
2. Kiriath-sepher, Jdgs. 1:11	Debir
3. Zephath, Jdgs. 1:17	Hormah
4. Luz, Jdgs. 1:23,26	Bethel

- B. Judges 1:1-2:5 is a brief overview of the conquest of Canaan after Joshua. It highlights the disobedience in killing or driving out the Canaanites (ie., Jdgs. 1:28). Their pagan, idolatrous influence would eventually result in the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles (i.e., see Jdgs. 2:6-3:6).
- C. Judges 1:8-21 describes the southern conquest, while 1:21-36 describes the northern conquest. Only Judah is seen as successful and obedient to the covenant.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:1-7

**<sup>1</sup>Now it came about after the death of Joshua that the sons of Israel inquired of the LORD, saying, “Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?” <sup>2</sup>The LORD said, “Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand.” <sup>3</sup>Then Judah said to Simeon his brother, “Come up with me into the territory allotted me, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I in turn will go with you into the territory allotted you.” So Simeon went with him. <sup>4</sup>Judah went up, and the LORD gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hands, and they defeated ten thousand men at Bezek. <sup>5</sup>They found Adoni-bezek in Bezek and fought against him, and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. <sup>6</sup>But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. <sup>7</sup>Adoni-bezek said, “Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to gather up scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me.” So they brought him to Jerusalem and he died there.**

**1:1 “after the death of Joshua”** This is recorded in Joshua 24. The book of Judges picks up immediately (i.e., soon, cf. Jdgs. 2:6-9) after Joshua’s death. It documents the societal struggle from one powerful leader to future generations (i.e., Jos. 24:19-28).

This chapter documents

1. a southern campaign, Jdgs. 1:1-9,16-19
2. a central campaign, Jdgs. 1:22-29
3. a northern campaign, Jdgs. 1:30-36

▣ **“inquired of the LORD”** This VERB (BDB 981, KB 1371, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*) is often used of Israel’s leaders asking the High Priest about YHWH’s desire concerning questions (usually about war, cf. Num. 27:21; Jos. 9:14; Jdgs. 18:5; 20:18,27; 1 Sam. 14:41-42; 22:13,15; 23:2). They used the Urim and Thummim (see Special Topic: Urim and Thummim).

▣ **“the Canaanites”** See Special Topic: Pre-Israelite Inhabitants of Palestine.

**1:2 “Judah shall go up”** This shows the preeminent place of Judah (cf. Gen. 49:8-12; esp. 49:10).

The tribe of Judah also included

1. the tribe of Simeon
2. Kenizzites (cf. Num. 32:12; Jos. 14:6,14; i.e., Othniel [and Caleb])
3. Kenizzites (cf. Num. 24:21,22; Jdgs. 1:16; 4:11,17; 5:24; Moses' father-in-law)

▣ **“I have given the land into his hand”** This is a recurrent phrase that shows

1. YHWH's ownership of Canaan
2. YHWH's empowering of its conquest but, unlike the conquest of Joshua, each tribe must defeat the Canaanites living in their tribal inheritance
3. “hand,” see Special Topic: Hand

**1:3 “Simeon”** The tribe of Simeon will lose its tribal and territorial identity and later merge with Judah (cf. Jos. 19:1,9).

▣ **“allotted”** This refers to Joshua 13-19. The priests cast the lots (i.e., Urim and Thummim) to designate which tribes had which parts of Palestine.

This tribal allocation was a God-given gift but even in times of difficulty the land had to be returned to its original owners at the year of Jubilee (cf. Leviticus 25; i.e., every 50<sup>th</sup> year, after seven sabbath years).

**1:4 “the Perizzites”** See Special Topic: Pre-Israelite Inhabitants of Palestine.

▣ **“ten thousand”** This is probably hyperbolic. See Special Topic: Thousand (*eleph*) and Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture.

▣ **“at Bezek”** Judges 1:4-7 records one of the encounters with a city-state in Palestine, north of the Dead Sea. See *The MacMillan Bible Atlas*, map #57, p. 52.

**1:6 “cut off his thumbs and big toes”** This was an ANE method of humbling a military opponent. They would not be able to carry a sword or bow.

*The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, p. 242, documents the mutilation of prisoners in Assyrian wall reliefs from Shalmaneser III (ninth century B.C.).

**1:7** This comment expresses the theology of

1. Lex Talionis (eye-for-an-eye) justice, cf. Exod. 21:23-24; Lev. 24:19-23; Deut. 19:21
2. “we reap what we sow” (cf. Job 34:11; Ps. 28:4; 62:12; Pro. 24:12; Eccl. 12:14; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Matt. 16:27; 25:31-46; Rom. 2:6; 14:12; 1 Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:7-10; 2 Tim. 4:14; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2:23; 20:12; 22:12)

▣ **“seventy kings”** This would refer to leaders of the larger city-states in the area. It may be a hyperbole. See Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture, A., 8.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:8-10**

**<sup>8</sup>Then the sons of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire. <sup>9</sup>Afterward the sons of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites living in the hill country and in the Negev and in the lowland. <sup>10</sup>So Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron (now the name of Hebron formerly was Kiriath-arba); and they struck Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmi.**

**1:8** When one compares Jdgs. 1:8 with 1:21, and also Jos. 15:63 with 2 Sam. 5:6-10, it is obvious that Jdgs. 1:8 refers to the city itself but not the inner fortress, which was later captured by David (cf. 2 Sam. 5:6-10).

**1:9 “Negev”** This geographical area (BDB 616) refers to the dry, southern part of Palestine.

▣ **“the lowlands”** This geographical area (BDB 1050) is from the Mediterranean Sea to the hill country of Palestine. It is also called the Shephelah (see *The MacMillan Bible Atlas*, #7, p. 14, which shows the topological divisions of Palestine).

**1:10-15** This retells what happened in Jos. 14:13-15; 15:13-19.

**1:10 “Hebron”** Caleb (i.e., one of the twelve spies, cf. Numbers 13-14) had already conquered Hebron (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 698-700) in Jos. 15:13-19 (cf. Jos. 14:6-15; Jdgs. 1:20). Judges 1:1-2:5 is a brief retelling of Joshua’s conquest.

The three people mentioned were part of the *Anakim*, cf. Jos. 11:26. See Special Topic: Tall/Powerful Warriors or People Groups.

**1:10 “Kiriath-arba”** Kiriath (BDB 900) means “city. Arba was

1. the father of Anak (i.e., “long-necked,” BDB 778 I; cf. Jos. 14:15; 15:13; 21:11)
2. the number “four” (BDB 918), referring to a confederation of city-states
3. the name of a Babylonian deity

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:11-15**

<sup>11</sup>Then from there he went against the inhabitants of Debir (now the name of Debir formerly was Kiriath-sepher). <sup>12</sup>And Caleb said, “The one who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will even give him my daughter Achsah for a wife.” <sup>13</sup>Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, captured it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah for a wife. <sup>14</sup>Then it came about when she came to him, that she persuaded him to ask her father for a field. Then she alighted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, “What do you want?” <sup>15</sup>She said to him, “Give me a blessing, since you have given me the land of the Negev, give me also springs of water.” So Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.

**1:11 “Kiriath-sepher”** This combination means “city of scribes” or “city of records” (cf. Jos. 15:15-16).

**1:12 “Caleb”** His name (BDB 477) meant “dog.” He was the brother of the judge Othniel (cf. Jdgs. 3:7-11; 5:17). He was not an Israelite but a Kenizzite (cf. Num. 32:12; 1 Chr. 1:53) but was incorporated into the clan of Judah.

▣ At this time in the ANE at this time the price of a bride (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 1, pp. 526-530) may not be valuables but

1. service (Gen. 29:15-30; Exod. 2:21)
2. military victory (Jos. 15:16-17; and here)
3. an assigned task (1 Sam. 17:25; 18:25)

**1:15 “springs of water”** This is possibly a set of place names (cf. Jos. 15:19).

1. “Gulioth-mayim” (BDB 165 CONSTRUCT BDB 565)
2. the upper springs, “Gulioth-illith” (BDB 165 CONSTRUCT BDB 751)
3. the lower springs, “gulioth-Tahteth” (BDB 165 CONSTRUCT BDB 165 CONSTRUCT BDB 1066)

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:16-21**

<sup>16</sup>The descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up from the city of palms with the sons of Judah, to the wilderness of Judah which is in the south of Arad; and they went and lived with the people. <sup>17</sup>Then Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they struck the Canaanites living in Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. So the name of the city was called Hormah. <sup>18</sup>And Judah took Gaza with its territory and Ashkelon with its territory and Ekron with its territory. <sup>19</sup>Now the LORD was with Judah, and they took possession of the hill country; but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had iron chariots. <sup>20</sup>Then they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had promised; and he drove out from there the three sons of Anak. <sup>21</sup>But the sons of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have lived with the sons of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

**1:16 “Moses' father-in-law”** He goes by several names/titles.

1. Hobab – Num. 10:29; Jdgs. 4:11
2. Jethro – Exod. 3:1; 4:18; 18:1
3. Reuel – Exod. 2:18
4. priest of Midian – Exod. 2:16; 3:1

However, in Num. 10:29, he is called “Hobab the son of Reuel the Midianite.” Names are often repeated within families. This makes it hard to document individuals with only a list of their parents or locality.

▣ **“the city of palms”** This was the earlier name for Jericho (cf. Deut. 34:3; Jdgs. 3:13; 2 Chr. 28:15), but in this context, it possibly refers to a city south of Arad (i.e., Tamar [lit. palm tree, BDB 1071 II] cf. 1 Kgs. 9:18; Ezek. 47:19; 48:28; see James Martin, *The Book of Judges*, p. 22).

**1:17 “utterly destroyed”** This VERB (BDB 365, KB 353, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT with *waw*) denotes a special kind of warfare (i.e., “holy war”) where the city is given to God (i.e., Jericho in Jos. 6:18).

Being under the “ban” (lit. *herem*, BDB 356) meant

1. everything living in the city must die (animals and humans)
2. no spoils of war must be taken (cf. Joshua 7)

The city was dedicated to God and became too holy for humans to use.

The new name, “Hormah,” is from the same root (BDB 356, cf. Num. 21:3). See Special Topic: Curse (OT).

**1:18 “Gaza...Ashkelon...Ekron”** Here, these coastal city-states are captured by Judah but later they will become three of the five city-states of the Philistines.

They were not fully conquered until David's day. The LXX states that Judah did not conquer these cities, probably because its translators saw the improbability of this so early in Israel's history, cf. Jdgs. 1:19.

**1:19 “the valley”** This refers to the Valley of Jezreel, which was south and west of the Sea of Galilee.

▣ **“iron chariots”** These weapons of war could only function on level ground. They were of no effect in the hill country. However, on the coast and in the valleys, they were ultimate weapons (cf. Jos. 17:16; Jdgs. 4:13; see Special Topic: Chariots). The Canaanite people had vastly superior weapons (i.e., iron age technology, cf. 1 Sam. 13:19-21; NIDOTTE, vol. 1, pp. 741-743).

**1:20 “they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had promised”** See Num. 14:24; Deut. 1:36; Jos. 14:6-15.

▣ **“the three sons of Anak”** See Num. 13:22, where they are first mentioned. See Special Topic: Terms Used for Tall/Powerful Warriors or People Groups.

**1:21 “Jebus”** See Special Topic: Jebus.

▣ **“Benjamin”** Jerusalem was in the tribal allocation of Benjamin (cf. Jos. 18:28), but right on the border of Judah (cf. Jos. 15:63).

▣ **“to this day”** This phrase occurs in Jdgs. 1:21 and 26. It shows that Judges has gone through an editorial process, as have all the OT books. The exact nature and time of this process is unknown. It must be assumed that the OT editors were as inspired as the original authors (see Special Topic: Inspiration).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:22-26**

**<sup>22</sup>Likewise the house of Joseph went up against Bethel, and the LORD was with them. <sup>23</sup>The house of Joseph spied out Bethel (now the name of the city was formerly Luz). <sup>24</sup>The spies saw a man coming out of the city and they said to him, “Please show us the entrance to the city and we will treat you kindly.” <sup>25</sup>So he showed them the entrance to the city, and they struck the city with the edge of the sword, but they let the man and all his family go free. <sup>26</sup>The man went into the land of the Hittites and built a city and named it Luz which is its name to this day.**

**1:22 “the house of Joseph”** At this time in OT history, this refers to the tribe of Ephraim and the western half-tribe of Manasseh.

▣ **“and the LORD was with them”** One of the LXX MSS, A and L, and the Old Latin have “and Judah was with them” (cf. AB, p. 59). The alternative reading is possible because the second half of chapter 1 documents the failures of the northern campaign. Judah was successful and faithful to YHWH’s commands about the Canaanite population (cf. Deut. 20:17; Jos. 16:10; 17:13), but not the northern tribes.

What is a mystery is why Judah helped Ephraim. Judah and Ephraim were the two largest tribes. Joshua was of Ephraim. There was jealousy and competition between these clans.

**1:23 “Bethel”** This means “House of God,” named by Jacob in Gen. 28:19. It is twelve miles north of Jerusalem (see NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp, 440-41).

**1:24-26** This is similar to the account of Rahab at Jericho. A person helped the Israelite invaders and was spared death, even given a reward (i.e., place to live).

It is unstated why the defeated cities of Joshua are re-occupied by Canaanites and had to be taken again.

**1:26 “Hittites”** See Special Topic: Pre-Israelite Inhabitants of Palestine.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:27-28**

**<sup>27</sup>But Manasseh did not take possession of Beth-shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; so the Canaanites persisted in living in that land. <sup>28</sup>It came about when Israel became strong, that they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but they did not drive them out completely.**

**1:27** The half-tribe of Manasseh did not successfully conquer their tribal allocation. This reinforces the truth that the conquest of Joshua was only partial (i.e., the main walled cities), but that each tribe had to, by faith, possess their own God-given land. Many did not! The presence of the Canaanite people corrupted the worship of YHWH and later brought judgment and exile (i.e., Exod. 34:10-17; Deut. 7:1-5; 20:17-18).

▣ **“its villages”** This is literally “daughter” (BDB 123 I) but it is often used of small, unwalled surrounding villages (cf. Num. 21:25; Jos. 15:45; Jer. 49:2).

**1:28** Instead of killing the Canaanite population, as God directed them, they used them for forced labor (cf. Jdgs. 1:30,33,35).

This is the first hint of the problems these idolatrous pagans would cause the Israelites. YHWH told them to totally remove them (cf. Exod. 34:10-17; Deut. 7:1-5; 20:17-18) but they did not, even when they were stronger and able to do so.

▣ **“they did not drive them out completely”** This is a grammatical form that shows intensity (i.e., an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and a PERFECT VERB from the same root (BDB 439, KB 441).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:29**

<sup>29</sup>**Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who were living in Gezer; so the Canaanites lived in Gezer among them.**

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:30**

<sup>30</sup>**Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol; so the Canaanites lived among them and became subject to forced labor.**

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:31-32**

<sup>31</sup>**Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco, or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, or of Achzib, or of Helbah, or of Aphik, or of Rehob. <sup>32</sup>So the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out.**

**1:31 “Ahlab”** This location also goes by “Mahalah” (cf. Jos. 19:29, NJB). The UBS Text Project, p. 72, gives “Mahalah” a “C” rating (considerable doubt).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:33**

<sup>33</sup>**Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anath, but lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; and the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath became forced labor for them.**

**1:33 “Beth-shemesh”** This name (BDB 112) implies the worship of the sun, as does “Mount Heres” (BDB 249). This pagan worship was widespread in Canaan as another “Beth-shemesh” (i.e., Ir-shemesh, cf. Jos. 19:41) in Judah shows.

Beth-anath (lit., “house of Anat”) is another pagan name (i.e., the goddess of war). This was one of Ramesses II’s favorite goddesses.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:34-36**

**<sup>34</sup>Then the Amorites forced the sons of Dan into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the valley; <sup>35</sup>yet the Amorites persisted in living in Mount Heres, in Aijalon and in Shaalbim; but when the power of the house of Joseph grew strong, they became forced labor. <sup>36</sup>The border of the Amorites ran from the ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela and upward.**

**1:34 “Amorites”** See Special Topic: Amorite.

▣ **“Dan”** The tribe of Dan had trouble conquering its allocation because of the Canaanite/Philistine presence along the southern coast of Palestine. They later relocated (i.e., Judges 18) to the far north of Palestine.

**1:36** For geographical places see *The MacMillan Bible Atlas*.

▣ **“Sela”** This is the Hebrew term for “rock” or “stone” (BDB 701, cf. Jdgs. 20:45,47; 1 Sam. 23:28) or “cliff” (BDB 701 I). In the OT it can refer to several different cities.

1. an Amorite border fortress, Jdgs. 6:35
2. Petra, a Nabatean capital, 2 Kgs. 14:7
3. a city in Moab, Isa. 16:1

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why does the conquest of Joshua in the book of Joshua seem so complete but the review of Judges 1-2 seem so fragmented?
2. What does “inquired” mean? Why was it important?
3. Why is Judah highlighted?
4. How does Judges relate to Gen. 15:12-21?
5. Is the king mentioned in Jdgs. 1:5 the same as the one mentioned in Joshua 10?
6. How do we reconcile Jdgs. 1:8 with 1:21?
7. What does the phrase “to this day” imply?
8. Why are all the tribes, except Judah and Benjamin, condemned?

# JUDGES 2

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Israel Rebuked 2:1-5	Israel's Disobedience 2:1-6	The Period of the Judges (1:1-2:5) 2:1-5	The Angel of the LORD at Bochim 2:1-5	The Angel of Yahweh Tells Israel of Disaster to Come 2:1-5
Joshua Dies 2:6-10	Death of Joshua 2:7-10	Israel Under the Judges (2:6-3:6) 2:6-10	The Death of Joshua 2:6-10	General Reflections on the Period of the Judges 2:6-10
Israel Serves Baals 2:11-15 2:16-23	Israel's Unfaithfulness 2:11-15 2:16-19 2:20-23	2:11-15 2:16-23	Israel Stops Worshiping the LORD 2:11-15 2:16-23	Religious Interpretation of the Period of the Judges 2:11-15 2:16-19 Why Foreign Nations Survived in Canaan (2:20-3:6) 2:20-23

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

#### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:1-5

**<sup>1</sup>Now the angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you, <sup>2</sup>and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done? <sup>3</sup>Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they will become *as thorns* in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.'" <sup>4</sup>When the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. <sup>5</sup>So they named that place Bochim; and there they sacrificed to the LORD**

**2:1 "the angel of the LORD"** Notice this angel speaks as if YHWH Himself (i.e., a theophany). See Special Topic: The Angel of the LORD and Special Topic: The Trinity.

**▣ "came up from Gilgal"** Notice the angel is depicted as moving (i.e., "came up," see Special Topic: The Problems and Limitations of Human Language), following the same route as Joshua's initial invasion. Gilgal was the first campsite of Israel in the Promised Land (cf. Jos. 4:19-20).

Gilgal (BDB 166 II) means "rolling" and is defined in Jos. 5:9 ("today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you").

▣ **“to Bochim”** The exact site is uncertain but it probably is close to Gilgal. The name means “weepers” (BDB 114, cf. Jdgs. 2:5).

The Jewish Study Bible, p. 513, asserts that Bochim is really Bethel because of

1. connection of Bethel to weeping (cf. Jdgs. 20:26; 21:2)
2. the golden calf worship recorded in 1 Kgs. 12:25-30

Other reasons are:

1. an “oak of weeping” is mentioned close to Bethel in Gen. 35:8
2. the LXX specifically includes the name “and to Bethel”
3. Bethel was the site of an altar, cf. Jdgs. 2:5; 20:27

▣ **“I brought you up out of Egypt”** This very phrase begins the “Ten Commandments” (cf. Exod. 20:2). This divine act was the fulfillment of Gen. 15:12-21.

▣ **“and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers”** This first promise was given to Abraham in Gen. 12:1-3 (cf. Deut. 1:8,35; 6:10,18,23; 7:13; 8:1; 11:9,21; 19:8; 26:3,15; 28:11; 30:20; 31:23). See Special Topic: Covenant Promises to the Patriarchs.

▣ **“I will never break My covenant with you”** This could refer to

1. YHWH’s statement in Gen. 3:1 (see Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan)
2. YHWH’s promise to the Patriarchs (see Special Topic: Covenant Promises to the Patriarchs)

YHWH has a plan for redeeming all humanity which involved Abraham and his seed. However, their covenant was conditional on human response and faithfulness (see Special Topic: Covenant). Judges highlights Israel’s faithlessness (i.e., disobedience in relation to the Canaanite population’s removal and later Israel’s adoption of their fertility worship, cf. Jdgs. 2:20-3:7). Israel’s disobedience had consequences.

1. YHWH stopped helping the individual tribes conquer their land allotment (Jos. 23:4-5,23)
2. YHWH sent oppressors (Jdgs. 2:3,21)

The mercy and long term purpose of YHWH for Israel is also seen in that He sent deliverers (cf. Jdgs. 2:16)! It is ultimately seen in the “New Covenant” of Jer. 31:31-34 (described in Ezek. 36:22-36).

Just one final comment. The Assyrian and Babylonian exiles were a reversal of the land promise of the Abrahamic covenant. As YHWH removed the wicked Canaanites (cf. Gen. 15:12-21), so too, He removed the wicked descendants of Abraham from Canaan.

The good news is He will bring them back (cf. Isa. 44:28; 45:1)! There is a long term purpose for Israel (i.e., the Messiah, see Special Topic: Messiah).

▣ The MT concludes Jdgs. 2:2 with *'olam*. This word has a wide semantic field and must be interpreted in context. See Special Topic: Forever (*'olam*).

**2:2 “you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land”** Judges 1:22-33 documents this disobedience. Instead of removing or destroying the Canaanite population, they used them for “forced labor” (cf. Jdgs. 1:28,30,33,35).

▣ **“you shall tear down their altars”** These were high places of Canaanite fertility worship (see Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the Ancient Near East).

1. a large raised, upright stone, phallic stone, symbolizing the male god, *Ba'al* (cf. Exod. 23:24; 34:13)
2. tall wooden stake representing the female goddess, *Astarte*, *Asherah* (cf. Exod. 34:13; similar mythology to the Babylonian *Ishtar*)

▣ **“But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done?”** This, like Jdgs. 2:11-23, is an overview of the period of the Judges; cycles of disobedience, mercy, deliverance, and renewed disobedience. See Special Topic: Keep.

**2:3** This imagery comes from Num. 33:55 and Jos. 23:13. There were consequences to disobedience, terrible consequences. The great promises of YHWH’s presence and blessing of Israel are balanced with warnings for disobedience (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). Israel must choose (cf. Deuteronomy 30)!

▣ **“as thorns in your sides”** The MT of Num. 33:55 has “thorns” (BDB 856), which seems to have dropped out of the text of Jdgs. 2:3. The LXX translates MT’s “sides” (BDB 841) as

1. obstacle, LXX Alexandrinus
2. oppression, LXX Vaticanus
3. oppressors or adversaries (Targums, NJB, based on the “r” and “d” confusion in the two Hebrew roots)

The UBS Text Project, p. 74, suggests it is some type of hunting instrument; based on an Akkadian cognate for “snare” (NET Bible, p. 429, #8).

**2:4-5** Apparently the coming of the Angel of the Lord was after Israel had already sinned. She tried to offer a sacrifice but it was too late.

**2:4 “they wept”** This may be an example of “superficial repentance,” cf. Num. 25:6; Jdgs. 20:33; 21:2; Ps. 51:17; Joel 2:12-14,17-19. See Special Topic: Repentance in the OT.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:6-10**

**“When Joshua had dismissed the people, the sons of Israel went each to his inheritance to possess the land. <sup>7</sup>The people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the LORD which He had done for Israel. <sup>8</sup>Then Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD died at the age of one hundred and ten. <sup>9</sup>And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. <sup>10</sup>All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.**

**2:6-10** This is a flashback to the events surrounding Joshua’s death and burial (cf. Jos. 24:29-31).

**2:7** The generation that experienced YHWH’s actions remained faithful but the future generations, who only heard about them, disobeyed (cf. Jdgs. 2:10).

**2:8 “the servant of the LORD”** This was an honorific title given to Joshua only after his death (cf. Jos. 24:29). See Special Topic: My Servant.

▣ **“the age of one hundred and ten”** In Egyptian culture, this was the ideal age (cf. Gen. 50:22,26).

It is uncertain why the people lived so long in the early part of Genesis. There are only theories.

There has been much discussion about the length of human life before and immediately after the great flood (i.e., the antediluvian period). Some have asserted that

1. it is figurative
2. they calculated years differently
3. sin had simply not pervaded the earth as it has today

4. the advanced ages were used to show honor for previous leaders as in the Sumerian lists of ten pre-flood kings. In that list, the kings before the flood lived much longer than the kings after the flood, much like the genealogies of the Bible.

**2:9 “Timmath-heres”** This name (BDB 584) means “territory of the Sun.” Sun worship is also implied in Judges 1.

1. Beth-shemesh, Jdgs. 1:33
2. Mount Heres, Jdgs. 1:35

This pagan association caused the Israelites to change the name of the location of Joshua’s burial (cf. Jos. 19:50; 24:30).

▣ **“in the hill country of Ephraim”** Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim.

**2:10 “All that generation also were gathered to their fathers”** This phrase, like “sleep,” is a euphemism for death. In the ANE, when possible, families were buried in close proximity (cf. Gen. 15:15; 25:8; 47:30). The other common idiom was “slept with their fathers” (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12; 1 Kgs. 1:21; 2:10; 11:43, etc.). See NIDOTTE, vol. 1, pp. 470-471, 4. C.

Several family tombs are mentioned in the OT.

1. the Patriarchs’ – Gen. 49:29,31; 50:13
2. Joshua’s – Jos. 24:30; Jdgs. 2:9
3. Joseph’s – Jos. 24:32

▣ **“another generation after them who did not know the LORD”** The term “know” (BDB 393, KB 390, *Qal* PERFECT) is not used here of general knowledge about YHWH, His actions or His commands, but the fact that this new generation did not have a faith relationship with Him. See Special Topic: Know.

Biblical faith is only one generation away from extinction if parents and the community of faith fail to pass on, not just facts about God, but an intimate, daily, obedient faith relationship with Him (cf. Deut. 6:4-9)!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:11-15**

**<sup>11</sup>Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals, <sup>12</sup>and they forsook the LORD the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from *among* the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the LORD to anger. <sup>13</sup>So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroth. <sup>14</sup>The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around *them*, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. <sup>15</sup>Wherever they went, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had spoken and as the LORD had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed.**

**2:11 “Baals”** Fertility worship was evil (cf. Deut. 4:25; 9:18; 17:2; 22:19; Jdgs. 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). See Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the Ancient Near East.

**2:12 “they forsook the LORD”** This VERB (BDB 736, KB 806, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*, cf. Jdgs. 2:13; 10:6,10,13) is used of forsaking

1. YHWH – Deut. 28:20; 31:16; Jdgs. 10:10; Jer. 1:16; Jon. 2:9
2. His covenant – Deut. 29:25; 1 Kgs. 19:10,14
3. His house (i.e., temple) – 2 Chr. 24:18; Neh. 10:40

▣ **“the God of their fathers”** Notice Israel’s Deity is called

1. the angel of the LORD, Jdgs. 2:1
2. YHWH, Jdgs. 2:12 (most often in this chapter)
3. *Eloah*, Jdgs. 2:12 (see Special Topic: Names for Deity, C. And D.)

▣ **“they provoked the LORD to anger”** This is anthropomorphic language (like “the anger of the LORD burned,” Jdgs. 2:14) to express the degree of displeasure that Israel’s God had with “other gods” (cf. Exod. 20:2-11; Deut. 5:6-15). See Special Topic: The Problems and Limitations of Human Language.

**2:14 “the hands of plunderers who plundered”** This is a purposeful grammatical combination of

1. BDB 1042, KB 1608, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE
2. BDB 1042, KB 1608, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*

▣ **“He sold them into the hands of their enemies”** This is an idiom (cf. Jdgs. 3:8; 4:2,9; 10:7; 1 Sam. 12:9) for God allowing the Canaanites to defeat His people. See Special Topic: Hand.

It is the antonym of the term “redeem” (see Special Topic: Ransom/Redeem), which means “to buy someone back.”

**2:15** The Divine Warrior (i.e., holy war terminology) was now on the side of the enemy! Israel had ignored Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Actions have consequences.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:16-23**

**<sup>16</sup>Then the LORD raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them. <sup>17</sup>Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the LORD they did not do as their fathers. <sup>18</sup>When the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them. <sup>19</sup>But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways. <sup>20</sup>So the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He said, “Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers and has not listened to My voice, <sup>21</sup>I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, <sup>22</sup>in order to test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers did, or not.” <sup>23</sup>So the LORD allowed those nations to remain, not driving them out quickly; and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua.**

**2:16** However, the mercy of YHWH is seen in Jdgs. 2:16. See Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (OT).

**2:17** The terrible cycle of faith, faithlessness, and renewal occurred again and again.

▣ **“played the harlot”** This imagery is both figurative and literal (cf. Exod. 34:15-16; Lev. 17:7; 20:5; Deut. 31:16; Jdgs. 8:27,35; 1 Chr. 5:25; Ps. 73:27; 106:39).

▣ **“They turned aside quickly from the way”** There are two images here.

1. The VERB (BDB 693, KB 747, *Qal* PERFECT) denotes an apostasy, cf. Exod. 32:8; Deut. 9:12; 11:16; 17:11,17; 1 Sam. 12:20; Ps. 14:3; Jer. 5:23; 32:40; Ezek. 6:9; see Special Topic: Apostasy (*aphistēmi*).
2. “The way” denotes God’s will as a clearly marked, straight, level road. Do not turn to the right or left, cf. Jdgs. 2:22; Deut. 5:32; Jos. 1:7; 2 Kgs. 22:2.

▣ **“commandments”** See Special Topic: Terms for God’s Revelation.

**2:18 “the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning”** This shows the basic character of YHWH, “mercy.” See Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (OT).

The fact that God was affected by His people’s prayers clearly demonstrates that prayer makes a real difference. See Special Topic: Effective Prayer.

This terminology is the same as Exod. 2:24; 3:9; 6:5, relating to Israel’s time in Egyptian bondage.

**2:19 “their stubborn ways”** Notice the character of Israel:

1. “the stubbornness of this people” – BDB 904, cf. Jdgs. 2:6,7,13,24,27
2. “their wickedness” – BDB 957, cf. Jer. 14:20; Ezek. 3:19; 33:12
3. “their sin” – BDB 308, cf. Exod. 32:30; Deut. 9:18; Ps. 32:5; 51:5; Pro. 5:22; 13:6; 14:34; 21:4; 24:9 (Deuteronomy shares the vocabulary of the sages of Hebrew Wisdom Literature)

**2:20-21** The faithlessness of Israel changed how YHWH treated them.

**2:20 “covenant”** See Special Topic: Covenant.

**2:22 “to test Israel”** See Special Topic: God Tests His People (OT).

The subject could be

1. YHWH
2. Joshua
3. what Joshua meant for a test had now turned into bondage

**2:23** There is only one God (see Special Topic: Monotheism). He, unlike the idols, can hear, act, show mercy, and direct history. In the OT there is only one causality—God (cf. 2 Chr. 20:6; Eccl. 7:14; Isa. 14:24-27; 43:13; 45:7; 54:16; Jer. 18:11; Lam. 3:33-38; Amos 3:6).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Who is the angel of the LORD?
2. What does “covenant” mean?
3. Why do people in the early part of the OT live so long?
4. Define the word “know” in Jdgs. 2:10.
5. Who are *Ba'al* and *Astarte*?
6. What does it mean “to play the harlot”?
7. How does Jdgs. 2:18 demonstrate the mercy of YHWH?
8. What does it mean that Israel was “stubborn”?
9. Does God test nations and people?
10. Why was YHWH with Joshua during the initial conquest but not with the northern tribes later?

# JUDGES 3

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Idolatry Leads to Servitude 3:1-8	The Nations Remaining in the Land 3:1-6 Othniel	Israel Under the Judges (2:6-3:6) 3:1-6	The Nations Remaining in the Land 3:1-6 Othniel	3:1-6 Othniel
The First Judge Delivers Israel 3:9-11	3:7-11 Ehud	3:7-11	3:7-11 Ehud	3:7-8 3:9-11 Ehud
3:12-14 Ehud Delivers from Moab	3:12-14	3:12-14	3:12-14	3:12-14
3:15-23	3:15-23	3:15-23	3:15-19b 3:19c 3:20-25	3:15-23
3:24-25	3:24-25	3:24-25		3:24-25
3:26-30	3:26-30	3:26-30	3:26-30	3:26-30
Shamgar Delivers from Philistines 3:31	Shamgar 3:31	3:31	Shamgar 3:31	Shamgar 3:31

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

#### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:1-8

<sup>1</sup>Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to test Israel by them (*that is*, all who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan; <sup>2</sup>only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war, those who had not experienced it formerly). <sup>3</sup>*These nations are:* the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath. <sup>4</sup>They were for testing Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the LORD which He had commanded their fathers through Moses. <sup>5</sup>The sons of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; <sup>6</sup>and they took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods. <sup>7</sup>The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth. <sup>8</sup>Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the sons of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years.

**3:1 “Now these are the nations which the LORD left”** One would assume by reading Joshua 23 that all the Canaanites had been defeated. However, when one compares Judges 1-3, one would realize that

although Joshua broke the back of the main Canaanite resistance (i.e., the walled cities), every tribe had to fully possess its own allotted territory.

▣ **“to test Israel by them”** It is obvious that God tests His people to make their faith toward Him stronger (cf. Genesis 12; 22; Exod. 16:4; 20:20; Deut. 8:2,16; 13:3; 2 Chr. 32:31; see Special Topic: God Tests His People). God’s tests are always for the purpose of strengthening our faith, never to destroy it. Testing will come (cf. Matt. 5:10-12; John 15:18-21; 16:1-3; 17:14; Acts 14:22; Rom. 5:3-4; 8:17; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; 6:3-10; 11:23-30; Phil. 1:29; 1 Thess. 3:3; 2 Tim. 3:12; James 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 4:12-16). All of the covenants are unconditional on God’s part, but conditional on man’s part. See Special Topic: Covenant.

**3:2 “that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught”** At first this would seem rather shocking that God’s will would be that they would be taught about war. But reading Joshua 23, God fighting on behalf of His people was a way of building His people’s faith. We also learn in Rom. 5:3,4 that we grow through the things that we experience. It is said that Jesus was perfected by the things that he suffered (cf. Heb. 5:8). It is obvious that in Jdgs. 3:1,2, sufferings are meant to strengthen the Israelites’ faith in their Covenant God.

**3:3 “These nations are. . .”** The following is a list of the Canaanites who were left in the land, to some extent, undefeated. See Special Topic: Pre-Israelite Inhabitants of Palestine.

▣ **“the five lords of the Philistines”** We learn from Jos. 13:3, these five lords were the kings of cities. Philistines were a part of the Sea Peoples (probably from Crete, cf. Amos 9:7) and, therefore, their manner of government was like the Greek city states. The five major cities of the Philistines are: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath. The Philistines invaded Egypt around 1250 B.C., but were repulsed and settled in the southwest corner of Palestine. Because of their superior knowledge of iron (cf. 1 Sam. 13:19-21) and their aggressive mercenary background, they dominated the local populations. They will be one of the major entities from the Judges period through the reign of David.

▣ **“and all the Canaanites”** “Canaanites” is sometimes a collective term for all the tribes of Canaan, as is the term “Amorites.” Some of these tribes are listed in Jdgs. 3:5. The number of tribes varies; sometimes there are five, seven, or ten nations mentioned.

▣ **“the Sidonians”** The fact that the inhabitants of Sidon are mentioned, rather than the inhabitants of Tyre, shows that this is an ancient account. Soon after this, Tyre, not Sidon, became the major city of Phoenicia. The Phoenicians were sea-faring people from the Aegean Islands and were a part of the wave of Sea Peoples who relocated around the Mediterranean Sea, as were the Philistines.

▣ **“the Hivites”** Sometimes the Hivites (BDB 295, cf. Jos. 11:3) are called Horites (cf. Gen. 36:2,20,29). They seem to be from the kingdom of Mitanni. This group is also known as the Hurrians in the Bible (capital being Nuzi).

**3:4 “They were for the testing of Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the LORD”** The reason the nations were left is explained in Jdgs. 2:19-23.

**3:5 “Canaanites”** This term (BDB 489 I) originally meant “lowlanders,” or at least this is the geographical area in which they settled, usually along the Mediterranean coast.

▣ **“Hivites”** In the Bible there seem to be three distinct groups of Hittites (BDB 366). One in the Tigris-Euphrates River Valley, one found in Palestine, and the large Hittite Empire in central Turkey. It is possible that the group found in Palestine was a member of the larger Hittite Empire located in central Turkey.

▣ **“the Amorites”** This word means “highlander” (BDB 57) but again, may simply refer to the geographical area where they originally lived in the foothills of Judea.

▣ **“Perizzites”** This is a word (BDB 827) that means “tent-dwellers,” which indicates that they did not live in walled cities, possibly were nomadic.

▣ **“Jebusites”** This seems to refer to the native inhabitants of Jebus, which later became Jerusalem under the reign of David and was known as the city of Salem (cf. Genesis 14). See Special Topic: Moriah, Salem, Jebus, Jerusalem, Zion.

**3:6 “and they took their daughters for themselves as wives”** Basically this is the religious apostasy spoken of earlier in the writings of Moses (cf. Exod. 34:15-16; Deut. 7:3-4; Jos. 23:12). The main problem of intermarriage had nothing to do with race. Canaanites were basically the same racial stock as the Israelites, so this was religious apostasy.

**3:7 “The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Ashtoreth”** This was the major problem of the Canaanites—the attractiveness of their religion to the fallen nature of man. It basically was a fertility cult with *Ba’al* being the male fertility god and *Ashtoreth* being the fertility goddess. *Ba’al* was worshiped by an uplifted stone, while *Ashtoreth* was symbolized by either a live tree or a carved wooden stake. Imitation magic was used in the worship of these fertility gods by the sex act. See Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the Ancient Near East.

▣ **“in the sight”** Literally, “in the eyes of the LORD” (cf. Jdgs. 3:12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). This is anthropomorphic language describing YHWH as a human. See the Special Topic: The Problems and Limitations of Human Language.

▣ **“and forgot the LORD their God”** The VERB (BDB 1013, KB 1489, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*) does not imply they forgot all information about Him, but that they ignored Him and His covenant. The phrase “the LORD their God” is covenant terminology. Israel’s idolatry was all the more serious because they uniquely had YHWH’s actions, leaders, and revelation (i.e., Rom. 9:4)!

▣ **“the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of. . .”** Usually it says that God “redeemed” His people, meaning He bought them back (see Special Topic: Ransom/Redeem). The opposite of redeemed is that He sold them into the control of foreign nations (cf. Jdgs. 2:14; 4:2,9; 10:7; 1 Sam. 12:9).

▣ **“Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia”** The word “Cushan” (BDB 469) could refer to (1) Cush, who is the father of Nimrod and the founder of the old Babylonian Empire (cf. Gen. 10:8) or (2) it could relate to the nation of Edom through Ham and a similar term used for Edom.

The term “rishathaim” (BDB 958) seems to have been a Jewish corruption of an earlier name. The Jews enjoyed changing the vowels of people’s names to make them mean something foolish or evil. This term, as it stands, means “double-wickedness.” What mother would name her son “double-wickedness”?

The term Mesopotamia, in the early parts of the Bible, refers to Aram (BDB 74), Syria, not the later empires of the Fertile Crescent. After the fourth century B.C., the term “Mesopotamia,” in Greek, meaning

“between the rivers,” does not refer to the Tigris and Euphrates River Valley, but at this point, only to their headwaters, Syria, Aram.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:9-11**

**<sup>9</sup>When the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother. <sup>10</sup>The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand, so that he prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. <sup>11</sup>Then the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.**

**3:9 “the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them”** Although this book is called “Judges,” we need to realize the term “judge” means a “God-sent and God-empowered deliverer.” This terrible cycle of sin, prayer, YHWH’s mercy (cf. Jdgs. 2:18), and peace is repeated again and again.

▣ **“Othniel”** This was a descendant of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother (or nephew, cf. Jdgs. 1:13). He would represent the tribe of Judah, as Ehud would the tribe of Benjamin. Both of these tribes are depicted as obedient to YHWH and, thereby, successful in possessing their land allotments in Judges 2.

**3:10 “The Spirit of the LORD came upon him”** This is a recurrent phrase (cf. Jdgs. 6:34; 11:29; 14:6,19; 15:14; 1 Sam. 16:13). We must be careful not to make a strong distinction between the Spirit’s work in the OT and the Spirit’s work in the NT. It is obvious that something significant and revolutionary happened at Pentecost, but God’s Spirit has always been active in the world, just as He was active in the world before Pentecost (cf. Num. 24:2; 1 Sam. 10:6,30). See Special Topic: Spirit in the Bible.

**3:11 “Then the land had rest forty years”** If we make a list of all of the years of the reigns of the foreign oppressors and the years of deliverance by the judges, we come to a grand total of approximately 400 years. When we compare this to 1 Kgs. 6:1, this is far too much time. Therefore, most scholars believe that the judges overlapped each other. They are not in chronological, sequential order.

The term “forty” seems to refer to one generation. A generation grew up who did not know the Lord, as stated in Jdgs. 3:1-2. See Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:12-14**

**<sup>12</sup>Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD. <sup>13</sup>And he gathered to himself the sons of Ammon and Amalek; and he went and defeated Israel, and they possessed the city of the palm trees. <sup>14</sup>The sons of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.**

**3:12 “did evil in the sight of the LORD”** This refers to covenant disobedience, especially idolatry.

▣ **“So the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel”** God used a pagan nation for His purposes. He used Moab, as He will use Assyria (cf. Isa. 10:5ff), Babylon (cf. Jer. 27:6ff; Ezek. 30:24), and Persia (cf. Isa. 45:11ff).

**3:13 “And he gathered to himself the sons of Ammon and Amalek; and he went and defeated Israel, and they possessed the city of the palm trees”** Ammon is a relative of Israel from one of the daughters of Lot (cf. Gen. 19:38).

Amalek is also a relative of Israel (cf. Gen. 36:12,16). Amalek was a desert tribe from the northern parts of the Sinai peninsula. Amalek was hated by Israel because they attacked the weaker, older, and sick members of the Jewish exodus group. The term “Amalek” (BDB 766) became an idiom for evil and enemy in the Bible.

The term “city of palms” refers to Jericho (cf. Deut. 34:3), but in Jdgs. 1:16, the same term is used for a southern oasis which may be Tamar (BDB 1071 II, , which means “palm tree,” cf 1 Kgs. 9:18; Ezek. 47:19; 48:28).

**3:14 “The sons of Israel”** Here, this collective term refers only to the tribes in southern Canaan.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:15-23**

**<sup>15</sup>But when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for them, Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man. And the sons of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab. <sup>16</sup>Ehud made himself a sword which had two edges, a cubit in length, and he bound it on his right thigh under his cloak. <sup>17</sup>He presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man. <sup>18</sup>It came about when he had finished presenting the tribute, that he sent away the people who had carried the tribute. <sup>19</sup>But he himself turned back from the idols which were at Gilgal, and said, “I have a secret message for you, O king.” And he said, “Keep silence.” And all who attended him left him. <sup>20</sup>Ehud came to him while he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber. And Ehud said, “I have a message from God for you.” And he arose from his seat. <sup>21</sup>Ehud stretched out his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh and thrust it into his belly. <sup>22</sup>The handle also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the sword out of his belly; and the refuse came out. <sup>23</sup>Then Ehud went out into the vestibule and shut the doors of the roof chamber behind him, and locked *them*.**

**3:15 “Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man”** Gera is mentioned in Gen. 46:21. It was well known that the Benjamites were ambidextrous (cf. Jdgs. 20:16; 1 Chr. 12:2).

**3:16 “a sword which had two edges”** This literally means “two mouths.”

▣ **“a cubit in length”** The term “cubit” (BDB 167) is different here from the normal term for cubit (BDB 52, KB 61). The rabbis say it refers to a short cubit, which would be from the knuckles to the elbow, or about 14 inches long. See Special Topic: Cubit.

**3:17 “he presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab”** This shows that Israel was under the domination of Moab.

**3:19 “he himself turned back from the idols which were at Gilgal”** The term NASB translates as “idols” (BDB 820) could mean “quarries” or “graven images” (cf. Deut. 7:5), but being located at Gilgal, it probably refers to the ancient memorial markers set up by Joshua (cf. Jos. 4:19-24). Ehud was not an idolater but a faithful follower of YHWH.

▣ **“Keep silence”** This is an INTERJECTION (BDB 245, cf. Neh. 8:11; Amos 6:10; Zeph. 1:7; Zech. 2:13).

**3:20 “Ehud came to him while he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber”** The roof chamber was a small room built on the roof where the wind would make it the coolest part of the house in the summer. Flavius Josephus, in his book, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 5.4.1,2, has a detailed account of this encounter, but it is uncertain where he received this information. Here, it refers to the place to “relieve himself” (lit. “covering his feet,” cf. 1 Sam. 24:3).

**3:22 “and the refuse came out”** This is very graphic in the Hebrew. It is a rare word (BDB 832) found only here and is usually translated “feces.” The blade may have (1) come out his back or (2) the intestines were ruptured and refuse came out.

**3:23**

NASB, NRSV,

NET, JPSOA,

LXX “the vestibule”

NKJV, REB,

Peshitta “the porch”

NJB “the privies”

The term (BDB 690 or BDB 414) occurs only here and its root and meaning are unknown. NIDOTTE, vol. 1, pp. 680, 962, suggests “a small room beneath the toilet from which refuse was removed.”

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:24-25**

**<sup>24</sup>When he had gone out, his servants came and looked, and behold, the doors of the roof chamber were locked; and they said, “He is only relieving himself in the cool room.” <sup>25</sup>They waited until they became anxious; but behold, he did not open the doors of the roof chamber. Therefore they took the key and opened them, and behold, their master had fallen to the floor dead.**

**3:24 “He is only relieving himself in the cool room”** The servants thought their master was simply using the necessary room. The phrase, “covering the feet,” is a euphemism for the genitals (cf. Exod. 4:25; Deut. 28:54; Ruth 3:4,7,8,14; 1 Sam. 24:3; Isa. 7:20; Ezek. 16:25; NIDOTTE, vol. 4, p. 1199).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:26-30**

**<sup>26</sup>Now Ehud escaped while they were delaying, and he passed by the idols and escaped to Seirah. <sup>27</sup>It came about when he had arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel went down with him from the hill country, and he *was* in front of them. <sup>28</sup>He said to them, “Pursue *them*, for the LORD has given your enemies the Moabites into your hands.” So they went down after him and seized the fords of the Jordan opposite Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross. <sup>29</sup>They struck down at that time about ten thousand Moabites, all robust and valiant men; and no one escaped. <sup>30</sup>So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land was undisturbed for eighty years.**

**3:26 “he passed by the idols”** The same word for “idols” (lit. “sculptured stones”) is used in Jdgs. 3:19. Therefore, Jdgs. 3:19 and 26 refer to the same geographical area. Ehud fled to Seirah (BDB 972 II), which means “the invaded” city, to hide.

**3:27 “he blew the trumpet”** The ram’s horn was used for military and religious purposes to communicate messages to the people, here to denote a called military gathering. See Special Topic: Horns Used By Israel.

**3:28 “the fords of the Jordan”** These were the shallow crossing places, therefore, the Moabites could not retreat or bring in reinforcements (military strategy, cf. Jdgs. 7:24-25; 12:5-6).

**3:29** In a sense, this victory of Ehud and the tribe of Ephraim was a God-given rout, similar to holy war, where no one survived. Remember, YHWH told them to kill or remove all the local inhabitants who might cause Israel to become idolatrous (cf. Deut. 7:1-5; 20:16-18).

▣ **“ten thousand”** This is an idiomatic hyperbole (cf. Jdgs. 1:4; 4:6,10,14; 7:3). See Special Topic: Thousand (*elpeh*) and Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture.

▣ **“all robust and valiant men”** These terms clearly reveal the “spiritual” nature of the victory over powerful Moabite warriors.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:31**

<sup>31</sup>After him came Shamgar the son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad; and he also saved Israel.

**3:31 “Shamgar”** This is a Hurrian name (BDB 1029, cf. Jdgs. 5:6), therefore, he probably was not Hebrew. He is called by scholars a “minor judge,” but this refers only because of the amount of Scripture that describes his exploits.

▣ **“the son of Anath”** This was a Canaanite war goddess (BDB 779), but here it probably refers to Beth-Anath, a city of Galilee (cf. Jdgs. 1:33)

▣ **“oxgoad”** This (KB 594) was a pole, 8 to 10 feet in length, with a metal tip to direct a yoke of oxen.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why did YHWH “test” Israel?
2. Why is Jdgs. 3:6 so troubling?
3. Is there a distinction between the Spirit’s work in the OT and NT?
4. Why do we call Shamgar a “minor judge” and Othniel and Ehud “major judges”?

# JUDGES 4

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Deborah and Barak Deliver From Canaanites	Deborah	Deborah (4:1-5:31)	Deborah and Barak	Israel Oppressed by Canaanites
4:1-3	4:1-3	4:1-3	4:1-3	4:1-3 Deborah
4:4-10	4:4-10	4:4-10	4:4-7 4:8 4:9-10	4:4-10 Heber the Kenite
4:11	4:11-16	4:11	4:11	4:11 Defeat of Sisera
4:12-16		4:12-16	4:12-13 4:14-16	4:12-16 Death of Sisera
4:17-22	4:17-22	4:17-22	4:17-20 4:21-22	4:17-22 Israel Delivered
4:23-24	4:23-24	4:23-24	4:23-24	4:23-24

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### BRIEF INTRODUCTION

- A. Judges 3 primarily deals with problems in southern Canaan.
- B. Judges 4 primarily deals with problems in northern Canaan.
- C. Judges 4 is a prose account of Deborah's judging ministry, while Judges 5 is a poetic account of the same incident. We learn from Egyptian documents that this was a quite common literary technique during this period and is one more evidence of the historicity of the book of Judges.

#### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

##### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:1-3**

**<sup>1</sup>Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died. <sup>2</sup>And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; and the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. <sup>3</sup>The sons of Israel cried to the LORD; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years.**

**4:1 "the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD"** This is a recurrent phrase throughout the period of the Judges. The evil spoken of here is that they worshiped the fertility gods of Canaan. See Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the Ancient Near East.

**4:2 “the LORD sold them into the hand of”** Again, this is the opposite of the term “redeemed” (see note at Jdgs. 2:14 and 3:8).

▣ **“Jabin king of Canaan”** There is another Jabin (BDB 108) mentioned in Joshua 11 who was killed by Joshua and was also the king of Hazor. Many have tried to say that these two accounts are a jumbled account of that one event. However, the term “Jabin” may be a family name or a title for the kings of Hazor, as “pharaoh” is for Egypt, “Hadad” is for Syria, and later “Caesar” is for Rome.

The title “king of Canaan” is unique and unusual.

1. NET Bible changes it to “King Jabin of Canaan”; TEV has “Jabin, a Canaanite King”
2. he may have led a confederacy of Canaanite city-states (note Jos. 11:10)
3. it may have been an honorific title for the leader of the largest, most powerful Canaanite city of its day

Surprisingly, he is not mentioned in the poetic account of Judges 5.

▣ **“who reigned in Hazor”** Hazor is a site about eight and a half miles north of the Sea of Galilee. It is a huge archaeological site. Megiddo, another city in the north, is about 40 acres, but Hazor is 240 acres. This was the chief Canaanite stronghold of the north. It was destroyed by Joshua in Joshua 11. There were not enough Israelites to occupy all the cities and possibly it was reoccupied by Canaanites.

▣ **“an the commander of his army was Sisera”** Sisera (BDB 696) is not a Hebrew or Canaanite name and we do not know his origin (may be Philistine, AB, p. 94), but he was the military commander for the Canaanite city-state of Hazor.

▣ **“who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim”** The location is uncertain but the name means “forest of the nations” or “international forest” (BDB 361 II).

**4:3 “for he had 900 iron chariots”** Iron is something that the Hebrews did not possess early at this period of their history. At the time, only the Philistines had iron weapons (cf. 1 Sam. 13:19-21). This does not mean the entire chariots were iron but just

1. their ornaments (i.e., breast plates for horses and chariots; the chariots allowed the indigenous Canaanites to control the valleys but not the foothills)
2. their wheels

Nine hundred chariots is far too many for one Canaanite city, so this must mean that a coalition of Canaanite city-states joined together to repel the invading Israelites.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:4-10**

**<sup>4</sup>Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. <sup>5</sup>She used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment. <sup>6</sup>Now she sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali, and said to him, “Behold, the LORD the God of Israel, has commanded, ‘Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun. <sup>7</sup>I will draw out to you Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his many *troops* to the river Kishon, and I will give him into your hand.’” <sup>8</sup>Then Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.” <sup>9</sup>She said, “I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the honor shall not be yours on the journey that you are about to take, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman.” Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. <sup>10</sup>Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali together to Kedesh, and ten thousand men went up with him; Deborah also went up with him.**

**4:4 “Now Deborah, a prophetess”** Deborah means “bee” (BDB 184). There are many women in places of leadership in the OT. Miriam in Exod. 15:20; Huldah in 2 Kgs. 24:14, were called prophetesses. Noadiah in Neh. 6:14 was a false prophetess. Anna in Luke 2:36; Phoebe in Rom. 16:1; Philip’s daughters in Acts 21:9; and the widow’s list of 1 Tim. 3:11 also had positions of leadership in the NT. It is true that the norm (i.e., patriarchal culture) is God using a man to lead His people, but the fact that we have these notable exceptions shows that any dogmatic statement about women’s leadership is inappropriate! One must balance Paul’s strong statements in this matter to the culture of his day. The issue is far from easy to solve but must be thought through clearly, biblically, not emotionally, culturally, or denominationally!

See Special Topic: Women in the Bible, Special Topic: Women in Ministry, and Special Topic: Women Keep Silent.

▣ **“the wife of Lappidoth”** His name means “torches” (BDB 542). Many have believed that because Barak, Deborah’s general’s name means “lightening” (BDB 140), that maybe she was married to her general, but this seems to be reading too much into the similarities of these two names. Some commentators have asserted that this man’s name is a FEMININE form but in truth it is not FEMININE but an ABSTRACT CONSTRUCT.

**4:5 “the palm tree”** Trees often had special cultic association, as the oaks of Moreh (cf. Gen. 12:6) in the life of Abraham. See also Jdgs. 6:11,19; 9:6,37; 1 Sam. 10:3; 18:9,10; 1 Kgs. 13:14; 1 Chr. 10:12.

▣ **“the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment”** This shows that she was more than just a local judge for she seems to have judged in the south and delivered the north.

**4:6 “Barak the son of Abinoam from Kadesh-naphtali”** Barak (BDB 140) means “lightening.” This location must be differentiated from Kadesh-barnea in the south. Barak was from the area affected by the control of the Canaanite city of Hazor.

In a sense Deborah is not a typical “judge.” She actually, and uniquely in Judges, functions as a person who settles legal and religious disputes (cf. Jdgs. 4:5). It is Barak who is the typical military leader/judge, common in Judges. He is listed with other judges in Hebrew 11:32, but Deborah is not mentioned. Deborah is a prophetess, not a judge in the military sense.

▣ **“Mount Tabor”** Mount Tabor is an isolated hill northeast of the plains of Megiddo or the Valley of Esdraelon (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 4, p. 1246). Because it was a hill, the chariots of Sisera were not effective against it.

▣ **“ten thousand”** The OT uses (1) hyperbolic numbers or (2) idioms to express groups (cf. Jdgs. 4:10,14). Modern westerners misunderstand this imagery (see D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic*. See Special Topic: Thousand (*eleph*) and Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture.

▣ **“the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun”** These are two of the tribes in the tribal allocation affected by the Canaanite city of Hazor. In Judges 5 we learn that many more of the tribes were involved, probably the two primary groups came from these two northern tribes.

**4:7**

**NASB, NKJV,**

**TEV**

**“river”**

**NRSV, JPSOA,**  
**REB, LXX** “wadi”  
**NJB** “torrent”

This term (BDB 636) refers to a ravine where water rushes through during the months of snow melt and rain storms (Jdgs. 5:21; Ps. 83:10), but is dry the rest of the year. These dry wadis were often used as roads.

**4:9 “She said, I will surely go with you”** This is an intensified grammar feature (an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and an IMPERFECT VERB from the same root, BDB 229, KB 246).

Barak wanted Deborah close by in case he needed to consult YHWH.

▣ **“the honor shall not be yours”** This has two possible references.

1. Deborah accompanying Barak
2. Jael, the wife of Heber, the Kenite, killing the army commander Sisera, Jdgs. 4:17-22

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:11**

**<sup>11</sup>Now Heber the Kenite had separated himself from the Kenites, from the sons of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaananim, which is near Kedesh.**

**4:11 “Now Heber the Kenite”** This short verse is inserted to explain the presence of Jael in Jdgs. 4:17 and her significant role in the death of Sisera. The Kenites are a Midianite tribe (cf. Jdgs. 1:13,16; Num. 10:29). Moses’ father-in-law was a member of this people group, as was Caleb.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:12-16**

**<sup>12</sup>Then they told Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor. <sup>13</sup>Sisera called together all his chariots, nine hundred iron chariots, and all the people who *were* with him, from Harosheth-hagoyim to the river Kishon. <sup>14</sup>Deborah said to Barak, “Arise! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hands; behold, the LORD has gone out before you.” So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. <sup>15</sup>The LORD routed Sisera and all *his* chariots and all *his* army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from *his* chariot and fled away on foot. <sup>16</sup>But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not even one was left.**

**4:14 “the LORD has gone out before you”** This is “holy war” terminology (cf. Deut. 1:30; 3:22; 2 Sam. 5:24). Victory came only because of YHWH’s presence not the power, skill, or numbers of the Israeli army. Note Jdgs. 4:15, “the LORD routed Sisera” and Jdgs. 4:23, “So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan.”

YHWH uses human instrumentality.

1. Moses – Exod. 3:8-10
2. here
  - a. Deborah
  - b. Barak (cf. Heb. 11:32)
  - c. Jael

**4:15 “The LORD routed Sisera. . . alighted from his chariot”** We learn from Jdgs. 5:4,5, and 21 that apparently the Lord had caused a huge thunderstorm to soften the ground so that the iron chariots bogged down in the Valley of Esdeaelon. They had to abandon their chariots, which were their only means of superiority.

This VERB (BDB 243, KB 251, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*) means “to confuse” or “vex,” and is used of YHWH confusing the Egyptian honor guard at the Red Sea with the *Shekinah* cloud of glory separating the Israelites (cf. Exod. 14:24; also note Jos. 10:10).

**4:16 “not even one was left”** This is also “holy war” terminology (cf. Exod. 14:28; Ps. 83:9). This is what YHWH had commanded of Israel.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:17-22**

**<sup>17</sup>Now Sisera fled away on foot 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. <sup>18</sup>Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, “Turn aside, my master, turn aside to me! Do not be afraid.” And he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. <sup>19</sup>He said to her, “Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.” So she opened a bottle of milk and gave him a drink; then she covered him. <sup>20</sup>He said to her, “Stand in the doorway of the tent, and it shall be if anyone comes and inquires of you, and says, ‘Is there anyone here?’ that you shall say, ‘No.’” <sup>21</sup>But Jael, Heber’s wife, took a tent peg and seized a hammer in her hand, and went secretly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went through into the ground; for he was sound asleep and exhausted. So he died. <sup>22</sup>And behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him and said to him, “Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.” And he entered with her, and behold Sisera was lying dead with the tent peg in his temple.**

**4:17 “Jael”** Her name (BDB418) means “mountain-goat” (cf. Job 39:1; Ps. 104:18).

▣ **“for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite”** Some scholars have suggested that “the Kenites” (related to Cain) were metal workers (cf. Gen. 4:22) and that Heber helped build the iron chariots and other weaponry for Hazor. This is just interesting speculation.

**4:18 “And he turned aside to her into the tent”** Apparently from Bedouin examples, the women had separate tents and Jael must have had a tent to herself (note Gen. 31:33). She tricked him into thinking he was safe under her cloak, but then she drove a tent peg through his temple (cf. Jdgs. 4:21). Remember, the women were the ones who set up the tents and she would have had these tools and the ability to use them.

▣ **“with a rug”** This word (BDB 970) occurs only here. It is similar to “mantle” (BDB 971), which refers to an outer garment (cf. Gen. 35:2; Ruth 3:3). See NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 1255.

**4:21 “temple”** Most English translations have “temple,” but the word (BDB 956) occurs only in

1. Jdgs. 4:21; 5:26
2. Song of Songs 4:3; 6:7

Since it seems difficult to drive a stake through one’s skull, it may refer to the upper neck behind the ear.

▣ **“he was sound asleep”** This PARTICIPLE (BDB 922, KB 1191, *Niphal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) may denote something even stronger than “deep sleep,” possibly “stunned.” It is even possible that Jael put something in the milk that drugged him (cf. Jdgs. 5:25; NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 1057).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:23-24**

**<sup>23</sup>So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the sons of Israel. <sup>24</sup>The hand of the sons of Israel pressed heavier and heavier upon Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin the king of Canaan.**

**4:24** These summary verses show that the Promised Land was taken in stages, not in one swift movement.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why is Jabin called “king of Canaan”?
2. What does the number 900 iron chariots imply?
3. Does God use women leaders?
4. How is Judges 4 related to Judges 5?
5. Was Heber an ally of Jabin?
6. Is Jael praised or condemned for her actions?

# JUDGES 5

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Song of Deborah and Barak	The Song of Deborah	Deborah (4:1-5:31)	The Song of Deborah and Barak	The Song of Deborah and Barak
5:1-5 (2-5)	5:1	5:1-3 (2-3)	5:1	5:1
	5:2 (2)		5:2-5 (2-5)	5:2 (2)
	5:3 (3)			5:2 (3)
	5:4-5 (4-5)	5:4-5 (4-5)		5:4-5 (4-5)
5:6-11 (6-11)	5:6-9 (6-9)	5:6-9 (6-9)	5:6-11c (6-11c)	5:6 (5:6)
				5:7 (7)
				5:8 (8)
				5:9 (9)
	5:10-11 (10-11)	5:10-11c (10-11c)		5:10-11 (10-11)
		5:11d (11d)	5:11d-18 (11d-18)	
5:12-18 (12-18)	5:12 (12)	5:12-18 (12-18)		5:12 (12)
	5:13-18 (13-18)			5:13 (13)
				5:14a-b (14a-b)
				5:14c-15b (14c-15b)
				5:15c-16 (15c-16)
				5:17 (17)
				5:18 (18)
5:19-23 (19-23)	5:19-23 (19-23)	5:19-21 (19-21)	5:19-22 (19-22)	5:19 (19)
				5:20 (20)
				5:21 (21)
		5:22 (22)		5:22 (22)

		5:23 (23)	5:23 (23)	5:23 (23)
5:24-27 (24-27)	5:24-27 (24-27)	5:24-27 (24-27)	5:24-27 (24-27)	5:24 (24)
				5:25-26b (25-26b)
				5:26c-27 (26c-27)
5:28-31 (28-31)	5:28-30 (28-30)	5:28-30 (28-30)	5:28-31c (28-31c)	5:28 (28)
				5:29-30 (29-30)
	5:31a-c (31a-c)	5:31a-c (31a-c)		5:31a-c (31a-c)
	5:31d		5:31d	5:31d

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

#### CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This poem has several female actors.
  1. Deborah (Jdgs. 5:1,3,7,12)
  2. Jael (Jdgs. 5:24-27)
  3. the wives and mothers of the defeated and destroyed Canaanite army (Jdgs. 5:28-30)
  
- B. The writing and singing of a song of victory after a successful battle is common in the ANE (cf Exodus 15; Numbers 21; Deuteronomy 32; 1 Samuel 18; see G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, "Saga," pp. 204-205, #1).  
 The NASB Study Bible, p. 318, suggests that the
  1. Book of the Wars of the Lord, cf. Num. 21:4
  2. Book of Jashar, cf. Jos. 10:13
 both were songs/psalms of the genre.  
 The oral traditions of the ANE were passed on through songs and stories (see D.).
  
- C. Notice YHWH is depicted as bringing rain from the southern mountains (Seir, Sinai, Jdgs. 5:4,5). This would be unusual, because the rain mostly comes from the north. The torrent of Jdgs. 5:4-5 was a natural event but with supernatural intensity, timing, and locality, just as
  1. the plagues of Egypt
  2. the miracles of the wilderness wanderings (i.e., quail)
  3. the crossing of Jordan in Joshua 3
  
- D. This ancient poem was possibly passed on by oral tradition before being written down. A new book by John Walton and Brent Sandy, *The World of Scripture*, documents how oral societies passed on their traditions. This is a very helpful book.
  
- E. The Hebrew words are rare and the text ambiguous. Several options/theories are possible.

- F. YHWH is often depicted as “the Divine Warrior” (i.e., Isa. 59:16-17). This is “holy war” terminology. YHWH fights on His people’s behalf (cf. Jos. 10:14,42; Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 260, lists several characteristic ways)
1. elements of nature used in the battle – Jos. 10:11,12-14; 24:7; Jdgs. 5:20; 1 Sam. 7:10; Ps. 18:14
  2. enemy thrown into confusion – Exod. 23:27; Deut. 7:23; Jdgs. 4:15; 7:22; Jos. 10:10; 1 Sam. 7:10; 14:20; Ps. 144:6
  3. sending a “divine terror” – 1 Sam. 14:15
- The victory was not the courage, strength, number, or weaponry of Israel, but the presence of their God. It was His victory!

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:1-5

<sup>1</sup>Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying,

<sup>2</sup>“That the leaders led in Israel,

That the people volunteered,

Bless the LORD!

<sup>3</sup>Hear, O kings; give ear, O rulers!

I—to the LORD I will sing,

I will sing praise to the LORD the God of Israel.

<sup>4</sup>LORD when You went out from Seir,

When You marched from the field of Edom,

The earth quaked, the heavens also dripped,

Even the clouds dripped water.

<sup>5</sup>The mountains quaked at the presence of the LORD

This Sinai, at the presence of the LORD the God of Israel.”

**5:1 “Deborah and Barak”** This same duo is mentioned in Jdgs. 5:12, but Jdgs. 5:7 emphasizes “Deborah.” The NT book of Hebrews emphasizes the role of Barak (cf. Heb. 11:32). They were both to be honored, as was Jael (Jdgs. 5:24-27).

Deborah (NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 512-513) functioned as the revealer of YHWH’s will (i.e., prophetess; see Special Topic: Women in the Bible), but Barak acted as the military leader (i.e., judge). However, the prophecy of Jdgs. 4:8 highlights the brave action of one Kenite woman, Jael.

▣ **“sang on that day”** Judges 5 is ancient poetry. It was from the memoirs of Deborah but written by another. Because of Jdgs. 4:12, which seems to be a refrain from a choir or music group, it was possibly written by the Levites to be used in the Tabernacle/Temple.

**5:2 “the leaders led in Israel”** The term “leaders” (BDB 828) means the “locks hung loose in” The soldiers let their hair grow long as a symbol of a vow or commitment to God (i.e., Nazirite, cf. Numbers 6). This same allusion can be seen in Deut. 32:42; 2 Sam. 14:26; Ezek. 24:2; and Acts 18:18.

Here, the *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT and the NOUN of the same root (BDB 828, KB 970) are combined for emphasis.

▣ **“the people volunteered”** This was a time of a loose tribal confederation. There was no central government to dictate military conscription. This poem highlights the volunteerism of some tribes and condemns others for not being willing to come (cf. Jdgs. 5:16-17).

▣ **“Bless the LORD”** This is a repeated refrain in this poem, which probably means it had been adapted to worship liturgy (cf. Jdgs. 5:9; BDB 138, KB 159, *Piel* IMPERATIVE) see Special Topic: Blessing (OT).

“LORD” is the special covenant name for Israel’s Deity, see Special Topic: Names for Deity, D.

**5:3 “Hear. . .give ear”** These are synonymous in Hebrew.

1. BDB 1033, KB 1570, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. BDB 24, KB 27, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE

These IMPERATIVES are addressed to either

1. the city-state kings of Canaan and their leaders
2. the leaders of the tribes of Israel (Jdgs. 5:19; this psalm became liturgy in an annual worship service)

▣ **“I . . .I”** This poem begins with the acknowledgment that both Deborah and Barak (Jdgs. 5:12) sang this song, but in Jdgs. 5:3,7 the focus is on Deborah.

**5:4-5** There are several titles for Israel’s Deity.

1. YHWH (the LORD)
2. YHWH of Sinai (NET Bible, NRSV, TEV, NJB, JPSOA, REB)
3. God of Israel

Number 2 is literally “the One of Sinai.” This is an archaic title for YHWH, the owner of Sinai (cf. Ps. 68:8).

▣ There is some disagreement among scholars of the VERB here.

1. “quaked” – BDB 272, KB 272, *Niphal* PERFECT, LXX
2. “trickled” – BDB 633, KB 683, *Qal* PERFECT; used only three times in the OT: here; Isa. 64:1,3; see Targums and Peshitta translations

This imagery is

1. a flashback to Sinai (cf. Exodus 19); YHWH’s promised blessing of Ps. 68:7-10
2. a prelude to the flood that caused victory over Sisera

All creation trembles at the approach (i.e., theophany) of its Creator.

1. a personified earth
2. YHWH’s human creatures

Remember, His coming can be for blessing or judgment.

**5:4 “out from Seir. . .from the field of Edom”** Judges 5:4-5 may be a flashback to Sinai (Exodus 19). Many people believe that Mt. Sinai is not located in the southern peninsula but closer to Edom because of this reference compared with Deut. 33:2 and Hab. 3:3. See Special Topic: Location of Mt. Sinai.

▣ **“marched”** This VERB (BDB 857, KB 1040, *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT) denotes a military attack (cf. Ps. 68:7; Isa. 63:1; Hab. 3:12). This is YHWH as the “Divine Warrior” for His people (see NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 545-549; cf. Isa. 59:17).

**5:4,5 “. . .the heavens also dripped**

**Even the clouds dripped water.**

**The mountains quaked at the presence of the LORD**” These all seem to be metaphors of rain (“dripped,” BDB 642, KB 694, *Qal* PERFECT, twice, cf. Ps. 68:8-10), which the Lord used to overcome Sisera. The word “quake” (Jdgs. 5:5) literally means “flowed down” (BDB 633, KB 683, *Qal* PERFECT). This is a different word from “quaked” (BDB 950, KB 1271) of Jdgs. 5:4c (and Exod. 19:18).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:6-11**

**6**“In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath,  
In the days of Jael, the highways were deserted,  
And travelers went by roundabout ways.

**7**The peasantry ceased, they ceased in Israel,  
Until I, Deborah, arose,  
Until I arose, a mother in Israel.

**8**New gods were chosen;  
Then war *was* in the gates.  
Not a shield or a spear was seen  
Among forty thousand in Israel.

**9**My heart *goes out* to the commanders of Israel,  
The volunteers among the people;  
Bless the LORD

**10**You who ride on white donkeys,  
You who sit on *rich* carpets,  
And you who travel on the road—sing!

**11**At the sound of those who divide *flocks* among the watering places,  
There they shall recount the righteous deeds of the LORD  
The righteous deeds for His *peasantry* in Israel.  
Then the people of the LORD went down to the gates.”

**5:6 “Shamgar”** This is the poetic account of the brief historical footnote found in Jdgs. 3:31.

▣ **“Shamgar. . . Jael”** Both deliverers are from unexpected persons, both non-Israelites, one a Bedouin’s wife.

▣ **“Jael”** This goes back to Jdgs. 4:11,17-22. YHWH’s power is seen through the victory accomplished by a Bedouin wife.

▣ **“and travelers went by round-about ways”** There are several possible meanings to these two lines of poetry.

1. caravan routes were made difficult by
  - a. taxation from Hazor
  - b. marauding bandits
2. the poor or rural people (BDB 826) were impacted by the trade or rain problem
3. the wadis used as roads in the dry period were suddenly and unexpectedly filled with torrents of runoff water

**5:7 “The peasantry ceased”** This is a term (BDB 826, also Jdgs. 5:11) that speaks of the poor rural farmers and shows the exploitation of the Canaanites.

The JPSOA translates the first two lines as “Deliverance ceased, ceased in Israel.” Notice the repeat of the VERB (BDB 292, KB 292, both *Qal* PERFECT). The Hebrew word, “the peasantry” (BDB 826) is interpreted by the Targums as referring to cities without walls. However, the term could refer to “leaders” (BDB 826, i.e., REB, “champions,” NET Bible, cf. Hab. 3:14).

▣ **“I, Deborah”** The RSV and Jerusalem Bible see “I” as an archaic form of “you.” However, it can also be translated “I” (NASB, NIV, Peshitta). Therefore, we are not sure about the authorship of this particular poem.

### 5:8

NASB	“New gods were chosen”
NKJV, NJB,	
REB	“They chose new gods”
NRSV, JPSOA	“when new gods were chosen”
TEV	“the Israelites chose new gods”

The questions are:

1. Who chose?
2. What does “gods” mean?

The options are as follows, for #1

- a. YHWH chose new leaders (cf. Jdgs. 5:9; NET Bible)
- b. Israelites (cf. Deut. 32:17; TEV)
- c. Canaanite fertility pantheon

For the second question, one must decide which meaning of *Elohim* fits the context best. See Special Topic: Names for Deity, C.

It is crucial that one looks at Jdgs. 5:6-11 and determines the meaning of the strophe.

1. Why were the highways deserted?
2. Why had the peasantry ceased?
3. Who is to rejoice with the coming war?

▣ **“Then war was in the gates”** This phrase can have several meanings.

1. There was conflict among the Israelite tribal leaders on what to do about the Canaanite idolatry (cf. Jdgs. 1:27,28,30,31,32,33,35; 2:2-3,11; i.e., “the gate,” the place of government).
2. There was conflict over whether to join Deborah and Barak in confronting Jabin and Sisera (cf. Jdgs. 5:16,17,23).
3. The NET Bible translates it as “then fighters appeared in the city gates” (see “new gods” as warriors/leaders, Jdgs. 5:8a).

▣ **“Not a shield or a spear was seen**

**Among the forty thousand in Israel”** This supports option #2 above. Many tribes (cf. Jdgs. 5:16-17,23) did not join the insurgency of Deborah and Barak.

It is possible this refers to the ill equipped farmers/soldiers of Israel (cf. 1 Sam. 13:19-22).

▣ **“forty thousand”** Both of these words can be literal or figurative, depending on the context. Here, probably a military unit.

See Special Topic: Thousand (*eleph*) and Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture.

**5:9 “My heart”** See Special Topic: Heart

▣ **“the volunteers”** This VERB (BDB 621, KB 671) was used in Jdgs. 5:2 (*Hithpael* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT). Here, it is a *Hithpael* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE. It refers to the tribes and geographical areas that joined the insurgency of Deborah and Barak. They are blessed for their obedience to a divine mandate and courage to act.

▣ Judges 5:10-11 documents some of the people who should “Bless the LORD.”

1. the wealthy (possibly leaders of Jdgs. 5:3)
2. the shepherds/musicians

They should tell of His acts of deliverance (i.e., in the past), cf. Jdgs. 5:11. He cares for His people. He acts on their behalf. He is the faithful covenant God of Israel (cf. Jdgs. 5:3a). In this context several specific groups are mentioned.

1. the volunteer leadership, Jdgs. 5:2,9
2. travelers/merchants, Jdgs. 5:10
3. wealthy, Jdgs. 5:10
4. shepherds/musicians, Jdgs. 5:11
5. villagers (i.e., rural farmers), Jdgs. 5:11
6. the survivors of the oppressed, Jdgs. 5:13
7. The AB, p. 110, suggests that Jdgs. 5:10b refers to judges following the use of a NOUN (BDB 192) instead of “carpet” (BDB 551). If so, then another group is meant to “Bless YHWH,” judges.

**5:10 “white donkeys”** These are metaphorical for the rich and wealthy (cf. Jdgs. 10:4; 12:14). Donkeys were the transportation of choice in the ANE. White (yellowish) donkeys were rare and extremely expensive. They were sought after as a status symbol.

▣

NASB, NRSV	“rich carpets”
NKJV	“sit in judge’s attire”
TEV	“saddles”
NJB, REB	“saddle blankets”
JPSOA	“saddle bags”

This NOUN (BDB 551, KB 546) can refer to

1. saddle cloth
2. special outer garment
  - a. Ehud’s cloak, Jdgs. 3:16
  - b. Saul’s war attire, 1 Sam. 17:38
  - c. Joab’s military attire, 2 Sam. 20:8
  - d. Jonathan’s royal robe, 1 Sam. 18:4
  - e. priest’s garment, Lev. 6:3
  - f. judge’s attire (NKJV)

Only context can determine. Here, a cloth over the back of a donkey seems best. Only the rich would have beautiful saddle cloths or saddles (TEV).

▣

NASB, NJB	“sing”
NKJV	“speak”
NRSV, TEV	“tell of it”
JPSOA, NASB margin	“declare it”

**REB, Peshitta  
NET**

**“ponder this”  
“pay attention”**

The MT has a *Qal* IMPERATIVE (BDB 967, KB 1319), which means

1. muse
2. talk
3. study
4. consider

I think the REB catches the meaning of the context. NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 1234, says “fluctuating between the act of speaking and thinking.”

**5:11**

**NASB** “At the sound of those who divide *flocks* among the watering places”  
**NKJV** “Far from the noise of the archers, among the watering places”  
**NRSV** “To the sound of musicians at the watering places”  
**TEV** “Listen! The noisy crowds around the wells”  
**NJB** “To the sounds of the shepherds at the watering places”  
**JPSOA** “Louder than the sound of archers, there among the watering places”  
**JPSOA footnote** “Louder than the thunder peals”  
**REV, LXX** “Louder than the sound of merry makers at the places where they draw water”

The root פצע (BDB 346) can mean

1. divide (NASB, NJB; i.e., shepherds)
2. archers (NKJV, JPSOA; the sound of flying arrows should not be louder than the praise)
3. musicians (NRSV, REB; who assembled at the watering holes)

The UBS Text Project, p. 79, suggests “dividers” (“A” rating). In context it refers to someone praising YHWH for His powerful deeds of deliverance.

▣ **“they shall recount the righteous deeds of the LORD”** This could refer to

1. YHWH’s care for the poor, powerless, and aliens (cf. Deuteronomy)
2. YHWH’s victory over the Canaanite forces

The mention of “gates” in line d may link to Jdgs. 5:8a. In 5:8b the tribes did not help but here they volunteer to fight.

▣ **“the people of the LORD”** In the OT this refers uniquely to the descendants of Abraham (see Special Topic: Covenant Promises to the Patriarchs), but in the NT it is widened to all people of faith in Jesus (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; 4:1-25; 9:6; Gal. 6:16; Eph. 2:11-3:13; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11). It is only in Dispensationalism’s presuppositions that the church is not “the new Israel.” My theological understanding on this subject has been labeled “replacement theology” but a better name would be “default theology.” Israel failed in her world mission. See Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan.

▣ **“gates”** The gate was the place for judicial decisions and social gatherings in ancient Israel (cf. Jdgs. 5:8b).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:12-18**

<sup>12</sup>“Awake, awake, Deborah;

Awake, awake, sing a song!

Arise, Barak, and take away your captives, O son of Abinoam.

<sup>13</sup>Then survivors came down to the nobles;

The people of the LORD came down to me as warriors.

<sup>14</sup>From Ephraim those whose root is in Amalek came down,  
Following you, Benjamin, with your peoples;  
From Machir commanders *came down*,  
And from Zebulun those who wield the staff of office.

<sup>15</sup>And the princes of Issachar *were* with Deborah;  
As *was* Issachar, so *was* Barak;  
Into the valley they rushed at his heels;  
Among the divisions of Reuben  
*There were* great resolves of heart.

<sup>16</sup>Why did you sit among the sheepfolds,  
To hear the piping for the flocks?  
Among the divisions of Reuben  
*There were* great searchings of heart.

<sup>17</sup>Gilead remained across the Jordan;  
And why did Dan stay in ships?  
Asher sat at the seashore,  
And remained by its landings.

<sup>18</sup>Zebulun *was* a people who despised their lives *even* to death,  
And Naphtali also, on the high places of the field.”

**5:12** This verse starts with five IMPERATIVES.

1. “Awake” – BDB 734, KB 802, *Qal* three times; i.e., take military action, cf. Jdgs. 4:14; Jos. 8:3; 24:9; 2 Sam. 2:14
2. “Sing” (lit. speak) – BDB 180, KB 210, *Piel*; this may refer to a prophetic utterance by Deborah before the battle
3. “Take away your captives” – BDB 985, KB 1382, *Qal*; i.e., symbol of victory

The question is

1. Does this refer to future actions? (Jdgs. 5:13)
2. Does this refer to past actions?



NASB, NRSV “take away your captives”

NKJV, TEV,

Peshitta “lead your captives away”

NJB “capture your captors”

JPSOA “take your captives”

REB “take prisoners in plenty”

The MT has a COGNATE ACCUSATIVE, “take back your captives.” It could refer to

1. the release of Israelite slaves, captives
2. the Israeli soldiers taking prisoners from the defeated Canaanite confederation cities
3. an idiom for victory

**5:13** This is a difficult line of poetry. I think the NJB catches the essence of the line in context.

“Then Israel marched down to the gates;

Like champions, Yahweh’s people marched down to fight for Him”

This reinforces the IMPERATIVES of Jdgs. 5:12 and expands the focus from Deborah and Barak to all those willing to answer YHWH’s call (through Deborah) to resist the Canaanite oppression in the north. Not all the tribes and northern cities responded (Jdgs. 5:16-17,23).

I also think that the Jewish Study Bible, p. 52c has a viable translation.

“Then they went down to Sarid (a city in the Jezreel Valley)

Against the mighty ones (i.e., the Canaanite Kings; see Jdgs. 5:25),

The LORD’S people with their warriors.”

For a discussion of why a place name (i.e., Sarid), see NIDOTTE, vol. 3, pp. 1271-1272. Sarid is a city on the southern border of Zebulun (cf. Jos. 19:10,12).

The MT has “remnant” or “survivor” (BDB 975, i.e., those who survived the Canaanite persecution). The name of the city (Sarid) and the term “remnant/survivor” have the same consonants (see NIDOTTE, vol. 3, pp. 1271-1272).

### 5:14

**NASB, NKJV,**

**JPSOA, LXX<sup>B</sup> “in Amalek”**

**NRSV, TEV,**

**NJB, REB,  
LXX<sup>A</sup> “in the valley”**

Amalek (BDB 766) does not seem to fit the previous inhabitants of Ephraim’s allotment (cf. Jdgs. 12:15). The term “valley” (BDB 770, cf. Jdgs. 5:15c) is similar and makes more sense in this context. The Canaanites wanted the battle to be in the valley because of their 900 iron chariots.

▣ **“Machir”** This line of poetry documents the cooperation of the fighting men of east and/or west Manasseh. Machir was Manasseh’s oldest son (cf. Jos. 17:1). In Num. 26:29 his family settled in Gilead (i.e., east of the Jordan). But because of Jdgs. 5:17, this refers only to the ones living in Canaan itself (west Manasseh).

### ▣

**NASB “staff of office”**

**NKJV “the recruiter’s staff”**

**NRSV, JPSOA “the marshal’s staff”**

**NJB “the commander’s staff”**

**REB “the musterer’s staff”**

**LXX<sup>B</sup> “a rod of the scribe’s account”**

**Peshitta “the pen of a scribe”**

The MT has “the marshal’s staff” (BDB 986 CONSTRUCT BDB 708). The rod, staff, scepter (BDB 980) represented

1. the person in charge of mustering troops
2. the person in charge of recording the names of the troops

Both options fit 2 Kgs. 25:19; 2 Chr. 16:11; Jer. 52:25.

**5:15 “Issachar. . .Issachar”** I like the comment in the Jewish Study Bible, p. 521:

“It is strange that Issachar is repeated twice in this verse, while Naphtali is absent. It, therefore, seems likely that it originally read ‘Naphtali.’ This conjecture is strengthened by the fact that Barak was from Kedesh-Naphtali.”

▣ **“They rushed at his heels”** This refers to close military formation (cf. Jdgs. 4:10).

▣

NASB, NKJV	“great resolve of heart”
NRSV, NJB, REB	“great searching of heart”
TEV	“they could not decide to come”
JPSOA	“great decisions of heart”

Some Hebrew MSS have

1. resolve
2. searching

The men of Reuben were divided about the war. They could not make up their minds (contrasts to Jdgs. 5:18).

Apparently this is a sign of the capture and dissolution of Reuben by Moab.

**5:15d-16** This seems to be a derogatory reference to Reuben holding a committee meeting (Jdgs. 5:16a,b) but coming to no conclusion nor taking any action.

The Jewish Study Bible takes Jdgs. 5:16-17, not as a comment about Reuben, Manasseh, Dan, and Asher choosing not to help, but an affirmation that they did (cf. P. 521, i.e., taking the Hebrew word “lamah,” BDB 554, lit. “why,” Jdgs. 5:16,17, as a negation, not a question).

**5:16 “sheepfolds”** Most English translations follow this definition of the MT’s word (BDB 1046, KB 1637), but there are other options of understanding this rare term.

1. saddlebags (NASB margin; NIV)
2. fire place (BDB 1046, cf. Ezek. 40:43)

**5:17 “Gilead”** This NOUN (BDB 166) can refer to

1. a person – Jdgs. 11:1-2
2. a tribe – Num. 26:29-30
3. a geographical area – Jos. 22:9; Jdgs. 10:17 (allocation of Gad)
4. here it seems to refer to eastern Manasseh, while “Machir” of Jdgs. 5:14 refers to western Manasseh

▣ **“why did Dan stay in ships”** This shows the historicity of this ancient account which refers to the tribe of Dan still being in the south near the coast (cf. Jos. 19:40-46). Part of Dan moves to the far north in Judges 19-21.

▣ The JPSOA suggests a place name, “Onioth,” which it calls “a presumed designation of Dan’s region” (p. 521) instead of the usual, “with the ships” (BDB 58).

▣ **“Asher sat at the seashore”** It is possible that this implies limited sea trade even among the Hebrews. The tribal allocation of Asher was on the seacoast in north central Canaan, parallel to the Sea of Galilee.

**5:18** This verse lauds these two northern tribes (i.e., Zebulun, Naphtali, cf. Jdgs. 4:6) for their bravery in battle (the Hebrew idiom is found only here, “despised their lives”).

▣ As a matter of fact, they are the only tribes mentioned in the account of Judges 4 (cf. 4:6).

▣ **“on the high places of the field”** The tribal allocation of Naphtali was north and west of the Sea of Galilee and located in hill country (cf. Jos. 20:7; NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 1218, #5).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:19-23**

<sup>19</sup>**“The kings came *and* fought;  
Then fought the kings of Canaan  
At Taanach near the waters of Megiddo;  
They took no plunder in silver.  
<sup>20</sup>The stars fought from heaven,  
From their courses they fought against Sisera.  
<sup>21</sup>The torrent of Kishon swept them away,  
The ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon.  
O my soul, march on with strength.  
<sup>22</sup>Then the horses’ hoofs beat  
From the dashing, the dashing of his valiant steeds.  
<sup>23</sup>‘Curse Meroz,’ said the angel of the LORD  
‘Utterly curse its inhabitants;  
Because they did not come to the help of the Lord,  
To the help of the LORD against the warriors.’”**

**5:19** The site of this battle was on the plains of Jezreel, also called the Valley of Megiddo.

▣ **“They took no plunder in silver”** Taking spoils is mentioned in Jdgs. 5:30. Possibly this encounter was like Jericho (i.e., under the ban where all the spoils belonged to YHWH).

The other option is to see this verse as referring to the thoughts and actions of the Canaanite warriors who expected booty (cf. Jdgs. 5:30).

**5:20 “The stars fought from heaven”** This is imagery of God fighting on behalf of Israel. It may also be a metaphor about God sending the rain storm. Stars were the source of rain in Canaanite mythology, AB, p. 113.

Some have seen this as a reference to the rejection of astral worship, which may be true because of line 2, “their courses/paths” (BDB 700). This would imply YHWH’s power (cf. Gen. 1:14-19; Ps. 19:1-6).

**5:21** There is a play on the word “wadi” (BDB 636), which is mentioned three times. YHWH’s unexpected rain storm flooded Sisera’s iron chariots and gave the victory.

The last line of the verse is

1. a statement of encouragement to the Israeli tribes participating in the battle
2. an implied IMPERATIVE (cf. JPSOA) addressing the Kishon for flooding at the appropriate time (poetic imagery).
  - a. swept them away – BDB 175, KB 204, *Qal* PERFECT; this root is found only here in the OT
  - b. confronted them (suggested emendation by NET Bible to a unique verb, קדק, BDB 869, to form a better parallelism)

The word “soul” is *nephesh* (BDB 659). See notes at Ezek. 18:4 at [www.freebiblecommentary.org](http://www.freebiblecommentary.org).

**5:22 “The horses hooves beat”** This must refer to the Canaanite chariot force (cf. Jdgs. 4:5). The term (BDB 187) “galloping/dashing” is repeated for emphasis (see Nah. 3:2).

**5:23 ““Curse Meroz,’ said the angel of the LORD”** This is an Israeli town in Naphtali that would not participate in the actions against this Canaanite force and is, thereby, cursed because of their lack of faith. Possible etymology of the name (BDB 931) is “lean” or “wasting.” AB has “cry doom on doomsville,” p. 114.

This verse reflects the Hittite-Suzerian treaty pattern, like Deuteronomy and Joshua 24. See Special Topic: Hittite (Suzerian) Treaties.

This “cursing” (BDB 76, KB 91) is reenforced in two ways.

1. the use of the *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. the addition of the INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE of the same root
  - a. NASB, “utterly curse”
  - b. NRSV, JPSOA, “bitterly curse”

Note again the mentioning of “the angel of the LORD.” See note at Jdgs. 2:1; see Special Topic: The Angel of the LORD. It is possible that here it should be “messenger of YHWH” and refer to Deborah, the prophetess.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:24-27**

- <sup>24</sup>**“Most blessed of women is Jael,  
The wife of Heber the Kenite;  
Most blessed is she of women in the tent.**
- <sup>25</sup>**He asked for water *and* she gave him milk;  
In a magnificent bowl she brought him curds.**
- <sup>26</sup>**She reached out her hand for the tent peg,  
And her right hand for the workmen’s hammer.  
Then she struck Sisera, she smashed his head;  
And she shattered and pierced his temple.**
- <sup>27</sup>**Between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay;  
Between her feet he bowed, he fell;  
Where he bowed, there he fell dead.”**

**5:24-27** The poetic account does not mention or imply Sisera was asleep. There may have been a struggle. In the ANE it was humiliating to be defeated/killed by a woman. YHWH was with her! She acted in concert with Barak as a military deliverer. See Special Topic: Women in the Bible.

**5:26 “his temple”** See note at Jdgs. 4:21.

**5:27** He is dead!

1. he bowed – BDB 502, KB 499, *Qal* PERFECT, 3 times
2. he fell – BDB 656, KB 09, *Qal* PERFECT, 3 times
3. he lay – BDB 1011, KB 1486, *Qal* PERFECT

The mighty Canaanite general, dead at the feet of a Bedouin wife!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:28-31**

**<sup>28</sup>“Out of the window she looked and lamented,  
The mother of Sisera through the lattice,  
‘Why does his chariot delay in coming?  
Why do the hoofbeats of his chariots tarry?’**

**<sup>29</sup>Her wise princesses would answer her,  
Indeed she repeats her words to herself,**

**<sup>30</sup>‘Are they not finding, are they not dividing the spoil?**

**A maiden, two maidens for every warrior;**

**To Sisera a spoil of dyed work,**

**A spoil of dyed work embroidered,**

**Dyed work of double embroidery on the neck of the spoiler?’**

**<sup>31</sup>Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD**

**But let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might.”**

**And the land was undisturbed for forty years.**

**5:28-31** Judges 5:28-31 is really ironic sarcasm put in the mouth of Sisera’s mother about why he did not return home. It implies they were delayed by dividing the spoils of war, including the captured women (cf. Gen. 34:27-29). This is the reason why he is late; when in reality, he was dead. This is also a mother’s hope that her son will return to her.

The “dyed work” (BDB 1021 CONSTRUCT BDB 840, only in 5:30 three times) mentioned in Jdgs. 5:30 was a characteristic gift which was given to the commander of the victorious army. It was some kind of beautiful outer garment to remember the victory.

It is possible from the MT that the ornament went around the necks of the animals given to the commander as spoil.

**5:31 “Let. . .let”** There are two IMPERFECTS used in a JUSSIVE sense.

1. Let YHWH’s enemies (i.e., idolaters perish (cf. Ps. 68:2; 92:9)
2. Let those who love Him be like the rising sun (imagery of glory and power, cf. Ps. 19:4-6; 89:36,37). Those who love Him (cf. Exod. 20:6; Deut. 5:10; 6:5; 7:9; Ps. 5:11; 69:36; 119:132) in this context, are those who were obedient to Deborah’s call to arms.

The Peshitta and Vulgate have “they would love you.”

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Who wrote this psalm?
2. Is Deborah a prophetess or a judge?
3. Are prophetesses common in the OT?
4. Are Jdgs. 5:4-5 a flashback to Exodus 19 or a prelude?
5. Define “peasantry” in Jdgs. 5:7,11.
6. Who chose “new gods” in Jdgs. 5:8?
7. Why does “Amalek” appear in Jdgs. 5:14?
8. Are Jdgs. 5:16-17 positive or negative?
9. What does “the stars fought from heaven” mean?
10. What is the “dyed work of double embroidery” of Jdgs. 5:30?

# JUDGES 6

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Israel Oppressed by Midian	Midianites Oppress Israel	5:31c-6:6 Gideon (6:1-8:35)	Gideon	Israel Oppressed by the Midianites
6:1-10	6:1-6		6:1-6	6:1-6
	6:7-10	6:7-10	6:7-10	A Message From A Prophet
Gideon Is Visited	Gideon			The Angel of YHWH Appears to Gideon
6:11-18	6:11-18	6:11-18	6:11-12	6:11-13
			6:14	6:14-18
			6:15	
			6:16	
			6:17-18a	
			6:18b	
6:19-24	6:19-24	6:19-24	6:19-21	6:19-24
			6:22	
			6:23-24	Gideon Against Baal
6:25-27	6:25-27	6:25-27	6:25-27	6:25-32
The Altar of Baal Destroyed	Gideon Destroys the Altar of Baal			
6:28-32	6:28-32	6:28-32	6:28-30	
			6:31-32	The Call to Arms
6:33-35	6:33-35	6:33-35	6:33-35	6:33-35
Sign of the Fleece	The Sign of the Fleece			The Sign of the Fleece
6:36-40	6:36-40	6:36-40	6:36-40	6:36-40

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

- A. The account of Gideon goes from Judges 6:1 to 8:28. Samson and Gideon are dealt with in more detail than the other “judges.”
- B. Gideon is a strange mixture of doubt and fear.
- C. This is the fifth cycle of apostasy and deliverance within the book of Judges.

- D. Many scholars see the combination of two accounts in Judges 6 (see Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, pp. 306-307; *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 154).
1. Judges 6:11-24
  2. Judges 6:25-32
- I do not see the need for this. It simply follows the trend of J.E.P.D (see Special Topic: Pentateuch Source Criticism), which I reject. I much prefer this oral history of John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*.
- E. The famous account of Gideon putting out the fleece, found in Judges 6:36-40, is really an act of unbelief, not faith, and, therefore, is not for us to emulate. The Bible records many things that it does not advocate.
- F. For the anthropomorphic language of this ancient account see Special Topic: The Problems and Limitations of Human Language and Special Topic: Anthropomorphic Language to Describe God.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:1-10

<sup>1</sup>Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years. <sup>2</sup>The power of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds. <sup>3</sup>For it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites would come up with the Amalekites and the sons of the east and go against them. <sup>4</sup>So they would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey. <sup>5</sup>For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, they would come in like locusts for number, both they and their camels were innumerable; and they came into the land to devastate it. <sup>6</sup>So Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried to the LORD. <sup>7</sup>Now it came about when the sons of Israel cried to the Lord on account of Midian, <sup>8</sup>that the LORD sent a prophet to the sons of Israel, and he said to them, “Thus says the LORD the God of Israel, ‘It was I who brought you up from Egypt and brought you out from the house of slavery. <sup>9</sup>I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hands of all your oppressors, and dispossessed them before you and gave you their land, <sup>10</sup>and I said to you, “I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But you have not obeyed Me.””

**6:1 “the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian”** Midian is a southern nomadic tribe south of Edom. The people are relatives of the Hebrews through Keturah (cf. Gen. 25:1). They are linked to the Kenites (cf. Num. 10:29; Jdgs. 1:16). Moses’ father-in-law was a priest of this tribe.

▣ **“into the hands”** This is a Semitic idiom for power (cf. Jdgs. 6:9). The NASB translates “hand” in 6:2 as “power.” See Special Topic: Hand.

**6:2 “the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds”** The Israelites had to (1) live in hide-aways (Josephus, *Antiq.* 5.6.1) or (2) hide their food in the mountains because of the pressure of the Midianites in the valleys.

**6:3 “that the Midianites would come up with the Amalekites and the sons of the east”** This referred to three different groups (cf. Jdgs. 6:33).

1. the Midianites mentioned in Jdgs. 6:1
2. the Amalekites mentioned in Jdgs. 3:13, who were also related to the Hebrews through Esau (cf. Gen. 36:12), but whose name became a synonym of treachery and evil because of the way they treated the people of God during the exodus period
3. the term “the sons of the east,” which refers to a third group, possibly a non-Semitic group (cf. Gen. 29:1), northeast of Canaan (cf. Jdgs. 6:3,33; 7:12; 8:10; 1 Kgs. 4:30; Job 1:3; Isa. 11:14; Jer. 49:28; Ezek. 25:4,10)

Josephus’ *Antiq.* 5.6.1 calls these three groups, “the Midianites called the Amalekites and Arabians.”

**6:4,5** These non-Israelite, nomadic invaders apparently swarmed into the land during the time of harvest and stole the annual crop along with the livestock of the Israelites.

**6:4 “destroy the produce of the earth”** Because of Jdgs. 6:5 the New Oxford Annotated Bible, p. 308, suggests this refers to taxation. The JPSOA has a footnote that suggests it means “grazed” and involves the over-grazing of the invaders’ herds.

However, to me, Jdgs. 6:4-5 implies stealing Israel’s crops and herds.

**6:5 “their camels were innumerable”** This is the first mention of domesticated camels. They were domesticated around the 12<sup>th</sup> century B.C. This would mean that these groups had the most advanced form of desert travel, military technology, and also their numbers were very large.

▣ **“like locust”** A locust plague is used in Joel as a metaphor of military invasion (cf. Jdgs. 7:12; also note Isa. 33:4; Jer. 46:23; 51:14,27; Amos 4:9-10).

Locusts were one of YHWH’s plagues on Egypt (cf. Exodus 10; Ps. 78:46; 105:34). They also formed part of the “cursing” section of Deut. 28:38,42.

There are several words in Hebrew which refer to locusts. This shows their prominence in the ANE. It is uncertain if the words refer to

1. stages of the locust’s life
2. different kinds of locusts

**6:6 “cried to the LORD”** This is part of a recurrent cycle of sin, judgment, and repentance which characterizes the book of Judges (cf. Jdgs. 3:9,15; 6:6,7; 10:10,14).

**6:8 “the LORD sent a prophet to the sons of Israel”** This is an unnamed prophet. He repeats the exodus covenant promises of God’s trustworthiness as demonstrated in the deliverance from Egypt. Some scholars try to interpret this as “the angel/messenger of the Lord,” but this does not fit Jdgs. 6:21-24.

**6:9 “dispossessed them”** This VERB (BDB 176, KB 204, *Piel* IMPERFECT with *waw*) is used several times to denote the Canaanites being driven out of the land.

1. by divinely directed hornets, Exod. 23:28
2. by divine empowering of Israel, Exod. 23:31; Jos. 24:12
3. by YHWH Himself, Exod. 23:29,30; 33:2 (by His angel); Deut. 33:27; Jos. 24:18; Jdgs. 2:3; 6:9

The conquest was an act of Israel’s God, not her military! Canaan was YHWH’s land.

▣ **“gave you their land”** YHWH gave Israel the land of Canaan. It is often said to be “His land.” He removed the native tribes because of their sin and idolatry (cf. Gen. 15:12-21).

When Israel sinned and committed idolatry, He removed them also (i.e., the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles).

**6:10 “I am the LORD your God”** This is covenant language using both YHWH and *Elohim* (cf. Exod. 20:2; Deut. 5:2-3). See Special Topic: Names for Deity, C. and D.

▣ **“fear”** See Special Topic: Fear.

▣ **“the Amorites”** See Special Topic: Pre-Israelite Inhabitants of Palestine.

▣ **“But you have not obeyed Me”** The source of the problem was not God’s impotence (cf. Jdgs. 6:13), but Israel’s lack of faith and obedience (cf. Jdgs. 2:2) to the covenant (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). See Special Topic: Keep.

▣ **“Amorites”** See Special Topic: Amorite.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:11-18**

**<sup>11</sup>Then the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites. <sup>12</sup>The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, “The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior.” <sup>13</sup>Then Gideon said to him, “O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?’ But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.” <sup>14</sup>The LORD looked at him and said, “Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?” <sup>15</sup>He said to Him, “O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father’s house.” <sup>16</sup>But the LORD said to him, “Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man.” <sup>17</sup>So Gideon said to Him, “If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who speak with me. <sup>18</sup>Please do not depart from here, until I come *back* to You, and bring out my offering and lay it before You.” And He said, “I will remain until you return.”**

**6:11 “the angel of the LORD”** When one compares Jdgs. 6:11 with 6:14, it seems obvious that we are dealing here with another theophany, or possibly the pre-Incarnate Jesus Christ. Here, he is called “the angel of the LORD,” while in Jdgs. 6:20 he is called “the angel of God.” We know that Gideon believed him to be God because of 6:22,23. He believed they were going to die (cf. Gen. 16:13; 32:30; Exod. 20:19; 33:20; Num. 12:8; Jdgs. 13:21-23; Isa. 6:5) because they saw God, which they came to understand meant this angel was a manifestation of Deity.

See Special Topic: The Angel of the LORD.

▣ **“and sat under the oak which was in Ophrah”** Ophrah was very close to the destroyed city of Ai. There is a possible connection between the oak at Ophrah and the oaks of Mamre during Abraham’s life (cf. Gen. 18:1). Trees were a common sacred site (cf. Gen. 12:6; 35:4,8; Deut. 11:20; Jos. 19:33; 24:26; Jdgs. 4:5; 9:37; 1 Sam. 10:3; 31:13; 1 Chr. 10:12), probably because they reveal the presence of underground water.

▣ **“the Abiezrite”** Joshua 17:2 states that this was a clan of Manasseh (cf. 1 Chr. 7:18). They settled on the western side of the Jordan.

▣ **“Gideon was beating the grain in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites”** This shows two things.

1. Gideon was hiding his crop from the annual raid

2. There was not a very large crop so that it could be thrashed in a wine press

**6:12 “The LORD is with you”** Notice that Gideon changes this to “the LORD is with us” in Jdgs. 6:13. At this point Gideon did not recognize this angel as representing God. He even addresses the angel in a way that shows he is wondering where God is in his life and the life of his people.

▣ **“O valiant warrior”** This is sarcasm that turns into a prophecy.

There is a possibility that this CONSTRUCT (BDB 150 plus 298) was a title for nobility (cf. Ruth 2:1; 1 Sam. 9:1; 2 Kgs. 15:20; 1 Chr. 7:5; see NEB and REB’s translations of Ruth 2:1).

**6:13** Gideon’s question about YHWH’s presence and deliverance in the past are addressed by the unnamed prophet in Jdgs. 6:8. He is still God of Israel, delivering them for His purposes. See Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan.

▣ **“lord”** See full note online at Exod. 32:23.

▣ **“But now the LORD has abandoned us”** This is a powerful VERB (BDB 643, KB 695, *Qal* PERFECT). Gideon and the Israelites felt that YHWH had abandoned them. They did not fully realize the devastating consequences of covenant disobedience.

**6:14** This is YHWH’s mandate to Gideon. Notice that YHWH, here, “the angel of the LORD,” turns and looks at Gideon. This is surely a theophany.

This is similar to God sending Moses in Exodus 3-4.

1. YHWH uses human instrumentality
2. YHWH’s personal presence is the key to victory (Jdgs. 6:16)
3. Gideon gives excuses, as Moses did, for not being able to fulfill YHWH’s mandate (Jdgs. 6:15)
4. he, like Moses, needs signs (cf. Jdgs. 6:17,37,39)
5. but he is obedient (Jdgs. 6:25-27)

**6:15 “How shall I deliver Israel”** This sense of inadequacy is similar to that of Moses and Jeremiah. Notice Gideon addresses the angel as “Lord” (*Adon*), not YHWH (Jdgs. 6:10). Gideon is not sure who this person is (cf. Jdgs. 6:22).

▣ **“Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh”** The Hebrew term (BDB 48), translated here “family,” can also mean the number “thousand.” This is one of the problems in the OT; when to translate this term “thousand” or “family.” See Special Topic: Thousand (*eleph*).

▣ **“I am the youngest in my father’s house”** Normally the eldest son was responsible for doing great acts for the family. Here is another example of God choosing, not only the least family in the tribe, but one other than the oldest son. This is an OT way to assert the sovereignty of YHWH.

▣

NASB, NKJV,

LXX, Peshitta

JPSOA

NRSV, TEV

NJB, REB

“my father’s house”

“clan”

“my family”

“my father’s family”

The term here is “אִלָּן” (BDB 48, KB 60; NIDOTTE, vol. 1, pp. 406-410) and denotes a “tribe” or “clan.” The Hebrew root for “thousand” is very similar (see Special Topic: Thousand; NIDOTTE, vol. 1, pp. 416-417 and chart at vol. 2, p. 1140).

**6:16 “surely I will be with you”** This is the greatest promise that a human can receive—the promise of the presence of God. This is a repeated promise: Gen. 26:3; 31:3; Exod. 3:12; Ps. 23:4; Matt. 28:20.

**6:17 “If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign”** This is the first indication of a weakness in Gideon. It is an indicator of his lack of faith (cf. Jdgs. 6:36-40; 7:10). Gideon needed much physical encouragement from YHWH. In this chapter alone, he requires three supernatural signs (i.e., Jdgs. 6:21,37,39). Be careful of signs (cf. Matt. 24:24).

**6:18 “do not depart from here, until I come back”** It took quite a long time to prepare this meal. This is similar to Gen. 18:1-8. The angel remained because of the customs of that day.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:19-24**

**<sup>19</sup>Then Gideon went in and prepared a young goat and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour; he put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, and brought *them* out to him under the oak and presented *them*. <sup>20</sup>The angel of God said to him, “Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth.” And he did so. <sup>21</sup>Then the angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. <sup>22</sup>When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the LORD he said, “Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face.” <sup>23</sup>The LORD said to him, “Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die.” <sup>24</sup>Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it The LORD is Peace. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.**

**6:19 “an ephah of flour”** This referred to a dry weight of between 35 and 45 pounds. See Special Topic: Ancient Near East Weights and Volumes.

☐ **“broth”** This word (BDB 600) is used only twice.

1. here as an offering to the angel of the Lord
2. Isa. 65:4 in a negative sense of idolatry

It may be implied but not mentioned in Gen. 18:1-8; 19:3.

**6:20 “Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so”** This was a very significant sacrifice in light of the scarcity of food. This text has three IMPERATIVES.

**6:21 “the staff that was in his hand”** YHWH appeared (i.e., theophany) in a way (i.e., dress and staff) as Gideon would have expected.

Since there have been so many parallels with YHWH’s initial call of Moses, possibly “the staff” represented the power of YHWH, as Moses’ staff did.

See Special Topic: Hand.

☐ **“and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread”** Again, God was giving Gideon a sign so he would know that He was with him.

**6:22 “Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face”** The Israelite tradition was that to see God was to die (cf. Gen. 16:13; 32:20; Exod. 20:19; 33:20; Num. 12:8; Jdgs. 13:21-22; Isa. 6:5).

**6:23 “The LORD said to him, ‘Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die’”** These were tremendous words of comfort (cf. Gen. 43:23) and also another sign to Gideon that God was with him. Kimchi, the famous Jewish commentator, says that God was speaking from heaven (i.e., *Bath kol*) because the angel of the Lord had departed (cf. Jdgs. 6:21).

**6:24 “The LORD is Peace”** This is a combination of YHWH and a NOUN. This combination was common and formed many titles for YHWH. See Special Topic: Names for Deity, D.

For “Peace” see Special Topic: *Shalom* (peace).

▣ **“To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites”** This is one of the many textual hints (i.e., like “unto this day”) that the book of Judges was compiled by a later editor.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:25-27**

<sup>25</sup>Now on the same night the LORD said to him, “Take your father’s bull and a second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it; <sup>26</sup>and build an altar to the LORD your God on the top of this stronghold in an orderly manner, and take a second bull and offer a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you shall cut down.” <sup>27</sup>Then Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had spoken to him; and because he was too afraid of his father’s household and the men of the city to do it by day, he did it by night.

**6:25 “Now on the same night”** This implies a revelation during a dream. This was common in the OT.

▣ **“Take your father’s bull and a second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal”** This seems to imply the use of a yoke of oxen. The age of the bull may link it to the time period that Israel had been oppressed by Midian, which was seven years (cf. Jdgs. 6:1). It may also relate to seven being the perfect number in the Bible. See Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture.

▣ **“pull down the altar of Baal”** Before Gideon could deliver Israel he had to deliver his own family from the idolatry that plagued his people. *Ba’al* was the male fertility god and *Asherah* was the female consort. See Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the Ancient Near East and Special Topic: Israel’s Mandated Response to Canaanite Fertility Worship.

**6:26**

NASB, NRSV,

JPSOA “stronghold”

NKJV, Peshitta “rock”

TEV “mound”

NJB “strong-point”

REB “earth-work”

LXX “peak”

This term (BDB 732) has several connotations.

1. natural stronghold

- a. mountain, cave, ravine – Jdgs. 6:26
- b. harbor – Isa. 23:4,11,14
2. manmade strongholds – Isa. 17:9; Ezek. 24:25
3. a place of safety (i.e., YHWH) – 2 Sam. 22:2,33; Ps. 27:1; 28:8

This raised earthen site already had a *Ba'al* altar, now it was the site of a new altar to YHWH. The *Ba'al* altars were located on naturally occurring high places or were manmade dirt platforms, several feet high.

**6:27** “Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had spoken to him; and it came about, because he was too afraid of his father’s household and the men of the city to do it by day, that he did it by night” Here again is another symbol of Gideon’s mixture of fear and doubt. He did what God said but he did it by night so no one would know. You can’t keep something secret very long when ten men were involved. It also shows that this altar to *Ba'al* was a local shrine encompassing more than just the family of Gideon.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:28-32**

<sup>28</sup>When the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was torn down, and the Asherah which was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar which had been built. <sup>29</sup>They said to one another, “Who did this thing?” And when they searched about and inquired, they said, “Gideon the son of Joash did this thing.” <sup>30</sup>Then the men of the city said to Joash, “Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has torn down the altar of Baal, and indeed, he has cut down the Asherah which was beside it.” <sup>31</sup>But Joash said to all who stood against him, “Will you contend for Baal, or will you deliver him? Whoever will plead for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because someone has torn down his altar.” <sup>32</sup>Therefore on that day he named him Jerubbaal, that is to say, “Let Baal contend against him,” because he had torn down his altar.

**6:29** “Joash” This name (BDB 219) is a combination of YHWH and “strong” or “given.” His name shows the amalgamation of *Ba'al* and Yahwehistic worship in this period. Gideon’s acts show a Yahwehistic altar replacing a *Ba'al/Asherah* altar.

**6:30** This verse has

1. a *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE – “bring out”
2. a *Qal* JUSSIVE – “that he may die”

**6:31** This shows the wisdom of Gideon’s father (Joash, Jdgs. 6:29) as the men of the city reacted to the loss of their local shrine. Gideon’s father stood up for his son and said that if *Ba'al* be a god, let him contend for himself.

▣ “Whoever will plead for him shall be put to death by morning” This seems to be a threat by Joash to protect his son.

**6:32** “Jerubbaal” Gideon’s name was changed to “one who contends with *Ba'al*” (BDB 937), which is a popular etymology but not the exact meaning of the name (“may *Ba'al* take action”).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:33-35**

**<sup>33</sup>Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the sons of the east assembled themselves; and they crossed over and camped in the valley of Jezreel. <sup>34</sup>So the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; and he blew a trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called together to follow him. <sup>35</sup>He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, and they also were called together to follow him; and he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they came up to meet them.**

**6:33 “the valley of Jezreel”** This is the same as the valley of Esdraelon or the plains of Megiddo, which will later be called Armageddon. This shows how far north the coalition had penetrated (cf. Jdgs. 6:3).

**6:34 “the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon”** This literally means “the Spirit of the LORD ‘clothed’ Gideon.” What a beautiful metaphor of the power of the presence of God. It occurs only three times in the OT (cf. 1 Chr. 12:18; 2 Chr. 24:20)

▣ **“and he blew a trumpet”** The blowing of the trumpet was a signal for the men to rally to war. See Special Topic: Horns Used by Israel.

The acts of deliverance were not accomplished by human power, intellect, or numbers but by YHWH’s Spirit. The way it is described varies.

1. “clothed” – Jdgs. 6:34
2. “came upon” – Jdgs. 11:29
3. “stir” (lit. “impel,” BDB 821, KB 952, *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT) – Jdgs. 11:29
4. “rush upon” (BDB 852, KB 1026) – Jdgs. 14:6,19; 15:14

Note the variety! The author is purposely using synonyms or quoting from oral or written sources.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:36-40**

**<sup>36</sup>Then Gideon said to God, “If You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken, <sup>37</sup>behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken.” <sup>38</sup>And it was so. When he arose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he drained the dew from the fleece, a bowl full of water. <sup>39</sup>Then Gideon said to God, “Do not let Your anger burn against me that I may speak once more; please let me make a test once more with the fleece, let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on all the ground.” <sup>40</sup>God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground.**

**6:37,39 “I will put out a fleece of wool. . .a test once more with the fleece”** Judges 6:36-40 is not an example of great faith for us to follow, but an example of weak faith for us to flee from. Many times in our day we use the idiom “putting out the fleece,” but the truth is the fleece was an act of unbelief. God simply honored it because He is willing to work with fallen mankind to accomplish His purposes! This is not an example for us to follow!

Although demanding signs from God is condemned (i.e., Matt. 12:39-47; 16:4; Luke 11:29-32), it is also true that God does periodically encourage weak faith.

1. Jesus touches people He heals.
2. Jesus appears several times to Paul in visions.

Even faith the size of a “mustard seed” (cf. Matt. 17:20) can move mountains. All believers have weak faith! See *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, pp. 192-193.

**6:39 “Do not let Your anger burn against me”** This is similar to Abraham’s statement as he bargained with God over Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Gen. 18:22-33).

▣ “that I may speak once more” This is similar to Abraham’s speaking to YHWH in Gen. 18:32.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why are histories of Gideon and Samson given in so much detail?
2. Who are “the sons of the east”?
3. Why is the prophet unnamed in Jdgs. 6:8? Is he the only unnamed prophet in the OT?
4. Who is “the angel of the LORD”?
5. Why is Gideon called “O valiant warrior”?
6. Why is Jdgs. 6:16 such a significant theological verse?
7. Why is “a sign” of Jdgs. 6:17 a problem?
8. Why did Gideon think he would die in Jdgs. 6:22?
9. How did the worship of *Ba'al* reappear after Joshua’s conquest?
10. What does Jdgs. 6:34 imply? Is it unique in the OT?

# JUDGES 7

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Gideon's 300 Chosen Men	Gideon's Valiant Three Hundred	Gideon (6:1-8:35)	Gideon Defeats the Midianites	Yahweh Reduces the Number of Gideon's Army
7:1	7:1	7:1	7:1	7:1-3
7:2-3	7:2-3	7:2-3	7:2-3	
7:4-8	7:4-8	7:4-8	7:4-8	7:4-8 An Omen of Victory
7:9-14	7:9-14	7:9-14	7:9-12 7:13 7:14	7:9-11 7:12-15
7:15-18	7:15-18	7:15-18	8:15-18	The Surprise Attack
Confusion of the Enemy				7:16-18
7:19-23	7:19-23	7:19-23	7:19-22 7:23-25	7:19-22 The Pursuit 7:23-25
7:24-25	7:24-25	7:24-25		

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. YHWH must limit Gideon's army to show His power (cf. Jdgs. 7:2).
- B. Gideon is still afraid and must have yet another sign (cf. Jdgs. 7:9-14).
- C. Judges 7:24-25 shows how geographical places in Canaan, after the invasion of Israel, got their names.
- D. Gideon, like Samson, clearly shows the fallen, frail nature of Israel's judges/deliverers. YHWH's will and Spirit are the true forces behind the historical events. YHWH uses fallen, weak people (i.e., Noah, Jacob, Moses) to accomplish His purposes.

#### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

##### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:1

<sup>1</sup>Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him, rose early and camped beside the spring of Harod; and the camp of Midian was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley.

**7:1 “Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon)”** See note at Jdgs. 6:32.

▣ **“the spring of Harod”** This name (BDB 353) means “trembling” (cf. Jdgs. 7:3). The valley of Jezreel or Esdraelon is the geographical setting.

▣ **“Midian”** The LXX (Alexandrinus) adds “and Amalek” (from Jdgs. 6:33), both here and 7:12, but LXX (Vaticanus) has only “Amalek” at Jdgs. 7:12.

▣ **“the hill of Moreh”** This is located to the southeast of Mt. Tabor (see *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, p. 15, maps 8, 60).

This is not the same locality as “the oak of Moreh” (Gen. 12:6; Deut. 11:30), which is near Shechem.

The name (BDB 435 II) means “teacher.” Trees were sacred sites in the ANE, probably because they identified in-ground water sources.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:2-3**

**<sup>2</sup>The LORD said to Gideon, “The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, for Israel would become boastful, saying, ‘My own power has delivered me.’ <sup>3</sup>Now therefore come, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, ‘Whoever is afraid and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead.’” So 22,000 people returned, but 10,000 remained.**

**7:2 “The people who are with you are too many”** God’s ways are not man’s way (cf. Isa. 55:6-9)!

▣ **“for Israel would become boastful”** God wanted all to know it was His victory, not Israel’s (cf. Deut. 8:17-18).

**7:3 “Whoever is afraid and trembling”** Lack of faith in God could cause panic to spread within the troops (cf. Deut. 20:8).

Notice YHWH reduces the army of Gideon in two ways.

1. those who are afraid, go home (22,000 reduced to 10,000)
2. those who drink without watching (Jdgs. 7:5-8), go home; the group left would have been the best soldiers (10,000 down to 3,000)

▣ **“depart from Mount Gilead”** This seems to be an early scribal error for Mt. Gilboa. Mt. Gilead is on the eastern side of the Jordan, while Mt. Gilboa is in the plain of Esdraelon.

The UBS Text Project gives “Gilead” an “A” rating (certain). However, it does not fit the context. Context is crucial and determines word meaning.

1. Gilead – גִּלְעָד
2. Gilboa – עִבְלָא

The REB has “Mount Galud,” from LXX, “Mount Galaad,” which is a spring at the foot of Mt. Gilboa.

▣ **“depart”** This VERB (BDB 861, KB 1050, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense) occurs only here. There are several options.

1. NKJV – “let him depart at once from Mt. Gilead”
2. NJB, Peshitta – “go back and watch from Mt. Gilboa”
3. JPSOA – “as a bird flies from Mt. Gilead”
4. REB – “to leave Mt. Galud at once”
5. LXX (B) – “leave Mt. Galaad”
6. Kimchi – “depart early” (Young’s literal)

7. G. F. Moore (ICC) – “Gideon put them to the test” (BDB 861, #2; NAB)

8. C. F. Burney – “decamp”

Obviously no one knows. JPSOA marks this as “meaning of Heb. uncertain.”

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:4-8**

**<sup>4</sup>Then the LORD said to Gideon, “The people are still too many; bring them down to the water and I will test them for you there. Therefore it shall be that he of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall go with you,’ he shall go with you; but everyone of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ he shall not go.” <sup>5</sup>So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, “You shall separate everyone who laps the water with his tongue as a dog laps, as well as everyone who kneels to drink.” <sup>6</sup>Now the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was 300 men; but all the rest of the people knelt to drink water. <sup>7</sup>The LORD said to Gideon, “I will deliver you with the 300 men who lapped and will give the Midianites into your hands; so let all the *other* people go, each man to his home.” <sup>8</sup>So the 300 men took the people’s provisions and their trumpets into their hands. And Gideon sent all the *other* men of Israel, each to his tent, but retained the 300 men; and the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.**

**7:4** “I will test them” YHWH Himself “tests” (BDB 864, KB 1057, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense). This term is from metallurgy and means to heat something to purify it (i.e., smelter; cf. Isa. 48:10; Zech. 13:9). In this context it refers to YHWH trying human’s hearts (cf. Ps. 17:3; 26:2; 66:10; 105:19; 1 Pet. 1:7).

**7:5** “he brought the people down to the water” Josephus (*Antiq.* 5.6.3) tells us it was at noon when they were very thirsty.

▣ “everyone who laps the water. . . everyone who kneels to drink” There are two opinions about these different drinkers.

I tend to see the smaller group as the most inexperienced soldiers. YHWH brings victory through the least likely group in order to show His power (cf. Jdgs. 7:2). It seems the former group was alert and prepared, while the latter group was concerned more with their immediate physical needs. Josephus says the first group were cowards (*Antiq.* 5.6.3) and the Jewish Study Bible agrees (p. 525).

Jewish tradition says that those who knelt showed they had at some point worshiped *Ba’al* (see Jewish Study Bible, p. 525).

**7:8** “provision” This term (BDB 845) usually means “food supply” (i.e., Jos. 1:11; 9:11), but here it seems to refer to the empty food jars used to conceal the torches in the nighttime surprise attack.

It could also refer to the “trumpets.” Not every person would normally have a trumpet but the remaining 300 each had one.

▣ “each to his tent” This is a Hebrew idiom for “return home.” It does not imply anything about what kind of structure (cf. 1 Sam. 4:10; 13:2; 2 Sam. 18:17; 19:8; 20:1,22).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:9-14**

**<sup>9</sup>Now the same night it came about that the LORD said to him, “Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hands. <sup>10</sup>But if you are afraid to go down, go with Purah your servant down to the camp, <sup>11</sup>and you will hear what they say; and afterward your hands will be strengthened that you may go down against the camp.” So he went with Purah his servant down to the outposts**

of the army that was in the camp. <sup>12</sup>Now the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the sons of the east were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. <sup>13</sup>When Gideon came, behold, a man was relating a dream to his friend. And he said, “Behold, I had a dream; a loaf of barley bread was tumbling into the camp of Midian, and it came to the tent and struck it so that it fell, and turned it upside down so that the tent lay flat.” <sup>14</sup>His friend replied, “This is nothing less than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given Midian and all the camp into his hand.”

**7:9-14** Gideon’s tendency toward doubt is revealed again and dealt with by God again (i.e., a sign, cf. Jdgs. 6:17,36-40).

**7:9** Notice YHWH reveals Himself in two dreams.

1. Gideon’s in Jdgs. 7:9
2. a man in Jdgs. 7:13 (i.e., one of the enemy); God uses many ways to accomplish His will

▣ **“for I have given it into your hands”** This is a PROPHETIC PERFECT. This victory has not yet occurred but YHWH’s promise was certain.

**7:10 “Purah your servant”** This is obviously an eyewitness account!

**7:12** There are three groups of invaders identified (cf. Jdgs. 6:3): (1) Midianites, (2) Amalekites, (3) “all the sons of the east.”

▣ Notice the three ways the opposing army is characterized.

1. as numerous as locusts
2. camels without number
3. as numerous as the sand on the seashore

It was a large coalition. No wonder Gideon was shocked to be told to reduce his 33,000 soldiers to 300! This is the faith element in Israel’s battles (cf. Deut. 3:22; 7:18; 20:1; 31:6,8; 1 Sam. 17:45,47; Ps. 20:7; 33:6-17; 44:1-3,5-7; Isa. 63:1-6,9). YHWH was their covenant God and Divine Warrior (NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 545-549)!

**7:13 “loaf of barley bread”** This was food for the poor. The Hebrew word “loaf” (BDB 853) occurs only here in the OT. The New Jerusalem Bible’s footnote and Jewish Study Bible (p. 526) both say the “barley loaf” represented the agricultural Israelites, while the “tent” represented the nomadic enemy.

**7:14** This interpretation by another enemy soldier is also a revelation from YHWH. There is no reason why an army as large as the one described (Jdgs. 7:12) should be afraid of Gideon and his much weaker troops. YHWH has placed fear in the hearts of the enemy (cf. Jdgs. 7:22).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:15-18**

<sup>15</sup>When Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship. He returned to the camp of Israel and said, “Arise, for the LORD has given the camp of Midian into your hands.” <sup>16</sup>He divided the 300 men into three companies, and he put trumpets and empty pitchers into the hands of all of them, with torches inside the pitchers. <sup>17</sup>He said to them, “Look at me and do likewise. And behold, when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. <sup>18</sup>When I and all who are

**with me blow the trumpet, then you also blow the trumpets all around the camp and say, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon.’”**

**7:15 “its interpretation”** This NOUN (BDB 991 I) used in this sense (i.e., “breaking” a dream’s meaning) is found only here.

▣ **“he bowed in worship”** Gideon has a worshipful moment amidst the enemy’s camp!

**7:16** Torches will not burn in an overturned pottery jar. The jar had some hole in it or this is another miracle of God!

**7:18** The war cry of Jdgs. 7:18 leaves out “a sword for” (see Peshitta) but the full form appears in Jdgs. 7:20.

This war cry (Jdgs. 7:18,20) was the only part of the battle required of Gideon’s soldiers. YHWH, as the Divine Warrior (i.e., Holy War), is the victor!

The Jewish Study Bible, p. 526, supports this by noting that Gideon’s soldiers had both hands full (i.e., jar and torch), so no hand for the sword. The sword was YHWH’s sword! However, there is the question of how they also carry a trumpet.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:19-23**

**<sup>19</sup>So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and smashed the pitchers that were in their hands. <sup>20</sup>When the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers, they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing, and cried, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!” <sup>21</sup>Each stood in his place around the camp; and all the army ran, crying out as they fled. <sup>22</sup>When they blew 300 trumpets, the LORD set the sword of one against another even throughout the whole army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the edge of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath. <sup>23</sup>The men of Israel were summoned from Naphtali and Asher and all Manasseh, and they pursued Midian.**

**7:19 “middle watch”** This was the second night watch from 10:00 pm to 2:00 am.

▣ **“when they had just posted the watch”** The Hebrew text has an intensified form here (i.e., an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and a PERFECT VERB from the same root, BDB 877, KB 1086). Exactly why is uncertain. Apparently the guards were not yet settled in for their watch, while the other guards were walking back to their tents.

▣ **“trumpets”** They used ram’s horns. See Special Topic: Horns Used by Israel.

**7:20 “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon”** This was their battle cry!

**7:21 “crying out”** This VERB (BDB 929, KB 1206, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT with *waw*) is the opposite of the war cry of Gideon’s army in Jdgs. 7:18 and 20. This VERB is never used for victory, only the sound of fear, defeat, and flight (i.e., Micah 4:9).

There is another word for “crying out” (BDB 858, KB 1042) used in Jdgs. 7:23, for Gideon calling out to the other Israeli tribes.

**7:22 “the LORD set the sword of one against another”** This is also mentioned in 1 Sam. 14:20; 2 Chr. 20:23.

▣ **“Beth-shittah”** This location is uncertain. The name (BDB 112) means “house of Acacia. It is not the same as “Shittim.”

▣ **“Abel-meholah”** It means “dancing brook” (KB 7). This is located very close to the Jordan River, about level with Samaria (cf. 1 Kgs. 4:12; 19:16).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:24-25**

<sup>24</sup>**Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, “Come down against Midian and take the waters before them, as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan.” So all the men of Ephraim were summoned and they took the waters as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan.**  
<sup>25</sup>**They captured the two leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb, and they killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and they killed Zeeb at the wine press of Zeeb, while they pursued Midian; and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon from across the Jordan.**

**7:24** The Ephramites are invited by Gideon to join in the pursuit of the invaders, especially at the fords of the Jordan. This was so that several tribes could be part of the victory.

1. Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, Naphtali (Jdgs. 6:35)
2. Ephraim (Jdgs. 7:24; 8:1); they cut off the enemy’s retreat towards the fords of Jordan

▣ **“Beth-barah”** This name means, “house of the ford” (BDB 111). Its location is uncertain but must be close to the Jordan (cf. Jdgs. 3:28).

**7:25 “Oreb”** This word means “raven” (BDB 788).

▣ **“Zeeb”** The word means “wolf” (BDB 255 II).

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How does Jdgs. 7:2 explain the rest of the chapter?
2. There are two options of how the soldiers drank and what it meant. Which one do you think is correct?
3. How does Jdgs. 7:10 characterize Gideon?
4. How did God defeat the invaders?
5. Why was Ephraim invited to participate?

# JUDGES 8

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Zabah and Zalmunna Routed	Gideon Subdues the Midianites	Gideon (6:1-8:35)	The Final Defeat of the Midianites	The Ephraimites Take Offence
8:1-3	8:1-3	8:1-3	8:1-3	8:1-3
				Gideon Pursues the Enemy Beyond the Jordan
8:4-9	8:4-9	8:4-9	8:4-5 8:6 8:7-9	8:4-9
				The Defeat of Zebah and Zalmunna
8:10-12	8:10-12	8:10-12	8:10-12	8:10-12
				Gideon's Acts of Vengeance
8:13-17	8:13-17	8:13-17	8:13-17	8:13-21
8:18-21	8:18-21	8:18-21	8:18a 8:18b 8:19-20	
	Gideon's Ephod		8:21	Latter Days of Gideon
8:22-27	8:22-28	8:22-28	8:22 8:23-24	8:22-27
Forty Years of Peace			8:25-27	
8:28			8:28	8:28-32
	Death of Gideon		The Death of Gideon	
8:29-32	8:29-32	8:29-32	8:29-32	Israel Relapses into Idolatry
8:33-35	8:33-35	8:33-35	8:33-35	8:33-35

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

#### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:1-3

<sup>1</sup>Then the men of Ephraim said to him, "What is this thing you have done to us, not calling us when you went to fight against Midian?" And they contended with him vigorously. <sup>2</sup>But he said to them, "What have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning *of the grapes* of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? <sup>3</sup>God has given the leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb into your hands; and what was I able to do in comparison with you?" Then their anger toward him subsided when he said that.

**8:1 “the men of Ephraim”** This was the largest and most powerful tribe. It was the tribe of Joshua and Samuel.

▣ **“they contended with him vigorously”** Josephus (*Antiq.* 5.6.6) says they wanted to make war against Gideon. The Amphictyony period was a time of loose alliances and tribal jealousies. Gideon’s tribe, Manasseh, was closely related to Ephraim, both being sons of Joseph (cf. Gen. 48:8-22).

**8:2 “the gleaning”** This was probably a proverb of the day. The gleaning is the grain left from the first harvest. It was left for the poor (cf. Lev. 19:10; Deut. 24:21).

▣ **“Abiezer”** This is the name for one of the clans of Manasseh (cf. Jos. 17:2; 1 Chr. 7:14-19, esp. 7:18). The name appears in Jdgs. 6:11,34 and here. They settled west of Shechem on the western side of Jordan.

**8:3** Gideon downplays the importance of his victories to make Ephraim feel more important. It was the Ephraimites who captured the military leaders (BDB 978) of Midian (cf. Jdgs. 7:25) and killed them. Apparently Zebah and Zalmunna were

1. their political leaders (i.e., princes, BDB 978)
2. in Ps. 83:11 they are called
  - a. Oreb and Zeeb – “nobles” (BDB 622)
  - b. Zebah and Zalmunna – “princes” (BDB 651)
3. leaders of other clans of Midian

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:4-9**

**<sup>4</sup>Then Gideon and the 300 men who were with him came to the Jordan and crossed over, weary yet pursuing. <sup>5</sup>He said to the men of Succoth, “Please give loaves of bread to the people who are following me, for they are weary, and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian.” <sup>6</sup>The leaders of Succoth said, “Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hands, that we should give bread to your army?” <sup>7</sup>Gideon said, “All right, when the LORD has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, then I will thrash your bodies with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers.” <sup>8</sup>He went up from there to Penuel and spoke similarly to them; and the men of Penuel answered him just as the men of Succoth had answered. <sup>9</sup>So he spoke also to the men of Penuel, saying, “When I return safely, I will tear down this tower.”**

**8:4** This describes Gideon and his army of 300 pursuing the remnant (cf. Jdgs. 8:10) of the invaders’ army across Jordan to the eastern side.

Both Succoth and Penuel are eastern cities on the major caravan route from Mt. Tabor to the southeast.

**8:5 “Succoth”** The name (BDB 697) means “booths” (cf. Gen. 33:17). It is located in the territory of Gad on the eastern side of Jordan, close to the River Jabbok.

▣ Gideon asked (*Qal* IMPERATIVE) the city of Succoth to provide food for his weary soldiers but they refused out of fear of the larger Midian army (cf. Jdgs. 8:10).

▣

NASB, NKJV,  
NRSV, TEV,  
NJB “loaves of bread”

The Hebrew term translated “loaves” (BDB 503) means “round.” Therefore, it was a designation for bread in the shape of a circle (cf. 1 Sam. 2:36; 10:3; 1 Chr. 16:3; Pro. 6:26; Jer. 37:21). It was often used as an idiom for food in general without designating the kind.

▣ **“Zebah”** The name (BDB 258 II) means “sacrifice” or “victim.” The name occurs only in this chapter and Ps. 83:11.

▣ **“Zalmunna”** The name (BDB 193) means “withheld hospitality” or “withheld protection.”

**8:6 “hands”** The reference to “hands” may mean

1. power; see Special Topic: Hand
2. literally, a way of showing victory by cutting off body parts (see *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, p. 256)

**8:8 “Penuel”** This place was named by Jacob after he wrestled with the angel, yet he lived (cf. Gen. 32:30). The name (BDB 819) means “face of God (*El*).”

This east bank city replied in the same way as Succoth.

**8:9 “I will tear down this tower”** It was the city’s security and pride.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:10-12**

<sup>10</sup>Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor, and their armies with them, about 15,000 men, all who were left of the entire army of the sons of the east; for the fallen were 120,000 swordsmen. <sup>11</sup>Gideon went up by the way of those who lived in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and attacked the camp when the camp was unsuspecting. <sup>12</sup>When Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued them and captured the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and routed the whole army.

**8:10 “Karkor”** The place is unknown (ABD, vol. 4, p. 6). It is obviously on the eastern side of the Jordan River.

*The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, p. 256, suggests the MT should not read as a place name but as “level ground,” which it asserts was seven miles from Rabbah (Amman). If this is true, it would show that Gideon did not travel so far into the trans-Jordan area.

▣ **“15,000”** Josephus says it was 18,000.

**8:11 “went up by the way of those who lived in tents”** This refers to (1) a caravan route or (2) the way of nomads (JB). It is a phrase used of unwallled villages or campsites.

▣ **“Nobah and Jogbehah”** The first name is not listed in the *MacMillan Bible Atlas* index but the second is, on page 63, map 76. It is positioned between Penuel and Rabbath-bene-ammon on the caravan route to Karkor.

▣ **“when the camp was unsuspecting”** This is literally “secure” (BDB 224, KB 243, *Qal* PERFECT with ADVERB, BDB 105 I). It could mean

1. this large military camp felt secure, so far from the fighting on the west bank
2. they had posted guards
3. they did not expect Gideon to follow them

4. it was another night attack

**8:12 “routed the whole army”** The VERB (BDB 353, KB 350, *Hiphil* PERFECT) means “to terrify” (cf. NJB). As in the first battle (Jdgs. 7:21-22), Gideon’s army caused panic.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:13-17**

<sup>13</sup>Then Gideon the son of Joash returned from the battle by the ascent of Heres. <sup>14</sup>And he captured a youth from Succoth and questioned him. Then *the youth* wrote down for him the princes of Succoth and its elders, seventy-seven men. <sup>15</sup>He came to the men of Succoth and said, “Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, concerning whom you taunted me, saying, ‘Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your men who are weary?’” <sup>16</sup>He took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briars, and he disciplined the men of Succoth with them. <sup>17</sup>He tore down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city.

**8:13 “ascent of Heres”** The KJV has “before the sun was up.” Heres (BDB 357 I) means “sun.” All other English translations translate it as an unknown pass or ascent leading up from Jogbehah to Succoth along the caravan route. It possibly had an association with sun worship.

**8:14 “*the youth* wrote down”** This shows the educational level of children in this age and locality. A “youth” (BDB 654) could refer to someone from infancy to 40 years of age.

▣ **“the princes. . .its elders”** This seems to designate two different leadership groups.

The term “princes” (BDB 978) is the same one used in Jdgs. 7:25 for “Oreb” and Zeeb.”

“Elders” would refer to the older tribal or community leaders. Both are also used together in Isa. 3:14. See Special Topic: Elder.

▣ **“seventy-seven men”** This number of community leaders is very large for one city the size of Succoth. Possibly it is figurative for a full and complete list. See Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture.

**8:16-17** Judges 8:17 specifically states that Gideon killed the male population of Penuel but 8:16 might be a type of physical punishment short of death.

**8:16 “disciplined”** The MT has “made known” (BDB 393, KB 390, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT with *waw*, see NASB margin). The LXX, Peshitta, and Vulgate emend this to “thrash” (BDB 190, KB 218).

1. know – עדי inflected עדיי
2. thrash – שוד inflected שודי

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:18-21**

<sup>18</sup>Then he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, “What kind of men *were* they whom you killed at Tabor?” And they said, “They were like you, each one resembling the son of a king.” <sup>19</sup>He said, “They *were* my brothers, the sons of my mother. As the LORD lives, if only you had let them live, I would not kill you.” <sup>20</sup>So he said to Jether his firstborn, “Rise, kill them.” But the youth did not draw his sword, for he was afraid, because he was still a youth. <sup>21</sup>Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, “Rise up yourself, and fall on us; for as the man, so is his strength.” So Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and took the crescent ornaments which were on their camels’ necks.

**8:18 “They were like you”** These kings remembered the ones they had killed at Mt. Tabor. This battle is not mentioned in the OT. Part of Gideon’s motivation in pursuing the Midianites across the Jordan was revenge.

The phrase “each one resembling the son of a king” gives some credence to the view that “O valiant warrior” (Jdgs. 6:12) was a reference to nobility.

**8:19 “As the LORD lives”** This is an oath formula using YHWH’s name. See Special Topic: Names for Deity, D.

▣ **“I would not kill you”** Gideon was the *Go’el* for his brothers (i.e., Kinsman Redeemer, cf. Num. 35:19).

**8:20 “a youth”** This is the same word used in Jdgs. 8:14. Gideon’s son was part of his army but still not accustomed to the brutality of ANE warfare.

These kings being killed by a “youth” would be the height of shame (i.e., 1 Sam. 17:42). So they asked Gideon to kill them instead (Jdgs. 8:21).

**8:21 “for as the man, so is his strength”** This unusual Hebrew phrase may refer to the fact that these kings wanted a quick kill by an expert warrior.

D. Brent Sandy and Ronald L. Giese, *Cracking Old Testament Codes*, pp. 239,245, suggest that both Jdgs. 8:20 and 21 are proverbial.

▣ **“the crescent ornaments”** Arabs still use this crescent moon symbol (see note at Isa. 3:18 online; see ABD, vol. 3, p. 831). This would represent YHWH’s victory over moon worship. See Special Topic: Moon Worship.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:22-27**

**<sup>22</sup>Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, “Rule over us, both you and your son, also your son’s son, for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian.” <sup>23</sup>But Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you.” <sup>24</sup>Yet Gideon said to them, “I would request of you, that each of you give me an earring from his spoil.” (For they had gold earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) <sup>25</sup>They said, “We will surely give *them*.” So they spread out a garment, and every one of them threw an earring there from his spoil. <sup>26</sup>The weight of the gold earrings that he requested was 1,700 *shekels* of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple robes which *were* on the kings of Midian, and besides the neck bands that *were* on their camels’ necks. <sup>27</sup>Gideon made it into an ephod, and placed it in his city, Ophrah, and all Israel played the harlot with it there, so that it became a snare to Gideon and his household.**

**8:22 “Rule over us”** This was an offer by several of the northern tribes to let Gideon be king (cf. 1 Sam. 8:5). Gideon declined, probably because he knew YHWH was the true king (cf. Exod. 15:18; 1 Sam. 8:4-20; 12:12; 1 Kgs. 22:19; Ps. 10:16; 29:10; 47; 93; 96; 97; 98; 99; Isa. 6:5; 24:33; 41:21; 43:15; 44:6; 52:7; Mic. 4:7). Canaan was YHWH’s land (cf. Jos. 22:19; Jer. 2:7; 16:18; Ezek. 36:5; Hos. 9:3).

**8:24 “Ishmaelites”** This designation seems to apply to both Midianites and Ishmaelites (cf. Gen. 37:28). Midian was the son of Abraham and Keturah (cf. Gen. 25:2), while Ishmael was from Abraham and Hagar (cf. Gen. 16:15).

**8:25 “We will surely give *them*”** This is an intensified grammatical structure (an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and IMPERFECT VERB from the same root, BDB 678, KB 733).

The northern tribes who participated in the battle were happy to share with Gideon.

**8:26** Notice the different sources of wealth.

1. gold earrings (or nose rings)
2. crescent (BDB 962; NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 1220) ornaments on the camels
3. the pendants (BDB 643)
4. purple robes
5. neck bands (BDB 778) on the camels, obviously different from #2, which are mentioned earlier

One of these may have had religious significance as amulets or charms from pagan gods. Melting them (Jdgs. 8:27) may have shown their powerlessness!

▣ **“17,000 shekels”** This equals somewhere between 40-75 pounds. See Special Topic: Ancient Near East Weights and Volumes.

▣ **“purple robes”** Purple was very expensive, made from sea shells (NIDOTTE, vol. 1, p. 498). It was a sign of wealth and royalty.

**8:27 “an ephod”** This is either (1) a cloth garment of a priest (cf. Exod. 39:1-2), which contains the means of determining God’s will or (2) a free standing idol (cf. Jdgs. 17:5; 18:14,18; 1 Sam. 2:28; 14:3; 21:9). See Special Topic: Ephod. Originally it may have been a way of Gideon asserting YHWH’s reign.

▣ **“all Israel played the harlot with it there”** This means they committed spiritual apostasy (cf. Jdgs. 8:33; 2:17; Exod. 34:15; 1 Chr. 5:25; fertility worship; see Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the Ancient Near East).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:28**

**<sup>28</sup>So Midian was subdued before the sons of Israel, and they did not lift up their heads anymore. And the land was undisturbed for forty years in the days of Gideon.**

**8:28 “the land was undisturbed”** This VERB (BDB 1052, KB 1641, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*) is literally “at rest.” It is used of the period of covenant fidelity, with its promised blessing (i.e., Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28), after each Judge (cf. Jdgs. 3:11,30; 5:31; 8:28; also note 2 Chr. 14:1).

YHWH gave the “rest” (cf. 2 Chr. 20:30).

▣ **“forty years”** This was one generation. See Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture, #7.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:29-32**

**<sup>29</sup>Then Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and lived in his own house. <sup>30</sup>Now Gideon had seventy sons who were his direct descendants, for he had many wives. <sup>31</sup>His concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he named him Abimelech. <sup>32</sup>And Gideon the son of Joash died at a ripe old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.**

**8:29 “Jerubbaal”** See note at Jdgs. 7:1.

**8:30 “seventy sons...had many wives”** This is imagery for a wealthy noble (possibly royal, cf. Jdgs. 8:18) person. For “seventy” see note at Jdgs. 8:14.

▣ **“direct descendants”** This is an idiom, possibly euphemism, of procreation (cf. Gen. 46:26; Exod. 1:5; NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 1198-1211). It is literally “hip” or “thigh” (BDB 437). It was used to designate Gideon’s children by “wives” in distinction from “concubines” (NIDOTTE, vol. 3, pp. 618-619). Abimelech was a “lesser” child in a legal sense. One wonders if his mother tried to overcome this by naming him “My father is king” (BDB 4).

**8:31 “concubine”** Josephus (*Antiq.* 5.6.6) says her name was “Drumah.” Concubines had limited rights. Their children usually lived with them and were counted among their family (cf. Jdgs. 15:1; 16:4ff) but had no inheritance rights.

▣ **“Abimelech”** The name means, “My father is king” (BDB 4). His name reflected his desires.

**8:32** Death was not viewed as an enemy (cf. Gen. 15:15; 25:8; 1 Chr. 29:28). It was, in a sense, a family reunion. Often (when possible) families were buried together in a tomb or cave (cf. Jdgs. 16:31; 2 Sam. 2:32; 17:23; 19:38; 21:12-14).

In the OT the Israelites believed in life after death (see Special Topic: *Sheol*), but with diminished physical abilities, conscious but silent. Thank God for NT revelation!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:33-35**

**<sup>33</sup>Then it came about, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the sons of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-berith their god. <sup>34</sup>Thus the sons of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side; <sup>35</sup>nor did they show kindness to the household of Jerubbaal (*that is*, Gideon) in accord with all the good that he had done to Israel.**

**8:33 “Baal-berith”** This means “Baal of the Covenant” (cf. Jdgs. 9:46). For “Baal” see Special Topic: *Sheol* at Jdgs. 8:32. For “covenant” see Special Topic: Covenant.

**8:34** This was the terrible pattern during this period. Somehow the faith of the parents who saw YHWH’s salvation was not passed on to their children.

The next generation forgot

1. YHWH’s deeds, Jdgs. 8:34
2. Gideon’s deeds, Jdgs. 8:35

They were self centered, thereby, the characteristic phrase of this period was “every man did what was right in his own eyes.”

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why was the tribe of Ephraim so upset at Gideon's victory over the Midianites?
2. Why was Gideon so upset with the Israelite cities of Succoth and Penuel?
3. What does Jdgs. 8:7 refer to?
4. How are Oreb and Zeeb related to Zebah and Zalmunna?
5. Why did Gideon reject the offer to be king in Jdgs. 8:22-23?
6. Explain the purpose of the Ephod.
7. Define and explain the role of a "concubine."
8. How is Jdgs. 8:27 related to 8:33?
9. What does "did not remember the LORD" in Jdgs. 8:34 mean?

# JUDGES 9

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Abimelech's Conspiracy	Abimelech's Conspiracy	Abimelech	Abimelech	The Reign of Abimelech
9:1-6	9:1-6	9:1-6	9:1-6	9:1-6
	The Parable of the Trees			Jotham's Diatribe
9:7-15	9:7-15	9:7-15	9:7-15	9:7a
		(8-15)		9:7b (7b)
	(7b)			9:8 (8)
	(8-9)			9:9 (9)
	(10-11)			9:10 (10)
				9:11 (11)
	(12-13)			9:12 (12)
				9:13 (13)
	(14-15)			9:14 (14)
				9:15 (15)
9:16-21	9:16-21	9:16-21	9:16-21	9:16-20
				9:21
Shechem and Abimelech Fall	Downfall of Abimelech			Shechem Revolts Against Abimelech
9:22-25	9:22-25	9:22-25	9:22-25	9:22-24
				9:25-41
9:26-29	9:26-29	9:26-29	9:26-29	
9:30-33	9:30-33	9:30-33	9:30-33	
9:34-41	9:34-41	9:34-41	9:34-36a	
			9:36b	
			9:37	
			9:38-41	Destruction of the Town and Citadel of Shechem
9:42-45	9:42-45	9:42-45	9:42-45	9:42-49
9:46-49	9:46-49	9:46-39	9:46-49	Siege of Thebez and Death of Abimelech

9:50-57	9:50-55	9:50-57	9:50-55	9:50-55
	9:56-57	9:56-57	9:56-57	9:56-57

## READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

### CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. Abimelech is a “false judge.” He is not informed and indwelt by YHWH’s Spirit (no mention of YHWH in this chapter). In a sense, he shows what would have happened to all these charismatic leaders, if not for YHWH’s Spirit. The results of the Fall (i.e., Genesis 3) remain. This chapter also shows the crippling, immoral influence of the Canaanites. Israel was influenced by *Ba’al* worship. The conquest and promises of YHWH were being compromised as He said they would be. Even the type of government (i.e., theocracy vs. city-state) is in conflict.
- B. This man affected only one city, Shechem (and its surrounding area). It was the site of a major northern Israeli sanctuary.
1. site of YHWH’s first encounter with Abraham (cf. Gen. 12:6,7) and the site of YHWH revealing Himself to Joseph (cf. Genesis 37).
  2. site of
    - a. a covenant renewal event in Jos. 8:30-35
    - b. site of Joshua’s last covenant renewal ceremony in Joshua 24
    - c. site of Joshua’s burial (Jos. 24:32)
- This city-state governmental structure was Canaanite, not Israeli.
- C. Judges 9:7-15 is a spoken parable (i.e., fable; see Sandy and Giese, *Cracking Old Testament Codes*, pp. 267-268) by Jotham about Abimelech’s reign and ultimate judgment. These are common in the ANE literature.
- D. The time line for this chapter is difficult to construct. There are several battles and several cities (also several protective and sacred structures, see note at Jdgs. 9:49).

### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

#### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:1-6

<sup>1</sup>And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem to his mother’s relatives, and spoke to them and to the whole clan of the household of his mother’s father, saying, <sup>2</sup>“Speak, now, in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem, ‘Which is better for you, that seventy men, all the sons of Jerubbaal, rule over you, or that one man rule over you?’ Also, remember that I am your bone and your flesh.” <sup>3</sup>And his mother’s relatives spoke all these words on his behalf in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem; and they were inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, “He is our relative.” <sup>4</sup>They gave him seventy *pieces* of silver from the house of Baal-berith with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows, and they followed him. <sup>5</sup>Then he went to his father’s house at Ophrah and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, for he hid himself. <sup>6</sup>All the men of Shechem and all Beth-millo assembled together, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar which was in Shechem.

**9:1 “Abimelech”** His name means, “My father is a king” (BDB 4). He was the son of Gideon and a Canaanite concubine from Shechem.

▣ **“Jerubbaal”** This was Gideon’s nickname. It means “Let Baal contend.” See note at Jdgs. 6:32.

▣ **“Shechem”** This was an old, large Canaanite city located between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim. It had important ties to Israel’s past.

1. through Abraham (cf. Gen. 12:6-7)
2. through Jacob (cf. Gen. 35:4)
3. it was the place of Joseph’s burial (cf. Jos. 24:32)
4. it was the site of covenant renewal under Joshua (cf. Jos. 8:30-35; 24; Deuteronomy 27-28)

▣ **“his mother’s relatives”** It was common for children of concubines to live with the mother and trace their descendants through her. Abimelech was of their “bone and flesh” (Jdgs. 9:2; cf. Gen. 29:14).

**9:2 “speak”** This is a *Qal* IMPERATIVE, which relates to the leaders of Shechem’s answer to Abimelech’s question.

▣ **“the leaders”** Literally “Baals” (BDB 127, “lord,” “master,” “husband”) is used in the sense of “leaders” (cf. Jos. 20:5; Jdgs. 9:5; 20:5; 1 Sam. 23:11; 2 Sam. 21:12).

▣ **“seventy men”** This probably is a round number. See note at Jdgs. 8:30.

▣ **“I am your bone and your flesh”** This idiom means “I am your blood kin” (cf. Gen. 29:14; 2 Sam. 5:1; 19:12-13). The first use of this idiom was when Adam first saw Eve in Gen. 2:23.

**9:4** Notice that the Canaanite population of Shechem supported Abimelech from the sacred offering to the local *Ba’al* temple (see Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the Ancient Near East).

Some scholars think that “Baal-berith” (i.e., lord of the covenant) was a corruption of the worship of YHWH and His covenant with Israel (cf. Jdgs. 8:33). See Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, pp. 293-294).

▣ **“seventy”** Notice the mention of this number in Jdgs. 9:2,5. See Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture, #8.

▣ **“the house of Baal-berith”** This shows the population was Canaanite. “Baal-berith” means “master of the covenant.” This sanctuary may have been a corruption of Joshua 24.

▣ **“Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows”** These were amoral mercenaries.

1. worthless – BDB 938, ADJECTIVE meaning “empty,” “vain,” or “worthless”
2. reckless – BDB 808, KB 923, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE; this VERB means “wanton” or “haughty” (Arabic root) and the VERB is found only here and Zeph. 3:4

Who we associate with reveals our own character!

**9:5 “Ophrah”** This town was about 30 miles away. Apparently it was where Gideon made his home (cf. Jdgs. 8:29).

▣ **“on one stone”** He must have had help. This slaughter almost has a sacrificial connotation. As Gideon destroyed the altar of *Ba’al*, now a man of *Ba’al* destroys Gideon’s family.

▣ **“Jotham”** Gideon’s youngest son; his name means “YHWH is perfect” (BDB 222).

**9:6 “Beth-millo”** The name means “house of fill dirt” (BDB 108 CONSTRUCT BDB 571). This seems to refer to the watchtower or citadel of the city or area. Probably the same as Jdgs. 9:46, “the tower of Shechem.” “The “millo” is also mentioned in 2 Sam. 5:9; 2 Kgs. 12:20. It was some type of earthwork.

▣ **“made Abimelech king”** Canaanites had kings of cities, but not the Israelis.

▣ **“the oak”** This was a place of special reverence (cf. Gen. 35:4). Joshua 24:26, “large stone” is probably the source of the “pillar.”

▣

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV, JPSOA

“the pillar”

TEV

– omit –

NJB

“cultic stone”

REB

“propped-up”

LXX

“of placing”

Peshitta

“of Mazpiah”

The MT has a PARTICIPLE (BDB 662, KB 714, *Hophal*), which means “to set up” or “to take a stand” (cf. LXX). However, most translations assume an emendation to “pillar” (BDB 663). This would have been an ancient pagan worship site or possibly a temple (cf. Jdgs. 9:46,51; see note at 9:49).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:7-15**

<sup>7</sup>Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and called out. Thus he said to them, “Listen to me, O men of Shechem, that God may listen to you. <sup>8</sup>Once the trees went forth to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, ‘Reign over us!’ <sup>9</sup>But the olive tree said to them, ‘Shall I leave my fatness with which God and men are honored, and go to wave over the trees?’ <sup>10</sup>Then the trees said to the fig tree, ‘You come, reign over us!’ <sup>11</sup>But the fig tree said to them, ‘Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to wave over the trees?’ <sup>12</sup>Then the trees said to the vine, ‘You come, reign over us!’ <sup>13</sup>But the vine said to them, ‘Shall I leave my new wine, which cheers God and men, and go to wave over the trees?’ <sup>14</sup>Finally all the trees said to the bramble, ‘You come, reign over us!’ <sup>15</sup>The bramble said to the trees, ‘If in truth you are anointing me as king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, may fire come out from the bramble and consume the cedars of Lebanon.’

**9:7 “stood on the top of Mount Gerizim”** This was a natural amphitheater (cf. Jos. 8:30-35; Deuteronomy 27-28). Shechem was located between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim (later site of the Samaritan temple).

▣ **“Listen to me. . .that God may listen to you”** This is a *Qal* IMPERATIVE and a *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense (BDB 1033, KB 1570, cf. 1 Chr. 28:2).

Jotham is speaking as a spokesman for God. He is using the genre of parable. He depicts the city of Shechem’s search for a king to trees asking for a king and being rejected again and again, but finally, a worthless tree (i.e., a bramble, BDB 31) agrees! The consequences are disastrous!

**9:8 “Once the trees went forth”** This is an emphatic phrase using an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and PERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 229, KB 246). The trees of the parable are very intent on having a king! See *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, p. 259.

▣ **“to anoint a king”** See Special Topic: Anointing in the Bible.

**9:13 “new wine, which cheers God and men”** See Num. 15:7,10, where wine is offered on the altar and Psalm 104:14-15, where God gives wine to men. Fermentation is not a biblical issue but intoxication, drunkenness is! See Special Topic: Alcohol – Alcoholism.

For “cheers God” see Special Topic: God Described As Human.

▣

**NASB, NKJV,  
JPSOA, LXX “God”  
NRSV, TEV,  
NJB, REB,  
Peshitta “gods”**

The interpretive question is “Were the citizens of Shechem mostly Canaanites or Israelites?” There is no ARTICLE with *Elohim* in either Jdgs. 9:9 or 9:13. See Special Topic: Names for Deity, C.

The fable of Jotham (Jdgs. 9:7-15) shows how the invading Israelites took over pagan worship sites but that later these sites again became idolatrous. The pagan fertility gods were worshiped by sexual imitation magic and drunkenness. Libations of wine were offered to their gods. This fits “gods” as the best historical option for translating *elohim* here. See Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 449-450, 501.

**9:14**

**NASB, NKJV,  
NRSV, LXX,  
Peshitta “bramble”  
TEV, NJB,  
JPSOA, REB “thorn bush”**

The exact kind of plant this term (BDB 31) represents is uncertain (NIDOTTE, vol. 1, p. 363). What is certain, it was a useless, desert bush in comparison to the olive, fig, and grapevine, which are food for all ANE societies. It is a different word from Jdgs. 9:7,16.

See UBS, *Fauna and Flora of the Bible*, pp. 184-186.

**9:15 “bramble. . .take refuge in my shade”** Brambles had no shade! See Special Topic: Shadow As a Metaphor for Protection and Care.

The VERB “take refuge” (BDB 340, KB 337, *Qal* IMPERATIVE) is powerful imagery for “put trust in.” It is normally used of trusting YHWH. See Special Topic: Refuge (OT).

It is only rarely used of other things/persons.

1. pagan gods (*elohim*) – Deut. 32:37
2. Zion (i.e., Jerusalem) – Isa. 14:32
3. Pharaoh (i.e., his military) – Isa. 30:2

Here, it is used metaphorically for protection and care but sarcastically because the bramble had no shade. Just as #1,3 above had no help either. Only YHWH can give what they seek (cf. 2 Sam. 22:3,31; Pro. 14:32; Isa. 25:4; 57:13; Zeph. 3:12).

▣ **“fire”** Brambles were often used for starting fires. They posed a real danger in grass fires!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:16-21**

**<sup>16</sup>“Now therefore, if you have dealt in truth and integrity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have dealt with him as he deserved—<sup>17</sup>for my**

**father fought for you and risked his life and delivered you from the hand of Midian; <sup>18</sup>but you have risen against my father’s house today and have killed his sons, seventy men, on one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your relative—<sup>19</sup>if then you have dealt in truth and integrity with Jerubbaal and his house this day, rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. <sup>20</sup>But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and consume the men of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from Beth-millo, and consume Abimelech.” <sup>21</sup>Then Jotham escaped and fled, and went to Beer and remained there because of Abimelech his brother.**

**9:16-21** Notice the number of times “if” (BDB 49) is used in the NASB (i.e., 4), which shows the contrast between what they should have done (i.e., honor Gideon and his family), but they did not (cf. Jdgs. 8:35). There are five *Qal* IMPERFECTS used in a JUSSIVE sense (i.e., “Let. . .”) in Jdgs. 9:19-20.

**9:16**

NASB, NKJV	“truth”
NRSV, LXX	“good faith”
TEV	“sincere”
NJB	“sincerity”
JPSOA	“loyalty”
REV	“fairly”
Peshitta	“truly”

This is a common FEMININE NOUN (BDB 54), which means “firmness,” “faithfulness,” “truth.” See Special Topic: Believe, Trust, Faith, and Faithfulness in the OT.

▣ **“integrity”** This is a NOUN (BDB 1071) meaning “complete,” “sound” (cf. Jos. 24:14), or “blameless” (cf. Deut. 18:13). It describes

1. Noah – Gen. 6:9
2. Abraham – Gen. 17:1
3. Israel – Deut. 18:13
4. Job – Job 12:4
5. David – Ps. 18:25
6. a person of integrity
  - a. SINGULAR – Pro. 11:5
  - b. PLURAL – Pro. 2:21; 28:10; Ps. 37:18

**9:18 “the son of a maidservant”** This was a derogatory way of referring to Abimelech’s Canaanite mother (cf. Jdgs. 8:31).

This is another example of the problems associated with polygamy and the sexual exploitation by powerful, wealthy men, even men like Gideon! The fallen human heart tends to act on self interests. See Special Topic: The Fall.

▣ **“because he is your relative”** This is another aspect of fallen human nature (i.e., the desire to help family and friends, instead of doing what is right). Nepotism is a curse in human society.

**9:21 “Beer”** The name means “well” (BDB 91) and the site is unknown.

The ABD, p. 640, has two suggestions.

1. Eusebius identified it as to the south, close to Beth-shemesh
2. modern scholars identify it as to the north, close to Ophrah, 7 miles NW of Beth-Sheam

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:22-25**

<sup>22</sup>Now Abimelech ruled over Israel three years. <sup>23</sup>Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, <sup>24</sup>so that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood might be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers. <sup>25</sup>The men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who might pass by them along the road; and it was told to Abimelech.

**9:22 “ruled over Israel”** This is a hyperbolic statement using a rare VERB (BDB 99, KB 1362), referring only to the city of Shechem, which was mostly Canaanite.

**9:23 “God sent an evil spirit”** In the OT YHWH is the ultimate source of all things (cf. 1 Sam. 16:14; 18:10; 19:9; 1 Kgs. 22:19-23; Ezekiel 14; and Amos 3:6b). This imagery is confusing to modern western people. God did not bless or remain with Abimelech.

☐ **“the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech”** This is the divine action related to Jotham’s curse in Jdgs. 9:15. See Special Topic: Spirit in the Bible. Judges 9:25 reveals the treachery as robbery and fraud. We reap what we sow (cf. Job 34:11; Ps. 28:4; 62:12; Pro. 24:12; Eccl. 12:14; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 14:12; 1 Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:7-10; 2 Tim. 4:14; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2:23; 20:12; 22:12)!

**9:24 “their blood might be laid on Abimelech”** Taking innocent blood caused a great curse (cf. Gen. 4:10; Num. 35:33; and 2 Sam. 3:28-29).

☐ **“the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers”** They were equally responsible.

**9:25 “Him. . .all”** Possibly (1) they wanted to capture and kill Abimelech and (2) while they waited they stole taxes from travelers.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:26-29**

<sup>26</sup>Now Gaal the son of Ebed came with his relatives, and crossed over into Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their trust in him. <sup>27</sup>They went out into the field and gathered *the grapes of their vineyards and trod them*, and held a festival; and they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank and cursed Abimelech. <sup>28</sup>Then Gaal the son of Ebed said, “Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal, and *is Zebul not his lieutenant?* Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him? <sup>29</sup>Would, therefore, that this people were under my authority! Then I would remove Abimelech.” And he said to Abimelech, “Increase your army and come out.”

**9:26** This shows the fickleness of the city.

☐ **“Gaal the son of Ebed”** The Hebrew term “Ebed” (BDB 714 II) means “servant.” This possibly means “Gaal, a son of a slave.” See note on “Gaal” at Jdgs. 9:29. Some Hebrew MSS have “Eber.” The Hebrew letters of “d” and “r” are similar and often confused in copying.

His family is unknown but he is possibly a Canaanite (i.e., Hittite name, see D. Winton Thomas ed., *Documents from Old Testament Times*, p. 40), trying to depose a half-Canaanite, half-Israelite (i.e., Abimelech).

**9:27 “a festival”** This was a harvest festival.

▣ **“the house of their god”** This refers to the sanctuary of Baal-bereth (cf. Jdgs. 8:33; 9:4) and surely is the same as “the house of El-berith” in Jdgs. 9:46.

▣ **“ate and drank and cursed Abimelech”** This was a drunken pagan feast. The term “curse” is literally “to be slight” (BDB 886, KB 1103, *Piel* IMPERFECT with *waw*). The connotation of “despise” is from the Assyrian cognate root. BDB calls it a “Canaanism.” It is translated by NASB as “curse” in Gen. 8:21; 12:3; Exod. 21:17; Lev. 19:14; Jos. 24:9; 2 Sam. 16:9; 1 Kgs. 2:8; Jer. 15:10.

**9:28 “Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem”** Because of 1 Sam. 25:10; 1 Kgs. 12:16, these two phrases are parallel. Abimelech was not present, he lived in Arumah.

▣ **“Zebal”** The name (BDB 259 II) means “prince” or “high one.” He is mentioned only in this chapter.

▣ **“lieutenant”** This (BDB 824) is possibly an administrative overseer of Abimelech, who lived at Shechem.

▣ **“Hamor”** This is the ancient ancestor and founder of Shechem (cf. Gen. 33:19; 34). His name means “Ass” (BDB 331 III), which was considered a noble animal, often ridden by the rich and powerful.

**9:29** Gaal (BDB 172) publically challenges Abimelech for control of Shechem. Apparently Abimelech was not present (cf. Jdgs. 9:30-33).

The name (BDB 172) is found only in this chapter. It is very similar to the Hebrew word “abhor,” “loathe” (BDB 171). It is surely possible this was a nickname by the author, “the loathed one, son of a slave.”

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:30-33**

<sup>30</sup>When Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger burned. <sup>31</sup>He sent messengers to Abimelech deceitfully, saying, “Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his relatives have come to Shechem; and behold, they are stirring up the city against you. <sup>32</sup>Now therefore, arise by night, you and the people who are with you, and lie in wait in the field. <sup>33</sup>In the morning, as soon as the sun is up, you shall rise early and rush upon the city; and behold, when he and the people who are with him come out against you, you shall do to them whatever you can.”

**9:31 “deceitfully”** There are several theories as to the exact meaning of this word (BDB 941, NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 1123, 3,c):

1. secretly (LXX<sup>B</sup>, NJB)
2. under false pretenses (Peshitta, REB)
3. in code
4. NRSV, TEV, have “Arumah” (BDB 371, i.e., a place name, cf. Jdgs. 9:41 BDB 72)



NASB, NRSV,	
NJB	“stirring up”
NKJV, Peshitta	“are fortifying”
TEV	“not going to let you into the city”
JPSOA	“inciting”
REB	“turning the city against you”
LXX <sup>A</sup>	“besieging the city against you”

The MT has the VERB (BDB 848 II, KB 1015, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) meaning “to besiege,” “to confine,” “to shut in” (see TEV, LXX<sup>A</sup>, NKJV, Peshitta), but others see the root as BDB 849 III, which means “to show hostility towards” (cf. Deut. 2:9,19; Esther 8:11).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:34-41**

<sup>34</sup>So Abimelech and all the people who *were* with him arose by night and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies. <sup>35</sup>Now Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance of the city gate; and Abimelech and the people who were with him arose from the ambush. <sup>36</sup>When Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, “Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains.” But Zebul said to him, “You are seeing the shadow of the mountains as *if they were men*.” <sup>37</sup> Gaal spoke again and said, “Behold, people are coming down from the highest part of the land, and one company comes by the way of the diviners’ oak.” <sup>38</sup>Then Zebul said to him, “Where is your boasting now with which you said, ‘Who is Abimelech that we should serve him?’ Is this not the people whom you despised? Go out now and fight with them!” <sup>39</sup>So Gaal went out before the leaders of Shechem and fought with Abimelech. <sup>40</sup>Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him; and many fell wounded up to the entrance of the gate. <sup>41</sup>Then Abimelech remained at Arumah, but Zebul drove out Gaal and his relatives so that they could not remain in Shechem.

**9:37 “the highest part of the land”** This is literally “the navel” (BDB 371), a mythological link between heaven and earth (cf. Ezek. 38:12), but here it is parallel to Jdgs. 9:36, “the tops of the mountains,” so it has no mythological connotations. See NIDOTTE, vol. 2, pp. 333-334.



NASB	“the diviners’ oak”
NKJV	“the Diviners’ Terebinth tree”
NRSV, JPSOA,	
LXX <sup>B</sup>	“the director of Elon-meonenim”
TEV	“from the oak tree of fortune tellers”
NJB	“the Diviners’ oak”
REB	“along the road of the soothsayers’ Terebinth”
LXX <sup>A</sup>	“the direction of Watchers’ oak”
Peshitta	“the house of the oak of Meaonin”

All these translations came from a PARTICIPLE (BDB 778, KB 857, *Poel*) meaning “practice soothsaying.” This is not like Deborah, a true judge of Israel. This is related to *Ba’al* worship. This is condemned in Deut. 18:10-11. It shows the Canaanite nature of Shechem in this period. Here, the false priest/prophet is associated with a divine tree.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:42-45**

<sup>42</sup>Now it came about the next day, that the people went out to the field, and it was told to Abimelech. <sup>43</sup>So he took his people and divided them into three companies, and lay in wait in the field; when he looked and saw the people coming out from the city, he arose against them and slew them. <sup>44</sup>Then Abimelech and the company who was with him dashed forward and stood in the entrance of the city gate; the other two companies then dashed against all who *were* in the field and slew them. <sup>45</sup>Abimelech fought against the city all that day, and he captured the city and killed the people who *were* in it; then he razed the city and sowed it with salt.

**9:42 “the people went out to the field”** This refers to (1) supporters of Gaal in Shechem or surrounding cities or (2) those men mentioned in Jdgs. 9:25.

**9:45 “sowed it with salt”** This was a curse symbol of cultic cleansing. This may also be why he burns the temple in Jdgs. 9:52.

It is also possible to see this salt-sowing as a curse. It made the land infertile. See *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, p. 260; and NIDOTTE, vol. 2, pp. 947-948,949.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:46-49**

<sup>46</sup>When all the leaders of the tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the inner chamber of the temple of El-berith. <sup>47</sup>It was told Abimelech that all the leaders of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. <sup>48</sup>So Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who *were* with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand and cut down a branch from the trees, and lifted it and laid it on his shoulder. Then he said to the people who *were* with him, “What you have seen me do, hurry *and* do likewise.” <sup>49</sup>All the people also cut down each one his branch and followed Abimelech, and put *them* on the inner chamber and set the inner chamber on fire over those *inside*, so that all the men of the tower of Shechem also died, about a thousand men and women.

**9:46**

NASB, “the inner chamber”

NKJV, NRSV,

TEV, LXX “stronghold”

NJB, REB “the crypt”

JPSOA “the tunnel”

The MT has a term (BDB 863, see NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 845), which means an underground chamber. The NOUN is used only here and 1 Sam. 13:6. There are several words used to describe structures at Shechem, some above ground, some below. See note at Jdgs. 9:49.

▣ **“El-berith”** The names means “God of the covenant.” It is probably the same as Baal-berith of Jdgs. 8:37; 9:4.

**9:48 “Mount Zalmon”** It means “dark one” (BDB 854 I, i.e., forested hill).

**9:49 “the tower of Shechem”** This refers to a fortified position.

1. a raised hill (Jdgs. 9:6)
2. special manmade earth-work (Jdgs. 9:6)
3. a citadel (Jdgs. 9:51)
4. a special central watchtower (i.e., “the pillar at Shechem,” Jdgs. 9:6)

5. a worship structure (Jdgs. 9:6,46)

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:50-57**

<sup>50</sup>Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he camped against Thebez and captured it. <sup>51</sup>But there was a strong tower in the center of the city, and all the men and women with all the leaders of the city fled there and shut themselves in; and they went up on the roof of the tower. <sup>52</sup>So Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it, and approached the entrance of the tower to burn it with fire. <sup>53</sup>But a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head, crushing his skull. <sup>54</sup>Then he called quickly to the young man, his armor bearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, so that it will not be said of me, 'A woman slew him.'" So the young man pierced him through, and he died. <sup>55</sup>When the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, each departed to his home. <sup>56</sup>Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father in killing his seventy brothers. <sup>57</sup>Also God returned all the wickedness of the men of Shechem on their heads, and the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal came upon them.

**9:50 "Thebez"** This town "Thebez" (BDB 1062) is mentioned only here and 2 Sam. 11:21. The ABD, p. 443, locates this site as a fertile region 13 miles northeast of Shechem, modern "Tubas" (so Eusebius).

Modern scholarship thinks it should read "Tirzah" (BDB 953), which is about 7 miles northeast of Shechem (cf. Jos. 12:24).

**9:53 "upper millstone"** Its size would be 2" or 3" by 18" round (cf. 2 Sam. 11:21).

**9:54 "kill me"** There are different words and stems used in this verse for "kill/die."

1. kill me – BDB 559, KB 562, *Polel* IMPERATIVE, which means "put to death," cf. 1 Sam. 14:13; 17:51; 2 Sam. 1:9,10,16
2. slew – BDB 246, KB 255, *Qal* PERFECT, which means "kill violently," cf Jdgs. 9:5,18,24,56; 16:2; 20:5; 1 Sam. 16:2; 22:21; 24:11,18, etc.
3. died – same as #1 but *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*

It was a "shame" to be killed by a woman (cf. Jdgs. 4:9,17-23; 5:24-27).

**9:57** This shows God is ethical and just! See note at Jdgs. 9:23.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why is Abimelech not a true judge?
2. Is the population of Shechem in this period Canaanite or Israelite?
3. Is “Baal-berith” a corruption of YHWH’s covenant?
4. Explain the fable of Jdgs. 9:7-15.
5. Does YHWH direct “evil spirits”?
6. Who is Gaal?
7. What does it mean “to sow a city with salt”? (Jdgs. 9:45)
8. Is “the temple (lit. house) of El-berith” in Jdgs. 9:46 the same as Baal-berith in Jdgs. 8:33; 9:4,27?
9. Why does Abimelech destroy Thebez?
10. Explain Jdgs. 9:57 in your own words.

# JUDGES 10

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Oppression of Philistines and Ammonites	Tola	Tola and Jair	Tola	Tola
10:1-2	10:1-2	10:1-2	10:1-2	10:1-2
	Jair		Jair	Jair
10:3-5	10:3-5	10:3-5	10:3-5	10:3-5
	Israel Oppressed Again	Jephthah (10:6-12:7)	Jephthah	Jephthah
10:6-9	10:6-9	10:6-9	10:6-9	10:6-16
10:10-16	10:10-14	10:10-16	10:10 10:11-14	
	10:15-16		10:15-16	
10:17-18	10:17-18	10:17-18	10:17-18	10:17-18

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. Judges 10:1-5 lists two of the minor judges. A remaining list of minor judges is found at the conclusion of Judges 12.
- B. There seems to be some connection between the persons mentioned in the early part of Judges 10 and later tribal names within Issachar. It is uncertain how these are exactly related (cf. Gen. 46:13; Num. 26:33; and 1 Chr. 7:1-2).
- C. James Martin, *The Book of Judges*, p.133, suggests that “Judges 10:6-16 is a deuteronomistic sermon on the general theme of apostasy and repentance, now used to introduce the Jephthah story.”  
Because of all the nations/peoples mentioned which do not fit into this period of Israel’s history, that comment may be accurate.
- D. The account of Jephthah is seen by some to begin in Jdgs. 10:6, but 10:6-16 is really a summary of the next literary unit which deals with the invasion of the Ammonites and the Philistines.

#### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

##### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:1-2

<sup>1</sup>Now after Abimelech died, Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, arose to save Israel; and he lived in Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim. <sup>2</sup>He judged Israel twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried in Shamir.

**10:1 “Now after Abimelech died”** The life story of Abimelech, Gideon’s son by a Canaanite concubine, is recorded in Judges 9.

▣ **“Tola”** We do not know very much about this man except that his name (BDB 1069 II) is similar to “scarlet.” This is one of the sons of Issachar who will later become a tribal group.

Tola was a significant regional deliverer (NASB, “saved,” BDB 446, KB 448, *Hiphil* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT) for central Israel for an extended period (i.e., twenty years). See Special Topic: Salvation (OT Term). He is only called a “minor judge” because there is less recorded about him and his exploits than other judges, such as Gideon and Samson.

▣ **“the son of Puah, the son of Dodo”** This is the only mention of these ancestors in the OT.

▣ **“he lived in Shamir”** The name’s root (BDB 1038 I) means “thornbush” or “sharp.” We do not know the site of this city but it is in the hill country of Ephraim. It is not the city by the same name in Judah (cf. Jos. 15:48).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:3-5**

**<sup>3</sup>After him, Jair the Gileadite arose and judged Israel twenty-two years. <sup>4</sup>He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities in the land of Gilead that are called Havvoth-jair to this day. <sup>5</sup>And Jair died and was buried in Kamon.**

**10:3 “Jair”** His name (BDB 22) means “enlightener.” He was a Gileadite, which means he settled in the trans-Jordan area (i.e., tribal area of Manasseh, cf. Num. 32:41; Deut. 3:14).

**10:4 “He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys”** This imagery expressed the wealth and power of these ancient judges (cf. Jdgs. 12:9,14).

▣ **“they had thirty cities in the land of Gilead that are called Havvoth-jair”** The word “donkey” (BDB 747) has the same root as “city” (BDB 746 II). It is a word play in Hebrew (see footnote in JPSOA). The name “Jair” (BDB 22) is also a similar sounding root.

1. donkey – רִיעַ
2. tent village – רִיעַ
3. Jair – רִיאִי

▣ **“to this day”** The phrase “to this day” shows that the author is writing at a later time.

**10:5 “Kamon”** This location is unknown but probably was in the tribal allocation of eastern Manasseh (ABD, p. 5).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:6-9**

**<sup>6</sup>Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; thus they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him. <sup>7</sup>The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the sons of Ammon. <sup>8</sup>They afflicted and crushed the sons of Israel that year; for eighteen years they afflicted all the sons of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in Gilead in the land of the Amorites. <sup>9</sup>The**

**sons of Ammon crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah, Benjamin, and the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was greatly distressed.**

**10:6 “the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD”** This is “the” recurrent phrase in Judges 1-16. It shows the vicious cycle of the apostasy (see Special Topic: Apostasy) of the people of God, even though they were in the Promised Land (i.e., Abrahamic promise) with the presence of the Levites, priests, and Temple (i.e., Moses’ revelations).

▣ **“they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him”** These two VERBS combine to show how Israel turned from YHWH to other gods (i.e., Jdgs. 10:13).

1. forsook – BDB 736, KB 806, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*
  - a. YHWH – Deut. 28:20; 31:16; 32:15; Jer. 1:16; Jonah 2:9
  - b. His covenant – Deut. 29:25; 1 Kgs. 19:10,14
2. serve – BDB 712, KB 773, *Qal* PERFECT (i.e., fulfill the requirements of YHWH’s covenant) – Exod. 3:12; 4:23; 7:16; Jos. 24:15,16; Job 21:15; Ps. 22:30; Mal. 3:14  
The Israelites were told again and again not to serve other gods – Deut. 4:28; 5:7; 7:4,16; 8:19; 12:30; 13:6-7; 28:14,36,64; 29:25-26; 30:17; 31:20; Jos. 23:16; Jdgs. 2:19; 3:7; 10:6,10.

▣ **“they served the Baals and the Ashtaroth”** Baal and Ashtaroth are Canaanite fertility gods. From archaeological studies in the Promised Land it seems they were either (1) brother and sister or (2) lovers. They followed the ancient fertility pattern of a dying and rising god based on the cycles of nature, which was so common in the ancient world. They were worshiped by imitation magic involving sacred prostitution (cf. Jdgs. 2:11-19). See Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the Ancient Near East.

▣ **“the gods of Syria”** Although we do not know the exact names of these gods, it is obvious that the gods of Syria, or Amram, are similar to the gods of Canaan. Hadad was the name of the male fertility god, similar to Canaanite, *Ba’al*. The female counterpoint was *Astartu* or *Athtart*, more commonly known as *Anath*.

▣ **“the gods of Sidon”** The main god of the Phoenicians was *Melquat*. However, we know from Ahab and Jezebel that Tyranian *Ba’al* worship was also dominant in this locale.

▣ **“the gods of Moab”** For a similar listing of gods, see 1 Kgs. 11:5-7, where they were still prevalent in the days of Solomon. The gods of Moab would be *Chemosh* and *Milcom* (see Special Topic: *Molech*).

▣ **“the gods of the sons of Ammon”** This would be the gods *Molech* and *Milcom*. They have the consonants “mlk” in them and are somehow probably related to a corruption of the Hebrew word for king, *Melek* (BDB 572).

▣ **“these gods of the Philistines”** We know one of these gods from the story of Samson. His name is *Dagon* and he was a fish god or fertility god. The Philistines were Aegean mercenaries who settled in the southern Palestinian coast somewhere around 1250 B.C. They did not establish their own culture but simply amalgamated with the culture where they settled. This means that they probably also incorporated the fertility gods of Canaan. They were the only uncircumcised group in this part of the world.

**10:7 “The anger of the LORD burned against Israel”** This is anthropomorphic language (see Special Topic: God Described As Human).

It clearly illustrates

1. God's hatred of sin, rebellion, and disobedience
2. God is no respecter of persons. The Canaanites sinned; He took them out of the land (cf. Gen. 15:12-22). Israel sinned; He took them out of the land (i.e., the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles, cf. Isa. 10:5; 28:21; 51:20).

▣ **“He sold them. . .”** The words “ransom” and “redeem” (see Special Topic: Ransom/Redeem) mean “to buy back.” The ANTONYM is “sold,” which is imagery for YHWH’s rejection (cf. Jdgs. 2:14; 3:8; 4:2,9; 1 Sam. 12:9; Isa. 50:1; 52:3). He will not be their “Divine Warrior.” The covenant is conditional (see Special Topic: Covenant).

**10:8 “for eighteen years”** This terrible cycle of oppression had been going on for eighteen years. God allowed this because of the apostasy of His people.

Two strong VERBS are used to describe Israel’s punishment from YHWH (Jdgs. 10:7).

1. “afflicted” (lit. “shattered”) – BDB 950, KB 1271, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*; this VERB is found only here and Exod. 15:6
2. “crushed” – BDB 954, KB 1285, *Poel* IMPERFECT with *waw*; this VERB is used in the “cursing and blessing” section of Deut. 28:33; it is used of Abimelech’s skull being crushed by a stone in Jdgs. 9:53

These two VERBS have a similar sound, which may be an intentional word play.

**10:9 “also against Judah, Benjamin, and the house of Ephraim”** This is an account of an armed foray of the Ammonites into the central area of the west bank. However, the major oppression is in the general area of Ammon in the trans-Jordan area of Bashan and Gilead.

▣ **“so that Israel was greatly distressed”** This VERB (BDB 864, KB 1050, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*) is intensified by the addition of the ADVERB “sorely” (BDB 547).

This VERB has the opposite connotation of the Hebrew concept of “to be free,” “to be spacious,” “to be unrestricted.” Israel was “hemmed in” by her enemies on several sides. She was trapped and without hope, without the help of her covenant God. But they had rejected Him and gone after the Canaanite gods, who could not deliver them (cf. Jdgs. 10:13-14).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:10-16**

**<sup>10</sup>Then the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD saying, “We have sinned against You, for indeed, we have forsaken our God and served the Baals.” <sup>11</sup>The LORD said to the sons of Israel, “*Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the sons of Ammon, and the Philistines?* <sup>12</sup>Also when the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hands. <sup>13</sup>Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods; therefore I will no longer deliver you. <sup>14</sup>Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress.” <sup>15</sup>The sons of Israel said to the LORD “We have sinned, do to us whatever seems good to You; only please deliver us this day.” <sup>16</sup>So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord; and He could bear the misery of Israel no longer.**

**10:10** This was a verbal affirmation of their sin and idolatry. See Special Topic: Repentance in the OT.

**10:11 “The LORD said to the sons of Israel”** This was probably through a prophet. The amazing thing is that He still listened to them when they sinned against Him again and again (cf. Jdgs. 10:12). See Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (OT).

▣ **“the Egyptians”** This refers to YHWH’s routing them during exodus.

▣ **“the Amorites”** This refers to the defeat of Og and Bashan on the eastern side of the Jordan (cf. Num. 21:21ff). See Special Topic: Amorite.

▣ **“the sons of Ammon”** An excellent summary of what is known about this tribal groups is found in *Young’s Analytical Concordance of the Bible*, p. 32.

▣ **“the Philistines”** This may refer to the actions of Shamgar of Jdgs. 3:31.

▣ **“the Sidonians”** We have no account of the defeat of this group of people unless they are somehow related to Deborah’s defeat of the northern Canaanite confederation stationed in Hazor (Judges 4; 5).

▣ **“the Amalekites”** These marauding desert warriors are often identified with Moab (cf. Jdgs. 3:13) or Midian (cf. Jdgs. 6:3,33). Again, a good summary is found in *Young’s Analytical Concordance*, p. 31.

▣ **“the Maonites”** There is a group by this name who later will become enemies of Judah (cf. 1 Chr. 4:41; 2 Chr. 20:1; 26:7). However, in this period they are unknown. The LXX changed the text at this point to the term “Midianites” and that fits the context much better. The UBS Text Project gives “Maon” a “C” rating (considerable doubt), p. 101.

**10:13 “I will deliver you no more”** This is an Oriental overstatement by YHWH, or the rest of the book of Judges is absolutely contradictory. God wanted them to know that He was not the God simply of the crisis times. His purpose in Israel was to reveal Himself through them, and this could not be accomplished in the vicious cycle of apostasy in which Israel had become involved. See Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan.

**10:14** This is ironic, biting sarcasm from the mouth of God (cf. Deut. 32:37-38) to a people who knew better but were still going after other gods who were not really gods.

Note the VERBS:

1. go – BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. cry out to other gods – BDB 277, KB 277, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. let them deliver you – BDB 446, KB 448, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense

**10:15 “do to us whatever seems good to You; only please deliver us this day”** If this wasn’t so sad, it would be humorous. The people of God say, “Well, you’re right, God, but one more time please do this for us.” Foxhole religion has always been a problem of semi-religious humanity who only want God to meet their immediate needs.

**10:16 “He could bear the misery of Israel no longer”** This is literally “His soul was short with the misery.” The NASB margin and the Peshitta see this phrase as referring to Israel, not YHWH.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:17-18**

**<sup>17</sup>Then the sons of Ammon were summoned and they camped in Gilead. And the sons of Israel gathered together and camped in Mizpah. <sup>18</sup>The people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another, “Who is the man who will begin to fight against the sons of Ammon? He shall become head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.”**

**10:17-18** This introduces the story of Jephthah (cf. Jdgs. 10:17-12:7).

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why do we not know more about these minor judges?
2. Why did the people of God go after the gods of Canaan?
3. Why is Jdgs. 10:15 so important?
4. How is Jdgs. 10:16 an act of repentance?

# JUDGES 11

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Jephthah the Ninth Judge	Jephthah	Jephthah (10:6-12:7)	Jephthah	Jephthah Lays Down His Terms
11:1-3	11:1-3	11:1-3	11:1-3	11:1-3
11:4-11	11:4-11	11:4-11	11:4-6 11:7 11:8 11:9 11:10-11	11:4-11     Jephthah Negotiates with the Ammonites
11:12-28	11:12-28	11:12-28	11:12 11:13 11:14-28	11:12-28
Jephthah's Tragic Vow	Jephthah's Vow and Victory			Jephthah's Vow and His Victory
11:29-33	11:29-31 11:32-33 The Daughter of Jephthah	11:29-33	11:29-31 11:32-33 Jephthah's Daughter	11:29-33
11:34-40	11:34-40	11:34-40	11:34-35 11:36-39a 11:39b-40	11:34-40

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

#### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 11:1-3

<sup>1</sup>Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a valiant warrior, but he was the son of a harlot. And Gilead was the father of Jephthah. <sup>2</sup>Gilead's wife bore him sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out and said to him, "You shall not have an inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman." <sup>3</sup>So Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob; and worthless fellows gathered themselves about Jephthah, and they went out with him.

**11:1 "Jephthah"** His name means "He (God) opens" (BDB 836, possibly "God opens the womb"). See note about him in Heb. 11:37.

▣ **"the Gileadite"** The name "Gilead" (BDB 167) is used for

1. the hill country of northeast Jordan (BDB 166), which was the tribal allocation of Reuben and Gad (Deut. 3:12)

2. an ADJECTIVE for a person living in northeast trans-Jordan (BDB 167) between the Arnon and Jabbok Rivers, Jdgs. 11:1
3. the proper name of a person (BDB 167, #6), Jdgs. 11:1

▣ **“a valiant warrior”** This was used by the angel to describe Gideon (cf. Jdgs. 6:12). It could denote

1. fighting courage and ability
2. nobility of some type (wealth, influence, social standing, see Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 70; quotes Jos. 8:30; Ruth 2:1; 1 Sam. 9:1; 2 Kgs. 15:20; 24:14)

▣ **“harlot”** This (BDB 275, KB 278) was a socially unacceptable union within Israel. A concubine was a socially acceptable union but still not a full legal wife (i.e., limited inheritance). Jephthah’s mother was probably Canaanite. Jephthah had no inheritance rights (cf. Jdgs. 11:3).

▣ **“the father of”** This phrase is really from one VERB “begot” (BDB 408, KB 411, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT with *waw*).

**11:3 “Tob”** This word (BDB 376 IV) means “good” or “fruitful,” possibly northeast in Gilead on the eastern side of the Jordan.

▣ **“worthless fellows”** This refers to mercenaries. This was much like David’s early life (i.e., 1 Sam. 22:1-2). It shows Jephthah was a leader of men; those without hope or social standing rallied to him. Josephus (*Antiq.* 5.7.8) says they asked for Jephthah’s help because he maintained an army (i.e., “worthless fellows”) at his own expense.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 11:4-11**

**<sup>4</sup>It came about after a while that the sons of Ammon fought against Israel. <sup>5</sup>When the sons of Ammon fought against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob; <sup>6</sup>and they said to Jephthah, “Come and be our chief that we may fight against the sons of Ammon.” <sup>7</sup>Then Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, “Did you not hate me and drive me from my father’s house? So why have you come to me now when you are in trouble?” <sup>8</sup>The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, “For this reason we have now returned to you, that you may go with us and fight with the sons of Ammon and become head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.” <sup>9</sup>So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, “If you take me back to fight against the sons of Ammon and the LORD gives them up to me, will I become your head?” <sup>10</sup>The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, “The LORD is witness between us; surely we will do as you have said.” <sup>11</sup>Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and chief over them; and Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD at Mizpah.**

**11:4** See Jdgs. 10:7-9, where the eighteen year affliction is described.

**11:5 “elders”** It is uncertain if the “elders” included part of Jephthah’s brothers who rejected him and sent him away. Obviously the community of Gilead knew about it and, at the least, condoned it by silence and inaction. See Special Topic: Elder.

**11:6 “chief”** This is a rare term (BDB 892), which means “the decider” or “man in authority.”

1. in Joshua 10:24 – chiefs of the men of war
2. in Daniel 11:18 – a military commander
3. in Judges 11 he is designated

- a. chief – BDB 892, cf. Jdgs. 11:6,11
- b. head – BDB 910 (see Special Topic: Head), cf. Jdgs. 11:8,9,11

He is never designated “king” but “head over all the inhabitants of Gilead” (Jdgs. 11:8).

**11:7** Jephthah’s expulsion from Gilead was a community decision.

**11:8**

- NASB “For this reason”
- NKJV, NJB “This is why”
- NRSV “Nevertheless”
- JPSOA “Honestly”
- REB “It is because of that”
- NET Bible “That may be true”
- LXX<sup>A</sup> (AB, p. 198) “It is not like that”

The problem is the wide semantical field of the Hebrew ADVERB (BDB 485-487). The leaders of Gilead were forced, because of circumstances, to turn to Jephthah, the only military force in the area. They wanted the past to be the past. They could not change what happened to Jephthah by his half-brothers. His countrymen needed him now!

**11:9** “if. . .the LORD gives them up to me” This shows Jephthah’s faith in YHWH, but without having a full knowledge of His will (cf. Dan. 3:17-18,28).

**11:10** “the LORD is witness” This is a covenant oath. See Special Topic: Covenant.

**11:11** “Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD at Mizpah” Mizpah (BDB 859 I, “watchtower”) was a local holy place. This seems to be his inauguration into public office.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 11:12-28**

<sup>12</sup>Now Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the sons of Ammon, saying, “What is between you and me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?” <sup>13</sup>The king of the sons of Ammon said to the messengers of Jephthah, “Because Israel took away my land when they came up from Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok and the Jordan; therefore, return them peaceably now.” <sup>14</sup>But Jephthah sent messengers again to the king of the sons of Ammon, <sup>15</sup>and they said to him, “Thus says Jephthah, ‘Israel did not take away the land of Moab nor the land of the sons of Ammon. <sup>16</sup>For when they came up from Egypt, and Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh, <sup>17</sup>then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, “Please let us pass through your land,” but the king of Edom would not listen. And they also sent to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh. <sup>18</sup>Then they went through the wilderness and around the land of Edom and the land of Moab, and came to the east side of the land of Moab, and they camped beyond the Arnon; but they did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon *was* the border of Moab. <sup>19</sup>And Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon, and Israel said to him, “Please let us pass through your land to our place.” <sup>20</sup>But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory; so Sihon gathered all his people and camped in Jahaz and fought with Israel. <sup>21</sup>The LORD the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them; so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country. <sup>22</sup>So they possessed all the territory of the Amorites, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok, and from the wilderness as far as the Jordan. <sup>23</sup>Since now the LORD the God of Israel, drove out the Amorites from before His people Israel, are you then to possess it? <sup>24</sup>Do you not possess what Chemosh your god gives you to possess?”

**So whatever the LORD our God has driven out before us, we will possess it. <sup>25</sup>Now are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive with Israel, or did he ever fight against them? <sup>26</sup>While Israel lived in Heshbon and its villages, and in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities that are on the banks of the Arnon, three hundred years, why did you not recover them within that time? <sup>27</sup>I therefore have not sinned against you, but you are doing me wrong by making war against me; may the LORD the Judge, judge today between the sons of Israel and the sons of Ammon.” <sup>28</sup>But the king of the sons of Ammon disregarded the message which Jephthah sent him.**

**11:12 “What is between you and me”** He uses an idiom, asking why are we fighting? (cf. 2 Sam. 16:10; 19:22; 1 Kgs. 17:18; 2 Kgs. 3:13; 2 Chr. 35:21). Jephthah tries to solve the issue by dialogue.

**11:13-27** This is a historical summary of the situation and the opposing claims. It reviews the events of the exodus (see Num. 20:1,4-12; 21:4,22,25-26; 22:2). Jephthah knew the history of Israel well (i.e., oral tradition or records).

**11:13** Three rivers are listed as the boundaries of the disputed area. They were in the tribal allocation of Reuben and the southern part of Gad.

**11:16 “Red Sea”** This could refer to (1) the miraculous water crossing when leaving Egypt (see Special Topic: The Route of the Exodus) or (2) Israel’s later arrival at the Gulf of Aqaba. See Special Topic: The Red Sea.

▣ **“Kadesh”** This was a large desert oasis in the southern part of Judah’s allocation in the wilderness of Paran, where Israel camped so long (cf. Num. 13:26; 20:1; Deut. 1:19-25).

**11:17 “Edom”** Edomites were relatives of the Israelites from Esau (cf. Num. 20:14-21; Deut. 2:5-8). See Special Topic: Edom and Israel.

▣ **“Moab”** These were relatives of the Israelites from Lot (cf. Gen. 19:36-38), as is Ammon (cf. Deut. 2:19,27). Ammon was not well established during the conquest era but by the time of the Judges they were.

**11:19 “Heshbon”** Heshbon is located on the “King’s Highway” and was Sihon’s capital (cf. Num. 21:26).

**11:20 “trust”** This term (BDB 52, KB 63, *Hiphil* perfect) basically meant “to confirm” or “to support.” It is an important theological word. See Special Topic: Believe, Trust, Faith, and Faithfulness in the OT.

**11:21 “the LORD. . .gave Sihon. . .into the hand of Israel”** God is the controller of history. See Special Topic: Hand.

**11:23 “Chemosh”** This was the god of Moab, not the Ammonites. From Ugaritic a connection has been found between *Molech* and *Chemosh* through *Anath-Chemosh*.

**11:24** The NASB Study Bible, p. 330, suggests that because *Chemosh* was the chief deity of the Moabites, not the Canaanites:

1. at this time, Ammon ruled Moab

2. at this time, there was a confederation between Ammon and Moab.

**11:25** This verse has three emphatic grammatical structures (i.e., INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE plus a VERBAL of the same root).

1. better than – BDB 373, KB 370, *Qal* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE plus *Qal* PARTICIPLE
2. ever strive – BDB 936, KB 1224, *Qal* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE plus *Qal* PERFECT
3. ever fight against – BDB 535, KB 526, *Niphal* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE plus *Niphal* PERFECT

▣ **“Balak”** See Numbers 22:2-24:5.

**11:26 “Aroer”** It was a region associated with the Arnon River.

▣ **“three hundred years”** This seems too long! The Jewish Study Bible, p. 537, thinks this refers to the time from the conquest to Jephthah. However, this number also equals the number of years already mentioned in Judges. Modern scholarship would see them as overlapping, but the author of Judges records them chronologically. The exact number is 319 (see *Tyndale OT Commentaries, Judges and Ruth*, p. 145). See Special Topic: Date of the Exodus.

**11:27 “may the LORD, the Judge”** The *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE “Judge” (BDB 1047, KB 1622) is combined with a *Qal* IMPERFECT of the same VERB used in a JUSSIVE sense (cf. 1 Sam. 24:12). YHWH is the only true Judge (cf. Gen. 16:5; 18:28; 31:53; 1 Sam. 24:15)!

One day all will appear before Him to give an account for the stewardship of the gift of life. See Special Topic: Judge, Judgment, Justice in Isaiah and Special Topic: Judgment in the NT.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 11:29-33**

<sup>29</sup>Now the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, so that he passed through Gilead and Manasseh; then he passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he went on to the sons of Ammon. <sup>30</sup>Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, “If You will indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand, <sup>31</sup>then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the LORD’S, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.” <sup>32</sup>So Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD gave them into his hand. <sup>33</sup>He struck them with a very great slaughter from Aroer to the entrance of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim. So the sons of Ammon were subdued before the sons of Israel.

**11:29 “the Spirit of the LORD”** This is God’s means of giving skill, power, and wisdom (cf. Exod. 31:3; 35:31; Jdgs. 3:10; 6:34; 13:25; 14:6,19; 15:14; 1 Sam. 10:10; 11:6; 16:13; 2 Sam. 23:2; 1 Chr. 12:18). See Special Topic: Spirit in the Bible.

▣ The VERB “passed through” (BDB 716, KB 778) in this verse occurs three times, all in the *Qal* stem. Jephthah is on the move through the direction of the “Spirit of YHWH.”

**11:30 “Jephthah made a vow to the LORD”** Proverbs 20:25 warns against making rash vows.

An “oath” is given when someone promises to do something in God’s name which involves a curse on themselves if they do not do it.

A “vow” is a promise made to God based on God doing something first (cf. Gen. 28:20-22; Num. 21:2; Jdgs. 11:30-31; 1 Sam. 1:11; 2 Sam. 15:8 [cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 4, p. 33]).

**11:31-33** There has been much confusion here as to the precise conditions of the vow. See *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, pp. 193-195).

1. human sacrifice
  - a. part of surrounding cultures
  - b. historical precedent in Israel
    - (1) Genesis 22
    - (2) Leviticus 27:28-29
  - c. context of Jdgs. 11:31
  - d. the Targums, Josephus (*Antiq.* 5.7.10) and all early Christian commentators
2. religious seclusion
  - a. Hebrew text of Jdgs. 11:31 can mean “or” or “and”
  - b. existence of Temple virgins (cf. Exod. 38:8; 1 Sam. 2:22)
  - c. Lev. 27:1-8 (i.e., a person could be bought back)
  - d. context of Jdgs. 11:38
  - e. Kimchi, a Jewish commentator of the Middle Ages, was the first to advocate the concept of seclusion

If I had to choose, I regrettably must choose #1 in this context.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 11:34-40**

**<sup>34</sup>When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. Now she was his one *and* only child; besides her he had no son or daughter. <sup>35</sup>When he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you are among those who trouble me; for I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot take *it* back.” <sup>36</sup>So she said to him, “My father, you have given your word to the LORD; do to me as you have said, since the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the sons of Ammon.” <sup>37</sup>She said to her father, “Let this thing be done for me; let me alone two months, that I may go to the mountains and weep because of my virginity, I and my companions.” <sup>38</sup>Then he said, “Go.” So he sent her away for two months; and she left with her companions, and wept on the mountains because of her virginity. <sup>39</sup>At the end of two months she returned to her father, who did to her according to the vow which he had made; and she had no relations with a man. Thus it became a custom in Israel, <sup>40</sup>that the daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.**

**11:34 “with tambourines and with dancing”** This was a common victory celebration (cf. Exod. 15:20; 1 Sam. 18:6; Ps. 68:25; and Jer. 31:4).

☐ **“she was his one *and* only child”** This meant that she was his only hope for grandchildren! His line would be permanently cut off.

**11:35 “tore his clothes”** This is a typical sign of mourning. See Special Topic: Grieving Rites.

☐ **“brought me very low”** This is another example of an emphatic Hebrew grammatical structure (i.e., INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE plus a PERFECT VERB of the same root, BDB 502, KB 499, cf. Jdgs. 11:25).

▣ **“those who trouble me”** This VERB (BDB 747, KB 824, *Qal* PARTICIPLE) occurs only here and Job 6:4, describing a state of psychological disruption and agitation.

▣ **“I have given my word to the LORD”** This account merges great faith and tragedy!

▣ **“I cannot take *it* back”** See Leviticus 27; Num. 30:2; Deut. 23:21-23; and Eccl. 5:4-5.

**11:36** This verse shows the faith of the daughter!

**11:37** See notes at Jdgs. 11:31-33 for the interpretive options.

▣

NASB	“go to the mountains”
NKJV	“go and wander on the mountains”
NRSV, TEV, NJB, Peshitta	“wander on the mountains”
JPSOA	“lament”
REV	“roam the hills”
LXX	“descend on the mountains”

The VERB (BDB 432, KB 434, *Qal* PERFECT with *waw*) means “to come down” or “go down” (LXX). Most translations see the difficulty of “descending on the mountains” and see the VERB as an idiom for grief (i.e., bow down or descend).

**11:38 “her virginity”** See Special Topic: Virgin.

**11:39 “had no relations with a man”** The verb is literally “know” (BDB 393, KB 390, *Qal* perfect) but used in a specialized sense of “no sexual contact.” See “know” used for sexual relations in Gen. 4:1; 19:8; Num. 31:17,35; Jdgs. 11:39; 21:11; 1 Sam. 1:19; 1 Kgs. 1:4. See Special Topic: Know.

**11:40 “commemorate”** This can mean either (1) “celebrate,” as in Ps. 8:1 or (2) “mourn,” as in New Jerusalem Bible translation.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. List the acts and words of Jephthah in Judges 11 that show his faith!
2. Why does Jdgs. 11:15-25 mention the exodus and conquest?
3. What does Jdgs. 11:29 imply?
4. Did Jephthah really sacrifice his daughter?

## JUDGES 12

### PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Jephthah and His Successors	Jephthah's Conflict with Ephraim	Jephthah (10:6-12:7)	Jephthah and the Ephraimites	War Between Ephraim and Gilead
12:1-7	12:1-7	12:1-6	12:1 12:2-6	12:1-6a  12:6b Death of Jephthah
		12:7	12:7	12:7
	Ibzan, Elon and Abdon	Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon	Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon	Ibzan
12:8-10	12:8-10	12:8-10	12:8-10	12:8-10  Elon
12:11-12	12:11-12	12:11-12	12:11-12	12:11-12  Abdon
12:13-15	12:13-15	12:13-15	12:13-15	12:13-15

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. Judges 12 concludes the story of Jephthah, cf. Jdgs. 10:17-12:7.
- B. There are several other “minor” Judges mentioned in chapter 12.
  1. Ibzan – BDB 7, Jdgs. 12:8-10
  2. Elon – BDB 19 II, Jdgs. 12:11-12
  3. Abdon – BDB 715, Jdgs. 12:13-15

#### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

##### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:1-7

<sup>1</sup>Then the men of Ephraim were summoned, and they crossed to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, “Why did you cross over to fight against the sons of Ammon without calling us to go with you? We will burn your house down on you.” <sup>2</sup>Jephthah said to them, “I and my people were at great strife with the sons of Ammon; when I called you, you did not deliver me from their hand. <sup>3</sup>When I saw that you would not deliver *me*, I took my life in my hands and crossed over against the sons of Ammon, and the LORD gave them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?” <sup>4</sup>Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought Ephraim; and the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, “You are fugitives of Ephraim, O Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim *and* in the midst of Manasseh.” <sup>5</sup>The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan opposite Ephraim. And it happened when *any* of the fugitives of Ephraim said, “Let me cross over,” the men of Gilead would say to him, “Are you an Ephraimite?” If he said, “No,” <sup>6</sup>then they would say to him, “Say now, ‘Shibboleth.’” But he said, “Sibboleth,” for he could not pronounce it correctly. Then they seized him and slew him at the fords of the Jordan. Thus there fell at that time 42,000 of Ephraim. <sup>7</sup>Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in *one of* the cities of Gilead.

**12:1 “men of Ephraim”** This was the largest and strongest northern tribe. The foreshadowing pride on their part can be seen in Jdgs. 8:1.

▣ **“Zaphon”** This name (BDB 861 II) means “north.” It was a city 5 miles north of Succoth (cf. Jos. 13:27).

▣ **“We will burn your house down on you”** There was serious tribal jealousy during this period (cf. Jdgs. 8:1-2). This may be an idiom threatening Jephthah’s family/descendants.

**12:2 “I and my people. . .when I called you”** Jephthah was not as tactful as Gideon. He apparently had asked for help (not recorded in the OT) and they did not respond.

**12:3 “I took my life in my hands”** This is literally “I took my soul in my hand.” This is an idiom for risking one’s life. It is not meant to be in contrast with “the LORD gave them into my hand.” Jephthah acts on his faith in YHWH’s leadership and power (i.e., Jdgs. 11:29).

▣ **“the LORD gave them into my hand”** Jephthah’s faith in YHWH’s leadership is again obvious.

I have a theological question about texts like this one.

1. Was it meant to show the sovereignty of Israel’s God (i.e., one causality; cf. Isa. 45:7; Amos 3:6b)?
2. Was it part of the ANE worldview that the gods of the nations fought on their behalf and the strongest won the battle?
3. Is this only applicable to YHWH’s covenant people (i.e., Israel) who bear His name and reputation (cf. Ezek. 36:22-36; see Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan)?

Although I cannot answer these questions, I, as a NT believer, believe my life is in the hands of God, but I am not sure of a nation. There are no biblical promises to modern nations! I guess I feel most comfortable with a sovereign, loving, caring God who is with me and for me, but does not micro-manage every detail of my life. My life is not a prewritten script. My choices and motives do count and have effect in time and eternity. There is a God-given dignity to humans being made in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen. 1:26-27). We are not robots but free, eternal, moral creatures. See Special Topic: Predestination (Calvinism) vs Human Free Will (Arminianism) and Special Topic: Election/Predestination and the Need for A Theological Balance.

**12:4 “You are fugitives of Ephraim”** This racial slur (omitted in the LXX) started the war. It accused the Gileadites of not being true sons of Israel, but foreigners (i.e., trans-Jordan tribes, cf. Joshua 22).

**12:5 “the fords of Jordan”** There were only certain crossing places (i.e., shallow places, cf. Jdgs. 3:28; 7:24-25) and no others. Control of them was militarily significant.

Jephthah defeating Ephraim was a miraculous, divine event.

**12:6 “Shibboleth”** The word meant “ear of corn” (BDB 987 II) or “stream” (BDB 987 I), according to which dialect (NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 31-32), i.e., Gilead or Ephraim. A similar acknowledgment of dialect occurs in Matt. 26:73.

▣ **“could not pronounce it correctly”** The MT has a VERB (BDB 465, KB 464, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT) that means “to fix” or “to arrange.”

1. The UBS Text Project, p. 103, gives this a “B” rating (some doubt), but most English translations alter it (לִכְיָ לִכְיָ) and translate it as “for he could not pronounce.”

2. The LXX has “keep straight.”
3. *The Ginsburg Hebrew Notes* has “distinguish,” meaning the Ephraimites could not hear the difference between
  - a. “ear of corn” – BDB 987 II, cf. Gen. 41:5-7
  - b. “flowing stream” – BDB 987 I, cf. Ps. 69:2

▣ **“42,000”** There are some real number problems in the OT (see Edwin Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* and John J. Davis, *Biblical Numerology*). Part of the problem may be the proper translation of the Hebrew terms of “thousand” or “military unit.” See Special Topic: Thousand (*elpeh*).

**12:7 “buried in one of the cities of Gilead”** The LXX and Vulgate have “Mizpah” but Josephus (*Antiq.* 5.7.12) has “Sebee.”

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:8-10**

**<sup>8</sup>Now Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel after him. <sup>9</sup>He had thirty sons, and thirty daughters whom he gave in marriage outside the family, and he brought in thirty daughters from outside for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years. <sup>10</sup>Then Ibzan died and was buried in Bethlehem.**

**12:8 “Bethlehem”** Josephus says in Judah, but context implies “Bethlehem” in Zebulun (cf. Jos. 19:15).

**12:9 “thirty sons and thirty daughters”** Once again, these numbers show the power and the wealth of Judges.

▣ In the ANE alliances between nations, clans, families were sealed by the giving and taking of wives (i.e., David and Solomon).

**12:10** Josephus (*Antiq.* 5.7.13) says Ibzan was a Judean because of the use of “Bethlehem,” but Ibzan was from “Bethlehem” in Zebulun, not Judah.

It is surprising that Josephus adds (5.7.13) that “He did nothing in the seven years of his administration that was worth recording, or deserved a memorial.” This is merely speculation. We do not know why some judges have more verses than others.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:11-12**

**<sup>11</sup>Now Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel after him; and he judged Israel ten years. <sup>12</sup>Then Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried at Aijalon in the land of Zebulun.**

**12:12 “Elon. . . Aijalon”** These are spelled with similar Hebrew consonants but different vowels (BDB 19 and BDB 19). The LXX has “Elon” as a place name.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:13-15**

**<sup>13</sup>Now Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel after him. <sup>14</sup>He had forty sons and thirty grandsons who rode on seventy donkeys; and he judged Israel eight years. <sup>15</sup>Then Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died and was buried at Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites.**

**12:13 “the Pirathonite”** This is probably the name of a city. Pirathon was one of David’s Mighty Men (cf. 2 Sam. 23:30; 1 Chr. 11:31; 27:14). It also goes by the name Benaiah.

**12:14 “forty”** See Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture, #7.

▣ **“seventy donkeys”** This was another sign of a wealthy clan (cf. Jdgs. 10:4)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why was Ephraim so upset?
2. How could such a small army defeat the tribe of Ephraim?
3. Explain how pronouncing “Shibboleth” revealed the Ephraimites.
4. If 42,000 is too large of a number, how can it be reduced, yet the text of the Bible be true?
5. Explain the number symbolism of
  - a. “thirty”
  - b. “forty”
  - c. “seventy”
6. Is Ibzan the only Judean judge?

# JUDGES 13

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Philistines Oppress Again	The Birth of Samson	Samson (13:1-16:31)	The Birth of Samson	Samson's Birth Foretold
13:1	13:1	13:1	13:1	13:1
13:2-7	13:2-5 13:6-7	13:2-7	13:2-5 13:6-7	13:2-7 The Angel Appears A Second Time
13:8-14	13:8-14	13:8-14	13:8 13:9-10 13:11 13:12 13:13-14	13:8-25
13:15-20	13:15-23	13:15-18	13:15-16a 13:16b 13:17 13:18	
13:21-23		13:19-23	13:19-21 13:22 13:23	
13:24-25	13:24-25	13:24-25	13:24-25	

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. The account of Samson's exploits is recorded in Jdgs. 13:1-16:31. The imperfections of the judges continue but worsen.
- B. Josephus, in his book, *Antiquities of the Jews* 8.7.2,3, elaborates this story along the lines of a godly Manoah's jealousy against the angel (i.e., appeared as a young man). However, this very detailed account seems to be pure fabrication.
- C. The concept of "the angel of the Lord," developed in Judges 13, is one of many biblical examples of a theophany or physical manifestation of God. There seem to be two emphases in the OT:
  1. that the angel of the Lord represents Deity (cf. Gen. 16:7-13; 31:13; 22:11-15; 48:15,16; Exod. 2:2,4; 13:1; 14:19; and Zech. 3:1,2)
  2. the separateness between YHWH and the angel (cf. Gen. 24:7,40; Exod. 23:30; 32:34; 1 Chr. 21:15ff; Zech. 1:12,13)

Both of these emphases are continued in this chapter. See Special Topic: The Angel of the LORD.

- D. The tribe of Dan was originally allocated land next to that of Benjamin and Judah in the southern part of the Promised Land. But, because of external pressures from the Philistines (cf. Jdgs. 10:7; the Philistines were a major threat up until the time of David, 2 Sam. 5:17-25), Dan moved north as seen in the latter part of the book of Judges (i.e., Judges 18). This is the origin of the famous proverb, “from Dan to Beersheba,” which refers to the entire Promised Land and reflects the northern movement of this tribe.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:1

**<sup>1</sup>Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, so that the LORD gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years.**

**13:1 “Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD”** The vicious cycle of the book of Judges continues. The fallenness of mankind, which began in Genesis 3, has shown its deadly trail throughout the Pentateuch and continues throughout these two historical books (Joshua and Judges), and will continue throughout the entire Bible. See Special Topic: The Fall.

▣ **“Philistines”** These were part of the Sea Peoples from the Aegean Islands. Apparently they were originally a mercenary group who tried to invade Egypt around 1250 B.C. They were successfully repulsed by Rameses III and then settled on the southwest coast of Palestine.

The term “Palestine” comes from the name “Philistine” (BDB 814). They had five major cities: Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, and Gath. Each one of these had their own chieftain or king. They brought iron age technology with them and, therefore, had technological superiority over the Hebrews for many years (cf. 1 Sam. 13:19-22). They also had chariots which meant they controlled the coastal plains. At first their domination of the people of God was subtle and not military in nature. This is basically why Samson had to instigate an international incident in order to arouse the people of God to throw off the Philistine yoke (cf. Jdgs. 15:9-13).

▣ **“forty”** This word is often a round number signifying a long time period. In Jdgs. 3:11; 5:31; 8:28 it is used of a period of rest and peace, but here it denotes an extended period of oppression, but it was subtle pressure, not overt.

See Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture, #7.

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:2-7

**<sup>2</sup>There was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had borne no children. <sup>3</sup>Then the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, “Behold now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son. <sup>4</sup>Now therefore, be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing. <sup>5</sup>For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines.” <sup>6</sup>Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, “A man of God came to me and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. And I did not ask him where he came from, nor did he tell me his name. <sup>7</sup>But he said to me, ‘Behold, you shall**

**conceive and give birth to a son, and now you shall not drink wine or strong drink nor eat any unclean thing, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.”**

**13:2 “a man of Zorah”** This is a Danite city which is mentioned in Jos. 19:41. It is about 14 miles west of Jerusalem.

▣ **“his wife was barren”** As has often been the case in the OT, God shows His power by raising up his leaders from barren women (i.e., Sarai – Gen. 11:30; Rebekah – Gen. 25:21; Rachel – Gen. 29:31). This same theological priority is seen in that He very seldom chooses the eldest son (see Special Topic: Firstborn), which would be the cultural choice, to lead His people. God wants to receive the glory for His acts, not human resources (cf. Jdgs. 7:2).

**13:3 “the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman”** We see the angel of the Lord several times throughout this chapter. In my opinion, it may be the pre-Incarnate Christ. There are some verses where the angel is identified with Deity (cf. Jdgs. 13:11), where he answered, “I am,” which is the covenant name for God; and Jdgs. 13:22 where Manoah and his wife believe they are going to die because they have seen God. However, the separation between God and the angel can also be seen in Jdgs. 13:8,9, and 10.

It is interesting to note that we have YHWH mentioned in Jdgs. 13:8, the Spirit of God in 13:25, and if the angel of the Lord here is the pre-Incarnate Jesus, then we have an OT example of the Trinity involved in this account. See Special Topic: The Angel of the LORD and Special Topic: The Trinity.

**13:4 “be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing”** Here we have the threefold description of a Nazirite vow. The word “Nazirite” (BDB 634, see Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, pp. 466-467 and James Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, pp. 452-453) comes from the term “to be separate” or “to consecrate.” It is fully described in Numbers 6. In this account it is defined as someone who cannot drink wine or touch anything unclean or shave his head. Samson will violate each of these at some point in his life. We have examples of Nazirites in the NT (cf. Luke 1:15, which describes John the Baptist in these terms; Acts 18:18 and 21:21-26 describes Paul and his Nazirite vow). There were two types of these vows, one was permanent (John the Baptist) and one was temporary (Paul). The rabbis said that the vow had to last at least 30 days. The long hair was a symbol of special dedication to God.

This verse has

1. a *Niphal* IMPERATIVE – “be careful” (BDB 1036, KB 1581)
- 2-3. two IMPERFECTS used as JUSSIVES
  - a. not to drink – BDB 1059, KB 1667
  - b. not to eat – BDB 37, KB 46; see Special Topic: The Old Testament Food Laws

The JUSSIVE sense is continued in Jdgs. 13:8 and 14. We learn from 13:5 that these restrictions are related to him as being a special dedication to God from his birth (i.e., a Nazirite, cf. Numbers 6; see Special Topic: Nazirite Vow).

It is also interesting to note that the Nazirite aspects of both Jdgs. 13:4 and 14 apply specifically only to the mother, who is not mentioned in Numbers 6.

Their continuation in the life of Samson is stated in Jdgs. 13:5,7. A birth dedication was meant to be permanent (like the Rechabites of Jeremiah 35 and John the Baptist). Yet, his life would be anything but “dedicated to God”! Here is a good example of how the faith hopes of the parents are not always transferred to the children! But God will use his deviant behavior for His purposes.

**13:5 “no razor shall come upon his head”** Razors were often associated with idolatry, which may explain the prohibition (cf. Deut. 32:42; Jdgs. 5:2; 2 Sam. 14:26).

▣ **“and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines”** Notice that it is only going to be the beginning of the struggle—not the end.

Notice the two *Hiphil* IMPERFECT VERBALS.

1. “begin” – BDB 320, KB 319, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT
2. “to deliver” – BDB 446, KB 448, *Hiphil* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT

Judah’s conflict with the Philistines lasted for many years, but Samson started the military response to the Philistine’s gradual and pervasive influence in the region.

▣ **“to deliver”** This VERB (BDB 446, KB 448, *Hiphil* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT) means “deliver,” “save,” “be victorious.” The deliverance is from Philistine influence to the influence of YHWH. Biblical “salvation” is always a deliverance “from” and “to”!

For the NOUN form, see Special Topic: Salvation (OT Term).

**13:6 “the woman came and told her husband, saying, “A man of God came to me and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome”** This is apparently where Josephus got his interpretation that Manoah was jealous and the angel came back in order to dispel that jealousy.

▣

NASB, NKJV “very awesome”

NRSV “most inspiring”

NJB “so majestic”

JPSOA “very frightening”

REB “most terrible”

LXX<sup>A</sup> “most remarkable”

LXX<sup>B</sup> “most awe-inspiring”

Peshitta “I trembled exceedingly”

The MT has a PARTICIPLE and an ADVERB.

1. BDB 431, KB 432, *Niphal* PARTICIPLE, from the word “fear,” but when used of YHWH
  - a. causes astonishment and awe
  - b. awe-inspiring majesty
  - c. inspires reverence

It is used of a theophany both here and in Gen. 28:17

2. BDB 547, KB 538, exceedingly

▣ **“tell me his name”** The woman did not ask his name or the place of his origin. This same emphasis on the importance of the name (see Special Topic: “The Name” of YHWH) can be seen in

1. Gen. 32:29, where Jacob wrestled with the angel
2. Exod. 3:13-14 and 33:17, where Moses asks God whom he should say sent him to deliver the Israelites

The names of spiritual beings was a large part of ANE magic. See Special Topic: Magic.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:8-14**

**<sup>8</sup>Then Manoah entreated the LORD and said, “O Lord, please let the man of God whom You have sent come to us again that he may teach us what to do for the boy who is to be born.” <sup>9</sup>God listened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again to the woman as she was sitting in the field, but Manoah her husband was not with her. <sup>10</sup>So the woman ran quickly and told her husband, “Behold, the man who came the *other* day has appeared to me.” <sup>11</sup>Then Manoah arose and followed his wife, and when he came to the man he said to him, “Are you the man who spoke to the woman?”**

**And he said, “I am.”** <sup>12</sup>Manoah said, “Now when your words come *to pass*, what shall be the boy’s mode of life and his vocation?” <sup>13</sup>So the angel of the LORD said to Manoah, “Let the woman pay attention to all that I said. <sup>14</sup>She should not eat anything that comes from the vine nor drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing; let her observe all that I commanded.”

**13:8 “that he may teach us what to do for the boy who is to be born”** It was the responsibility of the Hebrew father to train the child in the family faith (cf. Exod. 10:2; 12:26; 13:8,14; Deut. 4:9,10; 6:7,20-25; 11:19; 31:13; 32:46), and in his vocation. Apparently Manoah had the best of motives and was asking for more information. It is interesting that the angel does return but does not give any additional information.

**13:10 “the man”** Apparently the angel looked like any man of that day (see Special Topic: God Described As Human). He may have been startling and attractive but it was not obvious that this was a theophany (cf. Jdgs. 13:22).

**13:11 “he said, ‘I am’”** This, of course, would be just the normal response but also it is the covenant name for God taken from Exod. 3:14 (see Special Topic: Names for Deity, D). This same answer by Jesus will cause the Jews to try to kill Him because He claims to be God (cf. John 8:56-59).

**13:12 “Now when your words come *to pass*”** This is a faith affirmation on Manoah’s part of his trust in the angel’s prediction (cf. Jdgs. 13:17, a son for his barren wife).

The AB, p. 220, suggests that both IMPERFECT VERBS are “transparently JUSSIVE” (i.e., “Let your words come true”).

**13:14 “strong drink”** Basically this was the mixing of fermented wine with spices or the addition of other fermented grain extract for the purpose of raising the alcohol content. See Special Topic: Alcohol – Alcoholism, I., A., #4).

The LXX changes the FEMININE forms to MASCULINE forms. This makes the verse refer to Samson and not his mother, as in Jdgs. 13:7.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:15-20**

<sup>15</sup>Then Manoah said to the angel of the LORD “Please let us detain you so that we may prepare a young goat for you.” <sup>16</sup>The angel of the LORD said to Manoah, “Though you detain me, I will not eat your food, but if you prepare a burnt offering, *then* offer it to the LORD” For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the LORD <sup>17</sup>Manoah said to the angel of the LORD “What is your name, so that when your words come *to pass*, we may honor you?” <sup>18</sup>But the angel of the LORD said to him, “Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?” <sup>19</sup>So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering and offered it on the rock to the LORD and He performed wonders while Manoah and his wife looked on. <sup>20</sup>For it came about when the flame went up from the altar toward heaven, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. When Manoah and his wife saw *this*, they fell on their faces to the ground.

**13:17-18 “What is your name”** The angel answers by saying that it is too wonderful for them. The term “wonderful” (BDB 816) is translated “difficult” in Gen. 18:14 and as “marvelously wonderful” in Isa. 29:14. Apparently the name was significant but the angel simply could not reveal it to them at this time (cf. Gen. 32:29). This angel did some wonderful things (set fire to the sacrifice), much like the angel apparently did for Gideon in Jdgs. 6:19-21. See Special Topic: Wonderful Things.

13:18

NASB, NKJV

“wonderful”

NRSV

“too wonderful”

TEV, NJB,

REB

“of wonder”

JPSOA

“unknowable”

LXX

“amazing”

Peshitta

“glorious”

NASB margin

“incomprehensible”

The MT has the ADJECTIVE “wonderful” or “incomprehensible” (BDB 811, KB 928). For the VERB see Special Topic: Wonderful Things.

The ADJECTIVE is used here for the name of the angel of the Lord and in Ps. 139:6 of God’s knowledge; also note it is one of the titles of the Messiah in Isa. 9:6, and YHWH’s counsel in Isa. 28:29.

**13:19 “So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering and offered it on the rock to the LORD”**

This is similar to Gideon’s offering of the sacrifice in Jdgs. 6:21-22 (i.e., the angel caused the offering to catch fire).

▣ **“He performed wonders”** The “He” is capitalized in the New American Standard Bible, implying that the angel is divine (cf. Jdgs. 13:21).

Notice the VERB (BDB 810, KB 927, *Hiphil* PARTICIPLE) is the same root as the angel’s name in Jdgs. 13:18.

**13:20 “For it came about when the flame went up from the altar toward heaven, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar”** Now this will get someone’s attention! It does seem to cause the fear which is mentioned in Jdgs. 13:22.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:21-23**

**<sup>21</sup>Now the angel of the LORD did not appear to Manoah or his wife again. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the LORD. <sup>22</sup>So Manoah said to his wife, “We will surely die, for we have seen God.” <sup>23</sup>But his wife said to him, “If the LORD had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these things, nor would He have let us hear *things* like this at this time.”**

**13:22 “We shall surely die, for we have seen God”** This was a common concept in the OT and apparently was connected to His holiness. Manoah’s wife’s response in Jdgs. 13:23 was very pragmatic and assured him that since God has given him this revelation, He was not going to kill him.

The phrase “surely die” is an intensified Hebrew grammatical structure of an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and an IMPERFECT VERB from the same root (BDB 559, KB 562).

There is some confusion in the OT about the ability of humans to see God. I have inserted my notes from Exod. 33:17-23.

**Exod. 33:17-23** Moses wants to visibly see YHWH. Already he has a unique, intimate relationship (cf. Exod. 33:11; Num. 12:8; Deut. 34:10), but he wants more. Apparently Moses

1. did not think seeing YHWH meant death
2. did not fully grasp Exod. 20:4
3. wanted another experience like Exod. 24:10,11, but this time just for him

There is uncertainty about the fear of seeing God, which was thought to cause death because of God's holiness.

1. some did see God (in the Angel of the LORD) and live
  - a. Gen. 16:13 – Hagar, as the Angel of the LORD
  - b. Gen. 32:30 – Jacob in a vision
  - c. Exod. 24:10-11 – 70 elders and Moses in a theophany
  - d. Deut. 5:24 – Israel sees the glory of YHWH as the Angel of the LORD
  - e. Jdgs. 6:22-23 – Gideon
  - f. Jdgs. 13:21-22 – Samson's parents as the Angel of the LORD
  - g. Isa. 6:1,5 (cf. John 12:41) – Isaiah in a vision,
  - h. Ezek. 1:26-27 – Ezekiel in a vision of YHWH's chariot/throne
  - i. Dan. 7:9-14 – Daniel in a vision as the Ancient of Days
2. no one has seen God and lived
  - a. Exod. 3:6; 19:21; 33:20,23
  - b. Lev. 16:2
  - c. Num. 4:20
  - d. 1 Kgs. 19:13
  - e. even angels hid their faces, Isa. 6:2
  - f. John 1:18; 5:37; 6:46
  - g. 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16
  - h. 1 John 4:12,20
3. no one has heard God and lived
  - a. Exod. 20:19
  - b. Deut. 4:33; 5:24-26; 18:16
  - c. 2 Cor. 12:1-4
4. believers can see God in Jesus – John
5. one day believers will see God
  - a. Matt. 5:8
  - b. 1 Cor. 13:12
  - c. Heb. 12:14
  - d. Rev. 22:4
  - e. note Job 42:5; Ps. 17:15; 42:2

▣ **“God”** This is the Hebrew title *Elohim*, which can refer to spiritual beings (JPSOA, NET Bible). See Special Topic: Names for Deity, C.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:24-25**

<sup>24</sup>Then the woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson; and the child grew up and the LORD blessed him. <sup>25</sup>And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

**13:24 “named him Samson”** We are not sure of the origin of this name (BDB 1039, KB 1592). Some say it comes from the word “sun” (BDB 1039) but this is speculation. If it does,

1. the ending is diminutive resulting in “little sun” or “child of the sun”
2. it may relate to the nearby town of Beth-shemesh (NASB Study Bible, p. 332)

▣ **“the child grew up and the LORD blessed him”** This language is similar to

1. Samuel – 1 Sam. 2:26
2. Jesus – Luke 2:52

It denotes a normal, healthy childhood. The “blessing” does not imply that YHWH approved of Samson’s later lustful attitude toward Philistine women, although it is obvious from the account that YHWH would use this for His greater purposes.

**13:25 “the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him”** This seems to refer to specific occurrences. One of the great tragedies of Samson’s life is in Jdgs. 16:20 where the Spirit of the Lord departed from him and he did not even notice it. For similar experiences in Judges see Jdgs. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 14:6,19; 15:14,19. These judges acted in God’s power, not their own! See Special Topic: Spirit in the Bible.

▣ **“Mahaneh-dan”** This literally means “the camp of Dan” (BDB 334). It shows the external (i.e., Philistine) pressure that the tribe of Dan was under, so that they could not even live in the walled cities but were forced to live in nomadic tents.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Describe the Philistines
2. Who is the angel of the Lord?
3. What is a Nazirite?
4. Why did Manoah think he was going to die when he saw God?
5. How is the Spirit of God that came upon Samson related to the Spirit of God in the NT?

# JUDGES 14

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Samson's Marriage	Samson's Philistine Wife	Samson (13:1-16:31)	Samson and the Woman from Timnah	Samson Marries
14:1-4	14:1-9	14:1-4	14:1-2 14:3a 14:3b 14:4	14:1-4
14:5-9		14:5-9	14:5-6 14:7-9	14:5-11
14:10-11	14:10-14	14:10-14	14:10-13a	
Samson's Riddle			14:13b	Samson's Riddle
14:12-14 (14)	(14)	(14)	14:14 (14)	14:12-14 (14b)
14:15-20 (18)	14:15-18 (18)	14:15-20 (18)	14:15 14:16a 14:16b-20  (18)	14:15-17   14:18 (18)
	14:19-20			14:19-20

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

#### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 14:1-4

<sup>1</sup>Then Samson went down to Timnah and saw a woman in Timnah, *one* of the daughters of the Philistines. <sup>2</sup>So he came back and told his father and mother, "I saw a woman in Timnah, *one* of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife." <sup>3</sup>Then his father and his mother said to him, "Is there no woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she looks good to me." <sup>4</sup>However, his father and mother did not know that it was of the LORD, for He was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. Now at that time the Philistines were ruling over Israel.

**14:1 "Samson went down to Timnah"** Timnah means "the allotted portion" (BDB 584). It is a famous wine-growing region and is about 4 miles from his hometown of Zorah.

▣ **“he saw a woman”** *The Tyndale Commentary Series*, p. 162, says, “the term ‘woman’ used here is a very unusual term to describe a ‘woman of marriageable age.’” It usually referred to a widow or someone who had been divorced and is often used as a word of contempt (cf. Jdgs. 16:4). It is used in Jdgs. 13:1,3,7,10 and may be an Israelite way of showing some contempt for this Philistine woman.

**14:2 “get her for me as a wife”** At this time and in this culture (ANE) the parents arranged the marriages for their children. Samson was willing for his parents to do the traditional thing if he got to choose his own wife. Apparently his choice was based solely on physical beauty (cf. Jdgs. 14:3,7). Samson had tremendous problems during his life with this particular aspect of his character.

See *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, p. 266, which mentions that since the land of Canaan was allotted by God to specific tribes, then marrying within one’s tribe was an important way to keep the land in the family. The year of Jubilee (every 50 years, cf. Leviticus 25; 27) was also a way to restore lost land to the original family.

**14:3 “the uncircumcised”** I am putting my notes on Gen. 17:10 here to explain this term.

**Genesis 17:10 “circumcised”** Circumcision (BDB 557 II) was not an uncommon rite in the ancient Orient. All of the surrounding people circumcised their children at puberty except possibly the Assyrians, Babylonians, Hivites, or Horites of central Palestine and the Philistines (Aegean people) who invaded the southern coast of Palestine in the 1200's B.C. (cf. Jer. 9:25-26). However, circumcision had a religious purpose for the Israelites. It was always an outer sign of an inner faith (cf. Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4; 9:26; Rom. 2:28-29; Col. 2:11-13).

The parents may have been aware of the prohibitions in Exod. 34:11,16; Deut. 7:1,3, of marrying Canaanite women. See Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, pp. 46-48.

**14:4 “However, his father and mother did not know that it was of the LORD, for He was seeking an occasion against the Philistines”** This is an extremely important theological point made by the contemporary author or later editor. This assumes the reader/hearer understands that God is using Samson’s inappropriate behavior and lust toward foreign women to occasion a conflict between the Philistines and the Judeans.

This is the theological thrust of the entire account. YHWH used Samson in a unique way. He was equipped to begin this confrontation. The King James and Revised Standard Versions have a small “h” in the word “He” in this verse, but in the New English Bible and New American Standard Bible, it is a capital “H.” The capitalization implies that it was YHWH seeking an occasion and not Samson.

▣ **“occasion”** This NOUN (BDB 58, KB 1675) occurs only here according to BDB. BDB has “opportunity,” i.e., “ground for quarrel.” See the use of the *Hithpael* PARTICIPLE in 2 Kgs. 5:7, “see how he is seeking a quarrel against me.”

A closely related form is found in Pro. 18:1, where it is translated “desire.” YHWH wanted and planned a way to stimulate Judah to resist and repulse the non-military Philistine invasion.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 14:5-9**

**<sup>5</sup>Then Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came as far as the vineyards of Timnah; and behold, a young lion *came* roaring toward him. <sup>6</sup>The Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, so that he tore him as one tears a young goat though he had nothing in his hand; but he did not tell his father or mother what he had done. <sup>7</sup>So he went down and talked to the woman; and she looked good to Samson. <sup>8</sup>When he returned later to take her, he turned aside to look**

**at the carcass of the lion; and behold, a swarm of bees and honey were in the body of the lion. <sup>9</sup>So he scraped the honey into his hands and went on, eating as he went. When he came to his father and mother, he gave *some* to them and they ate *it*; but he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey out of the body of the lion.**

**14:5 “young lion”** This would not refer to a lion cub but to a young lion in all of its strength (BDB 498 CONSTRUCT BDB 71). There has been much allegorical interpretation based on this lion and the honey. However, in context, it is simply recorded to show the origin of the riddle that will be given in Jdgs. 14:14. Be careful of allegorical interpretations. Biblical authority comes only from the intent of the original author as seen in the context. See Seminar of Biblical Interpretation, on [www.freebiblecommentary.org](http://www.freebiblecommentary.org).

**14:6 “The Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily”** Again, Samson had little control of this but the Spirit comes in times of crisis or great excitement. See note at Jdgs. 13:25 and Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 881-885. See Special Topic: Spirit in the Bible and Special Topic: Personhood of the Spirit.

▣ **“he had nothing in his hand”** This may imply that

1. he carried no weapons because the Philistines had all of the metal implements (cf. 1 Sam. 13:19-22)
2. it may simply be an allusion to Samson’s strength (i.e., “tore him as one tears a kid”)

**14:7 “she looked good to Samson”** Samson was living life according to his individual desires, not YHWH’s laws. The key theme of the tragic book of Judges is “every man did what was right in his own eyes” (cf. Jdgs. 17:6; 21:25 for the concluding verse of the book). Samson’s actions reveal this same mentality (cf. Jdgs. 14:3). Personal freedom, personal preference, not YHWH guided human activity. It was, and is, a disaster (cf. Gen. 6:5,11-12,13; 8:21; Deut. 12:8; Rom. 1:17-3:18,23)!

As far as biblical precedent, remember the Bible records what humans do/did, not what they should have done. Do not confuse “foreknowledge” and “predestination”! The Bible is a guide book, not to bind our freedom but to insure long, happy individual lives in stable, productive societies. See Special Topic: election/Predestination and the Need for A Theological Balance.

**14:9** Touching a dead body would violate Samson’s Nazirite vow (cf. Numbers 6).

▣ **“eating as he went”** This is a construction with an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and IMPERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 229, KB 246), which seems to emphasize that he took little time to do this and went on his way quickly. He gave no thought to the ceremonial consequences of touching the body of an unclean animal (for food).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 14:10-11**

**<sup>10</sup>Then his father went down to the woman; and Samson made a feast there, for the young men customarily did this. <sup>11</sup>When they saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him.**

**14:10** This week-long feast, given by a Philistine family, would surely have involved heavy drinking (BDB 1059, meaning, “drinking bout”; Josephus, *Antiq* 5.8.6). This was another violation of the Nazirite vow of Numbers 6.

**14:11 “they brought thirty companions to be with him”** Samson apparently consented to the local custom of having a week long marriage celebration. Josephus (*Antiq.* 5.8.6) tells us that these were thirty Philistines who were sent to guard him. The LXX<sup>A</sup> here adds “when they were afraid of him.” Samson was an awesome physical person, so this may be true.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 14:12-14**

<sup>12</sup>Then Samson said to them, “Let me now propound a riddle to you; if you will indeed tell it to me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes. <sup>13</sup>But if you are unable to tell me, then you shall give me thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes.” And they said to him, “Propound your riddle, that we may hear it.” <sup>14</sup>So he said to them,

“Out of the eater came something to eat,

And out of the strong came something sweet.”

**But they could not tell the riddle in three days.**

**14:12** Samson tried to take advantage of these thirty companions by asking them a riddle. The bet was for thirty changes of clothes, which would be very expensive, party clothes (cf. Jdgs. 14:15; BDB 690, cf. Pro. 31:24; Isa. 3:22), not daily wear. This was one of the main types of wealth in the ancient world, along with food stuffs, weights of precious metals, and jewels.

There have been several theories why Samson asks the riddle.

1. It was culturally expected.
2. It was a way to humiliate the Philistine attendants.
3. It was to make money.
4. It was because the 30 Philistine attendants did not wear the proper wedding attire.

From Jdgs. 14:15-17, it is obvious these thirty were not family friends, but local, aggressive young men.

▣ **“propound”** Like Jdgs. 14:9, this is another emphatic construction of an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and an IMPERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 616, KB 665).

▣ **“your riddle”** The MT has the VERB (BDB 295, KB 295, *Qal* COHORTATIVE) and the NOUN, therefore, translated “let me riddle you a riddle” (AB, p. 231). See Sandy and Giese, *Cracking OT Codes*, pp. 257-258 and NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 107.

**14:14 “they could not tell the riddle in three days”** There is some problem with the time sequence here between

1. the three days mentioned in this verse
2. the fourth day in Jdgs. 14:15, which in the Masoretic Hebrew text is really “the seventh day”
3. the seven days mentioned in Jdgs. 14:17
4. the seventh day mentioned in Jdgs. 14:18

The exact relationship is uncertain but it was a week long party and apparently his new bride-to-be pressed him, cried for an entire week (Jdgs. 14:17) and tried to get him to tell her the answer to the riddle because the Philistines had threatened to burn her and her father’s house (Jdgs. 14:15) if she did not help them. It is ironical that this is exactly what will happen in Jdgs. 15:6.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 14:15-20**

<sup>15</sup>Then it came about on the fourth day that they said to Samson’s wife, “Entice your husband, so that he will tell us the riddle, or we will burn you and your father’s house with fire. Have you invited us to impoverish us? Is this not *so*?” <sup>16</sup>Samson’s wife wept before him and said, “You only hate me, and you do not love me; you have propounded a riddle to the sons of my people, and have not told *it* to me.” And he said to her, “Behold, I have not told *it* to my father or mother; so should I tell you?” <sup>17</sup>However she wept before him seven days while their feast lasted. And on the seventh day he told her because she pressed him so hard. She then told the riddle to the sons of her people. <sup>18</sup>So the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down,

“What is sweeter than honey?  
And what is stronger than a lion?”

And he said to them,

“If you had not plowed with my heifer,  
You would not have found out my riddle.”

<sup>19</sup>Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of them and took their spoil and gave the changes *of clothes* to those who told the riddle. And his anger burned, and he went up to his father’s house. <sup>20</sup>But Samson’s wife was *given* to his companion who had been his friend.

**14:17 “pressed him”** This VERB (BDB 847, KB 1014, *Hiphil* PERFECT) is used of psychological stress and pressure (cf. Job 36:16; Ps. 25:17; 107:6; 119:143; Pro. 1:27; Isa. 8:22; Zeph. 1:15) inflicted on Samson by two of his Philistine women (i.e., Jdgs. 14:17, and in 16:16).

**14:18** Samson realized his new Philistine wife had revealed the riddle.

**14:19 “the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of them and took their spoil”** Apparently they were having a similar wedding feast at Ashkelon because this is not the normal clothing that was worn every day. This, of course, caused great anger among the people of that city and this begins the series of actions which caused conflict between Samson and the Philistines.

▣ **“And his anger burned, and he went up to his father’s house”** Because Samson left, the girl’s father was not certain that he wanted to marry his daughter so he gave her to one of the Philistine companions (Jdgs. 14:20). This man is called his “friend,” but it refers to one of the Philistine companions who had been at the party.

There has been some question as to whether Samson’s marriage had been consummated but we are simply not sure whether, in the custom of that day, this was done on the first day or the last day of the feast (cf. alternate reading, “bridal chamber,” REB, NJB or “before the sun went down” [Jdgs. 14:18]). However, UBS Text Project, p. 108, gives the NASB an “A” rating (very high probability).

**14:20**  
**NASB, NKJV,**  
**NJB** “companion”  
**NRSV, TEV,**  
**NET** “best man”  
**JPSOA** “wedding companion”  
  
**REB, Peshitta** “groomsman”

**LXX<sup>B</sup>****“one of his friends, with whom he had been friendly”**

The MT has the VERB “befriend” (BDB 946, KB 1246, *Piel* PERFECT). The context implies it was one of the Philistine “thirty” (Jdgs. 14:11). Their role was uncertain.

1. protect the wedding party from robbers
2. protect the bride Samson
3. support and befriend Samson
4. protect the family and community from Samson

This verse supports #2. Samson’s apparent abandonment of his new wife demanded she be settled in someone’s care/home. Who better than the leader of the Philistine “thirty”?

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Was it unusual for Israelites to marry outside their ethnic group? Why?
2. How does the end of Jdgs. 14:3 and 14:7 foreshadow the last verse of the book?
3. Why is Jdgs. 14:4 so theologically significant?
4. What does it mean that “the Spirit of the LORD came upon him”? (Jdgs. 14:6,19)  
Is the Spirit distinct from YHWH?
5. Explain in your own words the difference between “foreknowledge” and “predestination.”

# JUDGES 15

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Samson Burns Philistine Crops	Samson Defeats the Philistines	Samson (13:1-16:31)		Samson Burns the Philistines' Harvest
15:1-8	15:1-8	15:1-8	15:1 15:2 15:3-6	15:1-5 15:6-8
15:9-13	15:9-13	15:9-13	Samson Defeats the Philistines 15:9-10a 15:10b-11a 15:11b 15:12a 15:12b 15:13	The Donkey's Jawbone 15:9 15:10-13
15:14-20 (16)	15:14-17 (16) 15:18-20	15:14-17 (16) 15:18-20	15:14-17 (16) 15:18-19 15:20	15:14-20 (16)

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

#### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 15:1-8

<sup>1</sup>But after a while, in the time of wheat harvest, Samson visited his wife with a young goat, and said, "I will go in to my wife in *her* room." But her father did not let him enter. <sup>2</sup>Her father said, "I really thought that you hated her intensely; so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please let her be yours instead." <sup>3</sup>Samson then said to them, "This time I shall be blameless in regard to the Philistines when I do them harm." <sup>4</sup>Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took torches, and turned *the foxes* tail to tail and put one torch in the middle between two tails. <sup>5</sup>When he had set fire to the torches, he released the foxes into the standing grain of the Philistines, thus burning up both the shocks and the standing grain, along with the vineyards and groves. <sup>6</sup>Then the Philistines said, "Who did this?" And they said, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he took his wife and gave her to his companion." So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire. <sup>7</sup>Samson said to them, "Since you act like this, I will surely take revenge on you, but after that I will quit." <sup>8</sup>He struck them ruthlessly with a great slaughter; and he went down and lived in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

**15:1 “in the time of wheat harvest”** This would be May or June. See Special Topic: Ancient Near Eastern Calendars.

▣ **“visited his wife”** Samson believed he was still married. Apparently the marriage arrangement was for his Philistine wife to reside with her parents and he would visit from time to time.

▣ **“with a young goat”** This would be for a celebratory dinner.

**15:2** This verse has two intensified grammatical forms (i.e., two INFINITIVE ABSOLUTES with a PERFECT VERB from the same root).

1. “I really thought” (lit. “say”) – BDB 55, KB 65
2. “hated her intensely” – BDB 971, KB 1338

▣ **“I gave her to your companion”** This would have been one of the thirty Philistine wedding friends (cf. Jdgs. 14:10-11). See notes at Jdgs. 14:20.

▣ **“Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she”** Either the father was trying to correct an unfortunate mistake or he was trying to keep the dowry. Notice the motive is still on outward beauty (i.e., Jdgs. 14:3,7).

**15:3** Obviously there had been some blowback from his slaughter of thirty men from Ashkelon (i.e., Jdgs. 14:19). Apparently this push-back came from both the Judeans and the Philistines.

The VERB (BDB 667, KB 720, *Niphal* PERFECT) can refer to

1. free from punishment (often expressed in the negative) – Exod. 21:19; Num. 5:28; 1 Sam. 26:9; Pro. 6:29; 11:21; 16:5; 17:5; 19:5,9; 28:20; Jer. 25:29; 49:12
2. free from quiet – Num. 5:31; Ps. 19:14; Jer. 2:39

**15:4 “foxes”** This same Hebrew word (BDB 1043) can refer to “jackals.” Foxes were an idiom for “problems” (i.e., “harvest problems,” cf. Song of Songs 2:15).

**15:5 “the shocks and the standing grain, along with the vineyards and groves”** The “shocks” (BDB 155 I) refers to the stacks of cut grain or sheaves (unwrapped, i.e., it was the wheat harvest, Jdgs. 15:1), while “standing grain” (BDB 879) refers to

1. uncut grain
2. not yet ripe grain

This was a disaster for an agricultural community, not only because of the loss of that year’s food and seed crop, but also this meant permanently, because fire damage to the vines and trees had taken so long to bring into cultivation.

**15:6 “burned her and her father with fire”** What irony (cf. Jdgs. 14:15)! The Philistines did this to appease Samson but it made him madder (cf. Jdgs. 15:7)! The LXX adds “burned her father’s house,” which the Peshitta understands as “burned her father’s family.”

**15:8 “struck them relentlessly”** This is literally “hip and thigh.” It must have been a Semitic proverb. The thigh muscle is the strongest in the human body and is often used as a symbol of strength.

▣ **“lived in the cleft of the rock of Etam”** The *MacMillan Bible Atlas* places this site south of Bethlehem on the main road, close to the foothills of Judah (maps #119, 140).

It was a well protected cleft on a well known rock. The Philistines could not easily surprise him there.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 15:9-13**

**<sup>9</sup>Then the Philistines went up and camped in Judah, and spread out in Lehi. <sup>10</sup>The men of Judah said, “Why have you come up against us?” And they said, “We have come up to bind Samson in order to do to him as he did to us.” <sup>11</sup>Then 3,000 men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam and said to Samson, “Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us?” And he said to them, “As they did to me, so I have done to them.” <sup>12</sup>They said to him, “We have come down to bind you so that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines.” And Samson said to them, “Swear to me that you will not kill me.” <sup>13</sup>So they said to him, “No, but we will bind you fast and give you into their hands; yet surely we will not kill you.” Then they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.**

**15:9 “the Philistines went up and camped in Judah”** This shows this had become an international incident (i.e., Jdgs. 15:5). Samson’s actions were serious and a retaliatory strike was undertaken by the Philistines.

▣ **“Lehi”** This verse clearly shows the fear of the Judeans. The name means “jawbone” (BDB 534 II, cf. Jdgs. 15:15).

The location of this place name is uncertain. Scholars suggest it was on the Philistine – Judah border in the lowlands (cf. ABA, pp. 274-275. It is not even listed in the index of the *MacMillan Bible Atlas*).

It apparently gets its name from the revenge attack by Samson with the jawbone of a donkey.

**15:11** This was “the” problem that God, through Samson, wanted to highlight (cf. Jdgs. 14:4).

**15:12 “Swear to me that you will not kill me”** Samson was not afraid but he did not want to hurt his own countrymen in self-defense. He was afraid of his own power (i.e., the coming of the Spirit).

**15:13** This verse, like Jdgs. 15:2, has two intensified grammatical forms (i.e., INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and IMPERFECT VERB of the same root).

1. “bind you fast” – BDB 63, KB 75
2. “for surely we will not kill you” – BDB 559, KB 562

These Judeans made a strong promise. You can sense their fear, not only of the Philistines (Jdgs. 15:11) but also of Samson (i.e., “bound him with two new ropes).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 15:14-20**

**<sup>14</sup>When he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him. And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily so that the ropes that were on his arms were as flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds dropped from his hands. <sup>15</sup>He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, so he reached out and took it and killed a thousand men with it. <sup>16</sup>Then Samson said,**

**“With the jawbone of a donkey,  
Heaps upon heaps,  
With the jawbone of a donkey  
I have killed a thousand men.”**

**<sup>17</sup>When he had finished speaking, he threw the jawbone from his hand; and he named that place Ramath-lehi. <sup>18</sup>Then he became very thirsty, and he called to the LORD and said, “You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant, and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?” <sup>19</sup>But God split the hollow place that is in Lehi so that water came out of it. When he drank, his strength returned and he revived. Therefore he named it En-hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day. <sup>20</sup>So he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.**

**15:14** The new ropes of the Judeans are now

1. burnt flax
2. dropped (NASB), but literally “melted”

See Special Topic: Fire.

**15:15 “a fresh jawbone”** It was not an old, dried out jawbone. The ADJECTIVE “fresh” (BDB 382) is used only here. These skeletal parts were used as plows and sickles, therefore, there were many of them. This, like Jdgs. 14:8, would have made him ceremonially unclean. See note at Jdgs. 15:9.

▣ **“killed a thousand”** This was a round number. See Special Topic: Thousand (*eleph*).

**15:16** This is a word play poem.

1. “With the jawbone of an ass, I piled them in mass,” Moffatt
2. “With the red ass’s jawbone, I have reddened them bright red,” Barney

**15:18-19** This account is much like Elijah’s in 1 Kings 19. Samson’s faith is seen here more clearly than other places! Notice, though, Samson gives no glory to God for the victory in Jdgs. 15:16, but here he does. Samson’s perspective is changing but it is still worldly (i.e., Judges 16).

**15:19** Places often receive their names from events that occurred there.

▣ **“strength”** This is the Hebrew *ruah* (BDB 924; see Special Topic: Spirit in the Bible). There is an obvious word play between

1. Samson’s spirit
2. YHWH’s Spirit, Jdgs. 15:14

**15:20 “he judges Israel twenty years”** We have only a small amount of Samson’s life recorded. This verse seems to mark the conclusion of the Samson account, but notice Jdgs. 16:31, where it is repeated. Judges 16 may be a later edition by the author.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why did Samson bring a goat?
2. Why did the father think Samson “hated” his daughter?
3. Who is “your companion”?
4. How does Jdgs. 15:10-11 describe the mental state of the Judeans?
5. Why did Samson want the Judeans to swear they would not kill him?
6. How does Jdgs. 15:18 reveal Samson’s faith?
7. Is Jdgs. 15:19 a supernatural event or a local legend? Why?

# JUDGES 16

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Samson's Weakness	Samson and Delilah	Samson (13:1-16:31) Samson's Death	Samson at Gaza	The Gates of Gaza
16:1-3	16:1-3	16:1-3	16:1-3	16:1-3
			Samson and Delilah	Samson Betrayed by Delilah
16:4-9	16:4-9	16:4-9	16:4-5	16:4-5
			16:6	16:6-9
			16:7	
			16:8-9	
16:10-12	16:10-12	16:10-12	16:10	16:10-12
			16:11	
			16:12	
16:13-14	16:13-14	16:13-17	16:13a	16:13-14
			16:13b	
Delilah Extracts His Secret			16:14	
16:15-17	16:15-17		16:15-17	16:15-21
16:18-22	16:18-20	16:18-22	16:18-22	
	16:21-22			
	Samson Dies with the Philistines		The Death of Samson	Samson's Revenge and Death
16:23-27 (23b) (24b)	16:23-27 (23b) (24b)	16:23-31	16:23-27	16:23-31 (23b) (24b)
Samson Is Avenged				
16:28-31	16:28-31		16:28-30	
			16:31	

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This may be an additional account added later (cf. Jdgs. 15:20). See John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*.
- B. Samson's weakness was his lust for Philistine women.
1. girl from Timnah, Judges 14
  2. harlot from Gaza, Jdgs. 16:1-3
  3. seductress from the Sorek valley, Jdgs. 16:4-31

- C. Samson seems so naive in his dealings with Delilah. His love made him blind and so did the Philistine leaders! What a tragedy. However, Jdgs. 14:4 looms in the background!

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 16:1-3

<sup>1</sup>Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her. <sup>2</sup>When it was told to the Gazites, saying, “Samson has come here,” they surrounded *the place* and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. And they kept silent all night, saying, “Let us wait until the morning light, then we will kill him.” <sup>3</sup>Now Samson lay until midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the city gate and the two posts and pulled them up along with the bars; then he put them on his shoulders and carried them up to the top of the mountain which is opposite Hebron.

**16:1 “Gaza”** This was one of five chief cities of the Philistines (i.e., Gaza, Ashkelon, Asdod, Ekron, Gath). It was 36 miles from Samson’s hometown.

▣ **“a harlot”** The term “harlot” (BDB 275, KB 275, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) was used of Jephthah’s mother in Jdgs. 11:1. Philistine women were Samson’s weakness. The Bible presents humans, warts and all (i.e., 1 Kgs. 11:1-13).

**16:2-3** The sequence is uncertain. Apparently the Philistines missed Samson leaving at midnight and did not even know the gate was gone until the next morning.

Where the Philistines kept watch is not stated but one would assume at the harlot’s house or workplace.

**16:3 “the city gate. . .carried them to the top of the mountain”** This apparently was the smaller wicker door within the larger city gates. How far Samson carried them is uncertain.

1. some think all 36 miles, uphill, to Hebron (Jewish Study Bible)
2. others think up the road to Hebron
3. the NASB Study Bible thinks as far as Hebron, which was in Judah, as a physical gesture to the Judeans who had turned him over to the Philistines

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 16:4-9

<sup>4</sup>After this it came about that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. <sup>5</sup>The lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, “Entice him, and see where his great strength *lies* and how we may overpower him that we may bind him to afflict him. Then we will each give you eleven hundred *pieces* of silver.” <sup>6</sup>So Delilah said to Samson, “Please tell me where your great strength is and how you may be bound to afflict you.” <sup>7</sup>Samson said to her, “If they bind me with seven fresh cords that have not been dried, then I will become weak and be like any *other* man.” <sup>8</sup>Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh cords that had not been dried, and she bound him with them. <sup>9</sup>Now she had *men* lying in wait in an inner room. And she said to him, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” But he snapped the cords as a string of tow snaps when it touches fire. So his strength was not discovered.

**16:4 “Delilah”** Her name (BDB 196, KB 222) means:

1. “dangling curls” from BDB 195, cf. Song of Songs 7:6, KB 223
2. small, slight from KB 223
3. “flirtatious” from Arabic root, دلل (IDB, vol. 1, p. 814)

4. “night,” – word play on Samson’s name, “sun”
5. “informer” – JB reference edition suggested as a nickname
6. “(she who) weakened” – ADJECTIVE “weak,” BDB 195
7. “devotee” or “worshiper” – James Martin, *The Book of Judges*, p. 177, *The Tyndale OT Commentaries*, p. 175
8. “traitress” – *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 160

Obviously it is uncertain from which root it is derived. Josephus (*Antiq.* 5.8.11) says she was a prostitute also. It is not specifically stated that she is a Philistine.

**16:5 “The lords of the Philistines”** The leaders of the five city-states (NIDOTTE, vol. 3, pp. 295-297) realized Samson had become a national problem. They were prepared to pay a lot of silver for the information on how to capture him.

▣ **“eleven hundred pieces of silver”** Delilah may have been a sacred prostitute and this large sum of money would have mostly gone to the god’s temple treasury. See Special Topic: Ancient Near East Weights and Volumes.

**16:6** This question should have made Samson suspicious! It was as if YHWH was blinding his mind to allow the destruction of all the Philistine leaders (civil and military, Jdgs. 16:27, cf. Jdgs. 14:4).

**16:7-18** This series of attacks was accomplished by

1. the Philistine military – Jdgs. 16:9
2. Delilah herself – Jdgs. 16:12
3. Delilah herself – Jdgs. 16:14
4. the Philistine military – Jdgs. 16:18

**16:7 “seven fresh cords”** The RSV has “bowstring,” but the term (BDB 452 II, cf. Job 30:11; Ps. 11:2) is uncertain. This series of tricks implies that the Philistines believed Samson had some magical powers! See Special Topic: Magic and Special Topic: Symbol Numbers in Scripture, #4.

**16:9 “when it touches fire”** This same imagery was used in the breaking of the new ropes in Jdgs. 15:14.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 16:10-12**

<sup>10</sup>Then Delilah said to Samson, “Behold, you have deceived me and told me lies; now please tell me how you may be bound.” <sup>11</sup>He said to her, “If they bind me tightly with new ropes which have not been used, then I will become weak and be like any *other* man.” <sup>12</sup>So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” For the *men* were lying in wait in the inner room. But he snapped the ropes from his arms like a thread.

**16:10 “deceive me”** This VERB (BDB 1068, KB 1739, *Hiphil* PERFECT) appears in Jdgs. 16:10,13,15 and means “trifle with” (i.e., Jer. 9:4; NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 298-299).

**16:11 “bind me tightly”** This reflects an intensified construction (i.e., INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and IMPERFECT VERB of the same root, BDB 63, KB 75).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 16:13-14**

<sup>13</sup>Then Delilah said to Samson, “Up to now you have deceived me and told me lies; tell me how you may be bound.” And he said to her, “If you weave the seven locks of my hair with the web [and fasten it with a pin, then I will become weak and be like any other man.” <sup>14</sup> So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his hair and wove them into the web]. And she fastened *it* with the pin and said to him, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” But he awoke from his sleep and pulled out the pin of the loom and the web.

**16:13-14** Notice that the NASB shows the textual expansion by adding parenthetical brackets.

**16:14** Samson fled with his hair attached to the loom!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 16:15-17**

<sup>15</sup>Then she said to him, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when your heart is not with me? You have deceived me these three times and have not told me where your great strength is.” <sup>16</sup>It came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death. <sup>17</sup>So he told her all *that was* in his heart and said to her, “A razor has never come on my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother’s womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me and I will become weak and be like any other man.”

**16:16** “she pressed him daily with her words. . . soul was annoyed to death” This same thing happened in Jdgs. 14:17, but is expressed by a different Hebrew word.

**16:17** “a Nazirite to God” Samson knew the angel’s message! He had violated every aspect except the hair (cf. Numbers 6; see Special Topic: Nazirite Vow).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 16:18-22**

<sup>18</sup>When Delilah saw that he had told her all *that was* in his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, “Come up once more, for he has told me all *that is* in his heart.” Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. <sup>19</sup>She made him sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair. Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him. <sup>20</sup>She said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” And he awoke from his sleep and said, “I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him. <sup>21</sup>Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes; and they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains, and he was a grinder in the prison. <sup>22</sup>However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off.

**16:18** “Come up once more” See Jdgs. 16:8-9.

**16:19** “She made him sleep on her knees” I think Samson was really fooled into thinking that she cared about him. How sad! The NET Bible suggests it is an idiom or euphemism for intercourse.

▣ “seven locks of his hair” The hair was not magical but represented his dedication to God’s use.

▣ “she began to afflict him” I think this refers to her shouting, “the Philistines are upon you” (cf. Jdgs. 16:9,12,14,20).

**16:20 “but he did not know that the LORD had departed from him”** What a tragedy! But it is true when there is no emphasis on personal relationship and commitment.

**16:21 “gouged out his eyes”** This was a common practice in the ANE.

▣ **“with bronze chains”** These chains (BDB 639, #2) refer to copper or bronze chains (cf. 2 Sam. 3:34; 2 Kgs. 25:7; 2 Chr. 33:11; 36:6; Jer. 39:7; 52:11; Lam. 3:7).

▣ **“he was a grinder in the prison”** This was apparently a hand grinder. The humiliation was that it was a slave’s (cf. Job 31:10) or a woman’s task.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 16:23-27**

<sup>23</sup>Now the lords of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice, for they said,

“Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hands.”

<sup>24</sup>When the people saw him, they praised their god, for they said,

“Our god has given our enemy into our hands,

Even the destroyer of our country,

Who has slain many of us.”

<sup>25</sup>It so happened when they were in high spirits, that they said, “Call for Samson, that he may amuse us.” So they called for Samson from the prison, and he entertained them. And they made him stand between the pillars. <sup>26</sup>Then Samson said to the boy who was holding his hand, “Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them.” <sup>27</sup>Now the house was full of men and women, and all the lords of the Philistines were there. And about 3,000 men and women were on the roof looking on while Samson was amusing *them*.

**16:23 “Dagon”** This was a grain god (ABD, p. 2) of the Fertile Crescent (BDB 186) from the third millennium. The Philistines assimilated the religious culture of the Canaanites (cf. Jos. 15:41; 19:27; 1 Samuel 5; 1 Chr. 10:10). In some texts found at Ugarit, Dagon is the father of *Ba’al*. See Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the Ancient Near East.

**16:25 “they were in high spirits”** They were drunk.

▣ **“he entertained them”** It is uncertain as to how he entertained them, but it had to be humiliating to Samson.

**16:26 “Let me feel the pillars”** He pretended to need to rest.

**16:27 “about 3,000. . .on the roof”** The structure of this temple was common in this day. There are many archaeological examples. The dignitaries were seated under the roof and the populous were on the roof. Several wooden pillars provided support.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 16:28-31**

<sup>28</sup>Then Samson called to the LORD and said, “O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.”

<sup>29</sup>Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and braced himself against them,

the one with his right hand and the other with his left. <sup>30</sup>And Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines!” And he bent with all his might so that the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed in his life. <sup>31</sup>Then his brothers and all his father’s household came down, took him, brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. Thus he had judged Israel twenty years.

**16:28** “LORD. . .Lord. . .GOD” YHWH. . . *Adonai*. . . *Elohim*. See Special Topic: Names for Deity, C. D. and Special Topic: Lord (*kurios*).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. What was the purpose of Samson’s “ministry” to Israel?
2. Was Samson’s hair the source or symbol of his strength?
3. How could the Spirit leave him and he not know it?
4. How does Jdgs. 16:28 relate to Jdgs. 14:4?
5. Why are there concluding statements at both Jdgs. 15:20 and 16:31?

# JUDGES 17

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Micah's Idolatry	Micah's Idolatry	The Failures of the Israelite Tribes (17:1-21:25)  The Shrine of Micah	Micah's Idols	Micah's Domestic Shrine
17:1-6	17:1-13	17:1-6	17:1-2a 17:2b-4	17:1-3  17:4-6
17:7-13		Micah's Priest 17:7-13	17:5-6 17:7-9a 17:9b 17:10-13	17:7-13

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This account of Micah's authorized shrine shows the corrupt nature of this period.
- B. The Danites accepted a false word from a Levite to attack and destroy a defenseless area. This was not "holy war" but "unholy war."  
They did not receive this tribal allocation from Joshua by divine lot but were willing to desert it and move. They traded a sure divine word for one that fit their plans and purposes. They may even have used Deut. 13:16 as an excuse to slaughter and burn Laish.
- C. The northern shrine at Dan becomes a rival to the legitimate southern shrines, like Gilgal (cf. Joshua 4), Gibeon (cf. 1 Kgs. 3:4; 1 Chr. 16:39; 21:20), and ultimately, Jerusalem.
- D. This appendix to Judges clearly shows that the Israelites need a godly king!

#### BACKGROUND TO JUDGES 17-21

- A. The closing section of Judges 17-21 is very different from the previous section. These chapters document how far Israel had drifted from YHWH's covenant.
  1. the tribe of Dan – Judges 17-18
  2. the tribe of Benjamin – Judges 19-21
 It functions as an appendix documenting the atrocities of the period. There are no "judges," just terrible covenant disobedience. The chronological relationship of this five-chapter appendix to the rest of the book is uncertain.

- B. The new key phrase is found in Jdgs. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25. In the previous section the key phrase was “the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD.” The Israelites needed a righteous king.
- C. Judges 17-18 explains how Dan, who was allotted land in the south to the west of Judah (cf. Jos. 19:40-48), wound up in the far north.
1. Amorite pressure – Jdgs. 1:34-35
  2. Philistine pressure – Samson (Judges 13-16)
- D. This section also seems to lament the absence of a strong central government and decries the moral degradation of the amphictyony period (i.e., loose tribal associations).

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 17:1-6

<sup>1</sup>Now there was a man of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah. <sup>2</sup>He said to his mother, “The eleven hundred *pieces* of silver which were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse in my hearing, behold, the silver is with me; I took it.” And his mother said, “Blessed be my son by the LORD.” <sup>3</sup>He then returned the eleven hundred *pieces* of silver to his mother, and his mother said, “I wholly dedicate the silver from my hand to the LORD for my son to make a graven image and a molten image; now therefore, I will return them to you.” <sup>4</sup>So when he returned the silver to his mother, his mother took two hundred *pieces* of silver and gave them to the silversmith who made them into a graven image and a molten image, and they were in the house of Micah. <sup>5</sup>And the man Micah had a shrine and he made an ephod and household idols and consecrated one of his sons, that he might become his priest. <sup>6</sup>In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.

**17:1 “Micah”** His name (BDB 567) is an abbreviation of “who is like YHWH” (lit. Micayehu).

**17:2 “mother. . .uttered a curse in my hearing”** Micah is presented in the very poor light of being a thief who stole from his own mother who pronounced a curse on the pieces of silver.

▣ **“mother. . .blessed”** This was an attempt to reverse the curse!

**17:3 “eleven hundred *pieces* of silver”** This must refer to “shekels” (NIDOTTE, vol. 4, p. 237). See Special Topic: Ancient Near Eastern Weights and Volumes (metrology).

▣ **“I wholly dedicate the silver”** The mother is also presented as a cheat. She promised to give all the silver to God but gave only 200 pieces (cf. Jdgs. 17:4).

This phrase is an intensive grammatical form, a *Hiphil* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and a *Hiphil* PERFECT VERB from the same root (BDB 872, KB 1073).

▣ **“to the LORD”** This makes it obvious that the image was meant to represent YHWH (cf. Jdgs. 18:31). The initial desire to worship YHWH at a private shrine became corrupted (notice all the extra cultic items mentioned in Jdgs. 17:3,5; 18:17-18), as did the corporate shrine established by Jereboam I in Dan and Bethel (i.e., the golden calves). For YHWH there is only one official central shrine (i.e., the temple in Jerusalem, cf. Deut. 12:5,11,21,23,24; 16:2,6,11; 26:2). It had no images of YHWH.

▣ **“a graven image”** This (BDB 820) is probably carved wood overlaid with silver.

▣ **“molten idol”** This (BDB 651) is from the Hebrew root “to pour,” i.e., solid silver. There is some question whether there were two idols or one. The text implies two (cf. Jdgs. 18:14,17-18) but the MT PRONOUN is SINGULAR (cf. Jdgs. 18:20,30). This shows the low state of knowledge of the Mosaic Law (cf. Exod. 20:4,23; Deut. 4:16; 27:15; and Aaron’s calf, Exod. 32:19-35). There were consequences for disobedience. See Special Topic: Consequences of Idolatry.

**17:5 “ephod”** The identification of this term is very uncertain. In some passages it seems to be a woven garment worn by

1. the High Priest (cf. Exodus 39)
2. a priest (cf. 1 Sam. 2:18)
3. laymen (cf. 2 Sam. 6:14)
4. *Asherah*’s priestesses (cf. 2 Kgs. 23:7)

In other places it seems to be an idol (cf. Jdgs. 8:27; 1 Sam. 2:28; 14:3; 21:9). It is related to *teraphim* and divination (cf. Judges 20; Hosea 3:4), which were all ways to know God’s will. See Special Topic: Ephod.

▣ **“household idols”** *Teraphim* seems to be idols. It possibly refers to ancestors (cf. Genesis 31; 1 Sam. 15:23; 2 Kgs. 23:24; Hos. 3:4-5; Ezek. 21:21; and Zech. 10:2). See Special Topic: *Teraphim*.

▣ **“consecrated one of his sons”** This reflects a practice during the Patriarchal period (i.e., the father acted as spiritual leader/priest for the family).

**17:6** This is the key phrase of the closing section of Judges 17-21 (cf. Jdgs. 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). It reflects the disobedience and apathy of Israel during the period of the Judges.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 17:7-13**

**<sup>7</sup>Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite; and he was staying there. <sup>8</sup>Then the man departed from the city, from Bethlehem in Judah, to stay wherever he might find a *place*; and as he made his journey, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah. <sup>9</sup>Micah said to him, “Where do you come from?” And he said to him, “I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to stay wherever I may find a *place*.” <sup>10</sup>Micah then said to him, “Dwell with me and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten *pieces* of silver a year, a suit of clothes, and your maintenance.” So the Levite went in. <sup>11</sup>The Levite agreed to live with the man, and the young man became to him like one of his sons. <sup>12</sup>So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest and lived in the house of Micah. <sup>13</sup>Then Micah said, “Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, seeing I have a Levite as priest.”**

**17:7 “he was staying there”** This phrase has the same consonants as the name “Gershom” (REB, cf. Jdgs. 18:30). The UBS Text Project (p. 116) gives the phrase an “A” rating (i.e., high probability).

Levites had no tribal inheritance (cf. Joshua 20-21). They were classed in legal code with aliens, widows, and orphans (cf. Deut. 12:12; 14:29; 26:12).

**17:10 “and be a father and a priest to me”** This means to act as a teacher and worship leader. In the OT fathers were given the teaching and spiritual leadership responsibilities for their families.

▣ **“clothes”** This may refer to the priestly garment known as “ephod.”

**17:13** This seems to reflect a selfish motive in a personal shrine (Jdgs. 17:5).

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. The character of Micah is clearly seen in Jdgs. 17:2. Why did he return the money?
2. How do you explain the difference between 1,100 pieces returned and only 200 given to God?
3. Did the image represent the gods of Canaan or YHWH?
4. Were there two images or only one?
5. List and define the items in Micah's "house of *Elohim*."
6. Why did Micah think a Levite would help YHWH accept his shrine?

# JUDGES 18

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Danites Seek Territory	Danites Adopt Micah's Idolatry	The Failures of the Israelite Tribes (17:1-21:25)  The Migration of the Tribe of Dan	Micah and the Tribe of Dan	The Danites in Search of a Territory
18:1-6	18:1-6	18:1-6	18:1-3 18:4 18:5 18:6	18:1-6
18:7-10	18:7-10	18:7-10	18:7-10	18:7 18:8-10 The Migration of the Danites
18:11-13	18:11-13	18:11-13	18:11-13	18:11-13
Danites Take Micah's Idols				
18:14-20	18:14-21	18:14-20	18:14-17 18:18 18:19-20	18:14 18:15-20
18:21-26	18:22-26	18:21-26	18:21-23 18:24	18:21-26
	Danites Settle in Laish		18:25-26	Capture of Laish; Foundation of Dan and the Sanctuary There
18:27-31	18:27-29 18:30-31	18:27-31	18:27-31	18:27-31

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

#### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 18:1-6

<sup>1</sup>In those days there was no king of Israel; and in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for themselves to live in, for until that day an inheritance had not been allotted to them as a possession among the tribes of Israel. <sup>2</sup>So the sons of Dan sent from their family five men out of their whole number, valiant men from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and to search it; and they said to them, "Go, search the land." And they came to the hill country of Ephraim, to the house

of Micah, and lodged there. <sup>3</sup>When they were near the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young man, the Levite; and they turned aside there and said to him, “Who brought you here? And what are you doing in this *place*? And what do you have here?” <sup>4</sup>He said to them, “Thus and so has Micah done to me, and he has hired me and I have become his priest.” <sup>5</sup>They said to him, “Inquire of God, please, that we may know whether our way on which we are going will be prosperous.” <sup>6</sup>The priest said to them, “Go in peace; your way in which you are going has the LORD’S approval.”

**18:1 “there was no king of Israel”** This is the recurrent phrase of Judges 17-21.

▣ **“in those days”** This refers to the period before there was a king (i.e., Saul). Another historical marker (Jdgs. 18:30) shows this was written or edited by later generations.

1. period of monarchy
2. period of Assyrian exile

▣ **“the tribe of the Danites”** Dan was allotted land in the south (cf. Jos. 19:41-46; Jdgs. 1:34-36), but pressure from the Amorites and Philistines caused them to seek another inheritance (cf. Jos. 19:47). The unsettled condition is reflected in the phrase “camp of Dan” (cf. Jdgs. 13:25; 18:12).

▣ **“for until that day an inheritance had not been allotted to them as a possession among the tribes of Israel”** This is a strange statement in light of Jos. 19:40-46.

However, Jos. 19:47 mentions a city called “Leshem,” which most scholars think is the “Laish” of Jdgs. 18:7,29. If this is so, then Joshua, in its final form, had to be written after the relocation of Dan to the north.

The other option is to translate this phrase as “the Danite tribe was looking for a place to settle because at that time they did not yet have a place to call their own among the tribes of Israel” (NET Bible).

**18:2 “valiant men”** This could refer to

1. nobility (i.e., social rank)
2. military ability
3. courage

See full note at Jdgs. 6:12.

**18:3 “they recognized the voice”** They recognized either his accent (Judah) or his specialized vocabulary (i.e., Levite).

**18:5-6** The five spies recognized this private shrine as a valid worship site of YHWH. They fully accepted this Levite’s ability to communicate with YHWH.

NASB	“Your way in which you are going has the LORD’S approval”
NKJV	“ <i>May</i> the presence of the LORD <i>be</i> with you on your way”
NRSV, MT	“The mission you are on is under the eye of the LORD”
NJB	“YHWH is watching over your journey”
JPSOA	“The LORD views with favor the mission you are going on”
LXX	“Your journey that on which you are going, is before the LORD”
Peshitta	“May the LORD prosper the errand on which you go”

**18:6** Notice the liturgical use of YHWH. See Special Topic: Names for Deity, D. In Jdgs. 18:31 the shrine is called “the house of *Elohim*.” This Levite was asserting his credentials as a true priest of YHWH. He was a grandson of Moses.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 18:7-10**

<sup>7</sup>Then the five men departed and came to Laish and saw the people who were in it living in security, after the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure; for there was no ruler humiliating *them* for anything in the land, and they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone. <sup>8</sup>When they came back to their brothers at Zorah and Eshtaol, their brothers said to them, “What do you report?” <sup>9</sup>They said, “Arise, and let us go up against them; for we have seen the land, and behold, it is very good. And will you sit still? Do not delay to go, to enter, to possess the land. <sup>10</sup>When you enter, you will come to a secure people with a spacious land; for God has given it into your hand, a place where there is no lack of anything that is on the earth.”

**18:7 “Laish”** It (BDB 539 II) is also known as “Leshem” (BDB 546, cf. Jos. 18:47) and “Lus” in Egyptian texts. It is north of Hazor and north of Kedesh on the eastern side of Jordan.

▣ **“living in security”** This means in an isolated spot. The closest national power was the Phoenicians (i.e., Sidonians).

The people are characterized as:

1. quiet – BDB 1052, KB 1641, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE; this root is used several times in Judges
  - a. of the land – Jdgs. 3:11,30; 5:31; 8:28; 18:7,27; Jos. 11:23; 14:15; 2 Chr. 14:1,5,6
  - b. of a city – 2 Kgs. 11:20; 2 Chr. 23:21
2. secure – BDB 105, KB 120, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE
  - a. the VERB can mean “trust,” cf. Jdgs. 9:26
  - b. the VERB can mean “rely,” cf. 2 Kgs. 18:20,21,24
  - c. the NOUN means “secure,” cf. Jdgs. 8:11; 18:7; Deut. 12:10; 33:12,28; 1 Sam. 12:11; 1 Kgs. 5:4; Ps. 16:9 (sometimes translated in NASB as “unsuspecting”)

▣

NASB, NKJV,

JPSOA, Peshitta “anyone”

NRSV “Aram”

NJB, REB “Aramaean”

The MT has “adam” (BDB 9), which means “mankind” (i.e., NASB, “anyone”). There is often a confusion between the “d” in Hebrew and the “r.” The same textual question is in Jdgs. 18:28.

The UBS Text Project, p. 118, gives “anyone” a “C” rating (considerable doubt).

▣ The end of this verse is uncertain. It depends on how one translates “ruler” (UBS Text Project, pp. 116-117, “power-holder”).

**18:8 “Zorah and Eshtaol”** These are cities west of Jerusalem on the coastal plain in the original allocation given to Dan.

**18:9** This is similar to the report of the twelve spies in Numbers 13-14. Here, however, the tribe of Dan responds with confidence that YHWH is with them (Jdgs. 18:6,10).

1. arise – BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* PARTICIPLE
2. let us go up against them – BDB 748, KB 828, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense

3. do not delay – BDB 782, KB 868, *Niphal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
  - a. to go – BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT
  - b. to enter – BDB 97, KB 112, *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT
  - c. to possess the land – BDB 439, KB 441, *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT

**18:10 “a spacious land”** The ADJECTIVE (BDB 932) basically means “wide” or “broad.” It is not describing a large land but a land of freedom. In Hebrew thought that which is narrow or tight describes difficulties, but that which is broad describes freedom, joy, lack of restraint.

▣ **“for God has given it into your hand”** This is the message of the five spies based on the Levite’s words in Jdgs. 18:6. See Special Topic: Hand.

▣ **“a place where there is no lack of anything that is on the earth”** This is theologically parallel to “it certainly does flow with milk and honey,” cf. Num. 13:27. It was an abundantly fertile place (possibly reflecting Deut. 8:9).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 18:11-13**

**<sup>11</sup>Then from the family of the Danites, from Zorah and from Eshtaol, six hundred men armed with weapons of war set out. <sup>12</sup>They went up and camped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. Therefore they called that place Mahaneh-dan to this day; behold, it is west of Kiriath-jearim. <sup>13</sup>They passed from there to the hill country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah.**

**18:11 “six hundred men”** This number of military personnel shows that the entire tribe of Dan was on the move north (cf. Jdgs. 18:21).

**18:12 “Mahaneh-dan”** This name (BDB 334) means “camp of Dan” and is used in Jdgs. 13:25 to show that the tribe of Dan had not possessed its tribal allocation from Joshua.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 18:14-20**

**<sup>14</sup>Then the five men who went to spy out the country of Laish said to their kinsmen, “Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod and household idols and a graven image and a molten image? Now therefore, consider what you should do.” <sup>15</sup>They turned aside there and came to the house of the young man, the Levite, to the house of Micah, and asked him of his welfare. <sup>16</sup>The six hundred men armed with their weapons of war, who were of the sons of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate. <sup>17</sup>Now the five men who went to spy out the land went up and entered there, and took the graven image and the ephod and household idols and the molten image, while the priest stood by the entrance of the gate with the six hundred men armed with weapons of war. <sup>18</sup>When these went into Micah’s house and took the graven image, the ephod and household idols and the molten image, the priest said to them, “What are you doing?” <sup>19</sup>They said to him, “Be silent, put your hand over your mouth and come with us, and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be a priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?” <sup>20</sup>The priest’s heart was glad, and he took the ephod and household idols and the graven image and went among the people.**

**18:14** Notice the cultic items mentioned (cf. Jdgs. 18:17-18).

1. an ephod – see note at Jdgs. 17:5
2. *teraphim* – see note at Jdgs. 17:5
3. a graven image – see note at Jdgs. 17:4

4. a molten image – see note at Jdgs. 17:4

**18:19-20** Notice the four IMPERATIVES.

1. be silent – BDB 361, KB 357, *Hiphil*
2. put your hand over your mouth – BDB 962, KB 1321, *Qal*
3. come with us – BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal*
4. be a father and a priest – BDB 224, KB 243, *Qal*

The Danite military force of 600 men were saying, “You have no choice! We need a spiritual leader and cultic center for our new home!”

Remember, it was this Levite (Jdgs. 18:6) who took this idol with them. The Levite was excited to go!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 18:21-26**

**<sup>21</sup>Then they turned and departed, and put the little ones and the livestock and the valuables in front of them. <sup>22</sup>When they had gone some distance from the house of Micah, the men who were in the houses near Micah’s house assembled and overtook the sons of Dan. <sup>23</sup>They cried to the sons of Dan, who turned around and said to Micah, “What is the matter with you, that you have assembled together?” <sup>24</sup>He said, “You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and have gone away, and what do I have besides? So how can you say to me, ‘What is the matter with you?’” <sup>25</sup>The sons of Dan said to him, “Do not let your voice be heard among us, or else fierce men will fall upon you and you will lose your life, with the lives of your household.” <sup>26</sup>So the sons of Dan went on their way; and when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his house.**

**18:21** They expected trouble but in Jdgs. 18:23, they tried to act innocent!

The term “little ones” (BDB 381) would denote:

1. children of all ages
2. elderly
3. infirm
4. weak
5. women folk

**18:24** Micah is offended by their actions.

**18:25** This reflects the attitude, “might is right.” Micah is told to be silent, just like the Levite in Jdgs. 18:19.

▣ **“you lose your life”** This is the Hebrew word *nephesh* (BDB 659), which denotes the entire person; see full note online at Ezekiel 18:4 ([www.freebiblecommentary.org](http://www.freebiblecommentary.org)).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 18:27-31**

**<sup>27</sup>Then they took what Micah had made and the priest who had belonged to him, and came to Laish, to a people quiet and secure, and struck them with the edge of the sword; and they burned the city with fire. <sup>28</sup>And there was no one to deliver them, because it was far from Sidon and they had no dealings with anyone, and it was in the valley which is near Beth-rehob. And they rebuilt the city and lived in it. <sup>29</sup>They called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father who was born in Israel; however, the name of the city formerly was Laish. <sup>30</sup>The sons of Dan set up for themselves the graven image; and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land. <sup>31</sup>So they set up for**

**themselves Micah's graven image which he had made, all the time that the house of God was at Shiloh.**

**18:28 “Beth-rehob”** It means “house of open space” (BDB 112, cf. Num. 13:21). This was the most northern area seen by Moses’ spies. Its location is unknown (cf. 2 Sam. 10:6).

**18:29** The Canaanite city of Laish (or Leshem of Jos. 19:47) becomes the namesake of the tribe—“Dan” (BDB 192; Dan means “judge”).

**18:30 “Gershom”** Many scholars believe this name (BDB 177) was mentioned earlier in Jdgs. 17:7 (see notes there). This list of ancestors was an attempt to justify or legitimize this northern shrine and its priest, as opposed to sites in the south.

The name “Gershom” is first mentioned in Exod. 2:22.

▣ **“Manasseh”** The original text has “Moses” (UBS Text Project, p. 120, gives it an “A” rating, NRSV, TEV, NJB, REB), but the rabbis inserted a “suspended *nun*” to show their horror at the Levite’s actions. The MT even inserted the vowels for Manasseh. The LXX has “Manasseh.”

The Levite’s name was “Jonathan” (BDB 220).

▣ **“until the day of the captivity of the land”** This is a reference to (1) exile by Tiglath-pileser II in 733 B.C. (cf. 2 Kgs. 15:29) or (2) Sargon II’s exile in 722 B.C. This shows that Judges was compiled by an editor, not one eyewitness author.

▣ **“the house of God at Shiloh”** This dates the book’s original production in the time of Samuel (cf. 1 Samuel 1).

Shiloh (ABD, vol. 5, pp. 1213-1215) became a central worship site (cf. Jos. 19:51; Jdgs. 21:12-21; 1 Sam. 1:3). It was later abandoned (cf. Ps. 78:60; Jer. 7:12-15; 26:6-9). The priestly line of Eli will be rejected!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why are chapters 17-21 included in Judges?
2. How is this section supportive of a strong central government?
3. Are all the characters of this account presented in a poor light? If so, why?

# JUDGES 19

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
A Levite's Concubine Degraded	The Levite's Concubine	The Failure of the Israelite Tribes (17:1-21:25)	The Levite and His Concubine	The Levite of Ephraim and His Concubine
19:1-9	19:1-4 19:5-9	19:1-9	19:1-5 19:6 19:7-8 19:9	19:1-10
19:10-15	19:10-15	19:10-15	19:10-11 19:12-15	The Crime of the Men of Gibeah 19:11-15
19:16-21	19:16-21	19:16-21	19:16-17 19:18-19 19:20-21	19:16-21
19:22-26	Gibeah's Crime 19:22-26	19:22-26	19:22 19:23-25 19:26-30	19:22-25 19:26-30
19:27-30	19:27-28 19:29-30	19:27-30		

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### BACKGROUND

- A. The central figure of Judges 17-18 is a Levite from Bethlehem, traveling in the hill country of Ephraim; strangely the same type of person is also the object of Judges 19.
- B. The chronological order of Judges 19-21 does not follow 17-18, but appears to be very early in the period of the Judges.
- C. The purpose of this section is to show the moral and legal problems involved when there is no central, strong, godly leadership. The horror of this crime is matched only by the over reaction of the tribes.
- D. Josephus, *Antiq.* 7.2.8, changes the story in several ways (i.e., traditions passed on to him).
  1. the lady was a very beautiful wife

2. the men of Gibeah saw his wife and wanted her; this is different from the MT, which asserts clearly the homosexual nature of the event
3. the woman felt her Levite husband would not forgive her and would feel great shame, so she voluntarily died

This shows how Jewish tradition tried to spare the Levite the shame he so deserved!

- E. This account has similarity to Genesis 19 and 1 Samuel 11:7. Some think it is a merging of two different accounts. I am very uncomfortable with the J.E.P.D. mentality (see Special Topic: Pentateuch Source Criticism). Moderns do not know the time, process, or date of how the OT books reached their final form. Believers accept, by faith, that the Spirit guided the process. We cannot superimpose modern textual criticism onto ancient ANE texts.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 19:1-9

<sup>1</sup>Now it came about in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite staying in the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim, who took a concubine for himself from Bethlehem in Judah. <sup>2</sup>But his concubine played the harlot against him, and she went away from him to her father's house in Bethlehem in Judah, and was there for a period of four months. <sup>3</sup>Then her husband arose and went after her to speak tenderly to her in order to bring her back, taking with him his servant and a pair of donkeys. So she brought him into her father's house, and when the girl's father saw him, he was glad to meet him. <sup>4</sup>His father-in-law, the girl's father, detained him; and he remained with him three days. So they ate and drank and lodged there. <sup>5</sup>Now on the fourth day they got up early in the morning, and he prepared to go; and the girl's father said to his son-in-law, "Sustain yourself with a piece of bread, and afterward you may go." <sup>6</sup>So both of them sat down and ate and drank together; and the girl's father said to the man, "Please be willing to spend the night, and let your heart be merry." <sup>7</sup>Then the man arose to go, but his father-in-law urged him so that he spent the night there again. <sup>8</sup>On the fifth day he arose to go early in the morning, and the girl's father said, "Please sustain yourself, and wait until afternoon"; so both of them ate. <sup>9</sup>When the man arose to go along with his concubine and servant, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said to him, "Behold now, the day has drawn to a close; please spend the night. Lo, the day is coming to an end; spend the night here that your heart may be merry. Then tomorrow you may arise early for your journey so that you may go home."

**19:1 "in those days"** Though this idiom is not specific, it is a textual marker for a later editor/compiler. Judges was written during the United Monarchy (i.e., Saul and David). See note at Jdgs. 17:6.

▣ **"concubine"** This was a second level, legal wife whose children had no inheritance rights.

**19:2 "played the harlot against him"** This is the reading of the MT and Peshitta, but the Vulgate has "she was angry and left him." The LXX<sup>A</sup> has "became angry with him," like the Vulgate, but LXX<sup>B</sup> has "left him." It seems that the context supports the MT, if understood in the sense of the Vulgate. For a wife to leave her husband was not allowed. When she left, everyone would assume she had committed an unfaithful act and was put away by her husband (cf. Matt. 19:9; Mark 10:11-12).

The UBS Text Project, p. 120, says there were three meanings for the VERB (BDB 275, KB 278).

1. play the harlot – הָנָה I, KB 275
2. became angry with – הָנָה II, KB 275 (Akkadiana root)
3. go away

In this context, #2 fits best.

19:3

NASB, NRSV “to speak tenderly to her”

NKJV “to speak kindly to her”

NJB “to appeal to her affections”

JPSOA “to woo. . .to win her back”

REB “to appeal to her”

LXX “to speak to her heart”

Peshitta “to speak lovingly to her”

The MT is literally “to speak to her heart” (BDB 524). This is an idiom for “wooing” or “courting” (i.e., intimate love conversations, cf. Gen. 34:3; Ruth 2:13).

▣ **“his servant and a pair of donkeys”** In the culture of the day these donkeys would have carried a gift for the father of the concubine. This apparently was a wealthy Levite.

It is also possible that these donkeys were merely transportation for

1. the concubine to return home
2. provisions for the trip (Jdgs. 19:19)
3. a ride for the Levite

**19:4-9** This describes the father-in-law’s joy and hospitality over the reunion and gift from the Levite. It includes many IMPERATIVES OF REQUEST.

Jdgs. 19:5 – “sustain yourself with a piece of bread” – *Qal* IMPERATIVE

Jdgs. 19:6

1.-2. “please be willing to spend the night” – *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE and *Qal* IMPERATIVE; this VERB (BDB 533, KB 529) is used eleven times in this chapter

3. “let your heart be merry” – *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense

Jdgs. 19:8

1. “please sustain yourself” – like Jdgs. 19:5

2. “wait” – *Hithpael* IMPERATIVE

Jdgs. 19:9

1. “please spend the night” – like 19:6, #2

2. “spend the night” (twice) – *Qal* IMPERATIVE, like 19:6, #2 and 19:9, #1

3. “that your heart be merry” – like 19:6, #3

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 19:10-15**

<sup>10</sup>But the man was not willing to spend the night, so he arose and departed and came to a place opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). And there were with him a pair of saddled donkeys; his concubine also was with him. <sup>11</sup>When they were near Jebus, the day was almost gone; and the servant said to his master, “Please come, and let us turn aside into this city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it.” <sup>12</sup>However, his master said to him, “We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners who are not of the sons of Israel; but we will go on as far as Gibeah.” <sup>13</sup>He said to his servant, “Come and let us approach one of these places; and we will spend the night in Gibeah or Ramah.” <sup>14</sup>So they passed along and went their way, and the sun set on them near Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin. <sup>15</sup>They turned aside there in order to enter and lodge in Gibeah. When they entered, they sat down in the open square of the city, for no one took them into his house to spend the night.

**19:10 “Jebus (that is, Jerusalem)”** The city was first called Salem (cf. Gen. 14:18). Later it was called Jebus after its inhabitants, the Jebusites, origin unknown. Finally, it was called Jerusalem, possibly after David made it his capital (cf. 2 Sam. 5:6-9). See Special Topic: Moriah, Salem, Jebus, Jerusalem, Zion.

**19:11-13** The servant requests that they stay in Jebus.

1. “please come” – *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. “let us turn aside” – *Qal* COHORTATIVE
3. “spend the night” – *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense

But the Levite did not want to stay in a Canaanite city (Jdgs. 19:12, irony). So, they moved on.

1. “come” – *Qal* IMPERATIVE, like Jdgs. 19:11, #1
2. “let us approach. . .” – *Qal* COHORTATIVE

The servant requested but the Levite commanded.

**19:13 “Gibeah”** The town was 4 miles north of Jerusalem. It was Saul’s birthplace and capital (cf. 1 Sam. 10:26; 11:4; 15:34). However, because of robbers, one could not travel at night. There may be a purposeful comparison of the cities associated with Saul (i.e., Gibeah) and the cities associated with David (Bethlehem, Jebus, Ramah). Remember, Judges was written during the United Monarchy (i.e., Saul then David).

There are three Gibeahs.

1. in Judah – Joshua 15:20,57
2. in Ephraim – Joshua 24:33
3. Saul’s capital – Jdgs. 20:31; 2 Sam. 10:26; 11:4

▣ **“Ramah”** Ramah was 2 miles farther. It was the hometown of Samuel.

**19:15 “they sat down in the open square of the city, for no one took them into his house”** This was a shameful act of the citizens not offering hospitality, which was so important in that day.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 19:16-21**

<sup>16</sup>Then behold, an old man was coming out of the field from his work at evening. Now the man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was staying in Gibeah, but the men of the place were Benjamites. <sup>17</sup>And he lifted up his eyes and saw the traveler in the open square of the city; and the old man said, “Where are you going, and where do you come from?” <sup>18</sup>He said to him, “We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim, *for* I am from there, and I went to Bethlehem in Judah. But I am *now* going to my house, and no man will take me into his house. <sup>19</sup>Yet there is both straw and fodder for our donkeys, and also bread and wine for me, your maidservant, and the young man who is with your servants; there is no lack of anything.” <sup>20</sup>The old man said, “Peace to you. Only let me *take care* of all your needs; however, do not spend the night in the open square.” <sup>21</sup>So he took him into his house and gave the donkeys fodder, and they washed their feet and ate and drank.

**19:16 “the man was from the hill country of Ephraim”** This is the same area that the Levite was from.

**19:18**

NASB, NRSV	“to my house”
NKJV, JPSOA, Peshitta	“to the house of the LORD”
TEV	“to our home”

**NJB, REB,**

**LXX “I am going home”**

The MT has “to the house of YHWH,” but the LXX has “to my home.” The difference between “my” (LXX) and “YHWH” (MT) is very close in Hebrew. Possibly the final *yod* (י) was mistakenly made the first letter (aberration) of the divine name, יהוה, by later Hebrew scribes.

Since the VERB “cut” in Jdgs. 19:29 has sacrificial connotations, some think the Levite dismembered his concubine at the shrine at Shiloh (cf. Jos. 18:1; Jdgs. 18:31) or even at Bethel (cf. Jdgs. 20:26-28) in a ritual manner.

**19:19** The Levite is clearly stating he brought all the provisions for his trip. He needs no assistance of any kind, except a place to stay (i.e., house). The lavish hospitality of his concubine’s father is not expected.

However, the culture demanded the host provide the needs and protection of guests (BDB 533, KB 529, *Qal* JUSSIVE, Jdgs. 19:20, cf. 19:21).

1. washed their feet, cf. Gen. 18:4; 24:32; 43:24
2. provided food
3. provided drink
4. provided a place to sleep
5. tended to their animals

It was not as elaborate as the concubine’s father, but still very expensive for this poor farmer and his unmarried daughter.

☐ **“your servants”** The MT (LXX<sup>B</sup>) has the PLURAL but the context demands the SINGULAR (Targum, Peshitta, Vulgate). The JPSOA footnote implies the PLURAL reflects:

1. the concubine
2. the servant
- 3.-4. the host and his daughter also called “your servants” (i.e., Oriental eastern hospitality)

☐ **“they washed their feet and ate and drank”** This is normal etiquette. The “they” may refer to the Levite’s servant or the man and his daughter.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 19:22-26**

**<sup>22</sup>While they were celebrating, behold, the men of the city, certain worthless fellows, surrounded the house, pounding the door; and they spoke to the owner of the house, the old man, saying, “Bring out the man who came into your house that we may have relations with him.” <sup>23</sup>Then the man, the owner of the house, went out to them and said to them, “No, my fellows, please do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not commit this act of folly. <sup>24</sup>Here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. Please let me bring them out that you may ravish them and do to them whatever you wish. But do not commit such an act of folly against this man.” <sup>25</sup>But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and brought *her* out to them; and they raped her and abused her all night until morning, then let her go at the approach of dawn. <sup>26</sup>As the day began to dawn, the woman came and fell down at the doorway of the man’s house where her master was, until *full* daylight.**

**19:22 “worthless fellows”** This is literally “sons of Belial,” from two Hebrew words, “sons of worthlessness” (BDB 116, cf. Deut. 13:13; 1 Sam. 2:12). Later, in the Apocrypha it became a title for Satan (cf. 2 Cor. 6:15).

▣ **“that we may have sexual relations with him”** This aggressive homosexuality reminds one of Sodom (cf. Genesis 19). These Israelites were acting like perverse Canaanites. Homosexuality was a way to highlight the evil of the day. See Special Topic: Homosexuality, cf. Rom. 1:26,27, and also note NIDOTTE, vol. 4, p. 1209, #8.

**19:23-24** This shows the cultural importance attached to ANE hospitality.

**19:23** Notice how this request is characterized.

1. “do not act so wickedly” – BDB 949, KB 1269, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense, cf. Gen. 19:7
2. “do not commit this act of folly” – BDB 793, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense; the NOUN “folly” (BDB 615) means “senseless” or “disgraceful,” cf. Gen. 34:7; Deut. 22:21; Jos. 7:15; 2 Sam. 13:12; Jer. 29:33; it usually has a sexual connotation

There is no NEGATIVE IMPERATIVE, so Hebrew expresses this with a NEGATIVE and a JUSSIVE (cf. Gen. 13:8).

**19:24** This shows the low morality and place of women in that day. See Special Topic: Women in the Bible. Notice the IMPERATIVES.

The man offers both his virgin (BDB 143) daughter and the Levite’s concubine.

1. “to ravish them” – BDB 776, KB 853, *Qal* IMPERATIVE, which means to humble a woman by sexual relations, cf. Gen. 34:2; Deut. 21:14; 22:24,29; Jdgs. 20:5; 2 Sam. 13:12,14,22,32; Lam. 5:11; Ezek. 22:10,11
2. “do to them whatever you wish” – BDB 793, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

This incident is so shocking. One wonders if the man thought that since the crowd wanted to have sex with the Levite, maybe they would not want to have sex with a woman.

At any rate, this shows clearly

1. the gracious and absolute requirement of ANE hospitality
2. the cowardly act of these men to save their own lives
3. the terrible plight of women in the ANE (i.e., property)

**19:25 “the man seized his concubine”** There were no more love words (cf. Jdgs. 19:3)! He sacrificed her for his own life. I am surprised this Levite did not offer his male servant to the homosexual mob. Apparently servants were valued more than concubines.

Notice the actions of this sex-crazed mob.

1. they raped her – BDB 393, KB 390, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*; this is literally “knew,” cf. Gen. 4:1; see Special Topic: Know
2. they abused her – BDB 759 I, KB 834, *Hithpael* IMPERFECT with *waw*, cf. 1 Sam. 31:4; Jer. 38:19
3. all night until morning – repeated abuse which caused her death (Jdgs. 19:28)

Number 3 shows the prolonged attack by the mob. I must admit this account bothers me! This was a horrible night for this poor woman. I feel the same sinking feeling about Job’s family and servants (i.e., Job 1-2). Remember, the Bible records what it does not advocate. In historical narratives (see Special Topic: Genre and Interpretation: Old Testament Narratives). One must look for the overall purpose (i.e., Judges 17-21) and not focus on the details of the accounts.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 19:27-30**

**<sup>27</sup>When her master arose in the morning and opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, then behold, his concubine was lying at the doorway of the house with her hands on the threshold. <sup>28</sup>He said to her, “Get up and let us go,” but there was no answer. Then he placed her on the donkey; and the man arose and went to his home. <sup>29</sup>When he entered his house, he took a knife**

**and laid hold of his concubine and cut her in twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout the territory of Israel. <sup>30</sup>All who saw *it* said, “Nothing like this has *ever* happened or been seen from the day when the sons of Israel came up from the land of Egypt to this day. Consider it, take counsel and speak up!”**

**19:27-29** These verses show

1. the Levite’s callused feelings toward his concubine (as did his actions in Jdgs. 19:25)
2. the Levite’s anger and sense of violation expressed toward the whole tribe of Benjamin (Jdgs. 19:29)

The actions of

1. the townspeople of Gibeah (i.e., no offer of shelter)
2. the worthless fellows (i.e., sexual demands)
3. the Levite (i.e., putting his concubine at the door for the mob and his callous reaction to her murder)
4. the tribe of Benjamin (i.e., not punishing the worthless fellows in their midst)
5. the over reaction of the Israeli tribes in destroying a whole tribe (i.e., men, women, and children)

This is the theological point of Judges 17-21. The editor/compiler thinks a righteous king would/could solve the problem (cf. Jdgs. 19:1).

**19:29 “cut her in twelve pieces”** This VERB is often used of sacrificial acts (BDB 677, KB 732, cf. Exod. 29:17; Lev. 1:6,12; 8:20). A similar act was performed by Saul to call the Twelve Tribes into action (cf. 1 Sam. 11:7). In this case, Benjamin tried to protect these vile men of their tribe! Why, is not stated.

**19:30** The terrible acts of this mob became a proverb for evil (cf. Hosea 9:9; 10:9).

▣ Notice the three IMPERATIVES of the last sentence of Jdgs. 19:30.

1. consider – BDB 962, KB 1321, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. take counsel – BDB 734, KB 801, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. speak up – BDB 180, KB 210, *Piel* IMPERATIVE

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why record this horrible account?
2. Define “concubine.”
3. Contrast the hospitality of
  - a. the concubine’s father
  - b. the people of Gibeah
  - c. the farm worker from Ephraim
4. What type of sex was requested by the “worthless fellows”?
5. How could the farmer offer his virgin daughter and the Levite’s concubine to the sex-crazed mob?
6. How does this account demonstrate the low status of women in the ANE?
7. List the ways the Levite comes across as a bad person.

# JUDGES 20

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Resolve to Punish the Guilty	Israel's War with the Benjamites	The Failures of the Israelite Tribes (17:1-21:25)  The War Against Benjamin	Israel Prepares for War	The Israelites Vow to Avenge the Crime at Gibeah
20:1-7	20:1-7	20:1-7	20:1-3a 20:3b-7	20:1-7
20:8-11	20:8-11	20:8-11	20:8-11	20:8-11  Obduracy of the Benjamites
20:12-16	20:12-17	20:12-17	20:12-17	20:12-13  The First Engagements  20:14-16  20:17-18
20:17				
Civil War, Benjamin Defeated			The War Against the Benjamites	
20:18	20:18-23	29:18	20:18a 20:18b	
20:19-23		20:19-23	20:19-23a 20:23b-28a	20:19-25
20:24-28	20:24-25 20:26-28	20:24-28		20:26-28
20:29-35	20:29-35	20:29-34	20:28b 20:29-32a 20:32b-36a	Defeat of Benjamin 20:29-32  20:33-35
20:36-48	20:36-48	20:35 20:36a 20:36b-48	How the Israelites Won 20:36b-46  20:47-48	20:36-41  20:42-47  20:48

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

## BACKGROUND STUDY

- A. It is surprising that “all Israel” (Jdgs. 20:1,2,11) agreed on anything.
- B. The disgraceful covenant violation of Benjamin demanded a response. This is similar to Joshua 7:15,22.
- C. The acts of the “worthless fellow” (lit. “sons of “Belial”) are characterized as
1. wickedness – BDB 949, cf. Jdgs. 20:3,12,13 (translated “disaster” in 20:34,41; it is used often in Jeremiah)
  2. lewd – BDB 273 I, Jdgs. 20:6, cf. 20:44,48,49; Ezek. 16:27,43,58; 22:9,21,27; 23:29,35,44,48,49
  3. disgraceful – BDB 615, Jdgs. 19:23; 20:6,10,12; Gen. 34:7; Deut. 22:21; 2 Sam. 13:12; Jer. 29:23 (all with sexually inappropriate acts)
- God’s people are to live their lives within covenant guidelines which encourage and support long term societal stability, not instant personal gratification!
- D. This slaughter of Benjamin was sanctioned by YHWH (cf. Jdgs. 20:17,23,26-28). There are consequences to choices (cf. Gal. 6:7),
1. individually (the worthless fellows)
  2. corporately (the tribe of Benjamin refusing YHWH’s words)
  3. corporately (the sadness of all Israel about what they have done)

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:1-7

**<sup>1</sup>When all the sons of Israel from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, came out, and the congregation assembled as one man to the LORD at Mizpah. <sup>2</sup>The chiefs of all the people, *even* of all the tribes of Israel, took their stand in the assembly of the people of God, 400,000 foot soldiers who drew the sword. <sup>3</sup>(Now the sons of Benjamin heard that the sons of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.) And the sons of Israel said, “Tell *us*, how did this wickedness take place?” <sup>4</sup>So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, “I came with my concubine to spend the night at Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin. <sup>5</sup>But the men of Gibeah rose up against me and surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me; instead, they ravished my concubine so that she died. <sup>6</sup>And I took hold of my concubine and cut her in pieces and sent her throughout the land of Israel’s inheritance; for they have committed a lewd and disgraceful act in Israel. <sup>7</sup>Behold, all you sons of Israel, give your advice and counsel here.”**

**20:1 “from Dan to Beersheba”** This became an idiom for all the land given to the tribes of Israel. The new city of Dan (formerly Laish, Judges 18) to Beersheba, a city in the far south (cf. 1 Sam. 3:20; 2 Sam. 17:11; 24:2,15).

The exact boundaries of the Promised Land are rather ambiguous (NIDOTTE, vol. 1, p. 803).

1. Num. 34:1-12
2. Deut. 1:6-8
3. Deut. 3:12-26
4. Deut. 11:24
5. Joshua 1:3-4
6. Jos. 13:8-12 (east of Jordan)

7. Jdgs. 20:1

This implies a later date than Judges 17-28, but the united action of the tribes (cf. Jdgs. 20:1,2,11), the presence of the ark, and Phinehas, the High Priest in charge (cf. Jdgs. 20:26-28), all point to an early date in the period of the Judges. Even possibly before Judges 17-18, because the OT historical narratives are not always in chronological order. Judges was compiled by a later editor during David's reign.

▣ **“the land of Gilead”** This phrase was used to describe the land (and tribes) east of the Jordan River. This statement is surprising in light of Jdgs. 21:8-9, which informs us that not all Gilead came to Mizpah.

The VERB “come up” (BDB 748, KB 828, *Qal* PERFECT, cf. Jdgs. 21:5,8) may be idiomatic for meeting YHWH at a worship gathering (NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 404).

▣ **“the congregation assembled”** Israel collectively was called

1. the congregation – BDB 417, Jdgs. 20:1
2. the assembly – BDB 874, Jdgs. 20:2

The early church chose #2, as translated by the LXX, to refer to themselves. They saw themselves as the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. See Special Topic: Church (*ekklesia*). Remember, the writers of the NT (except Luke, who was still influenced by Paul) were Hebrew thinkers, writing in street Greek (Koine). The best way to understand NT Greek terms is not a Greek lexicon but the Septuagint (see Special Topic: Greek Grammatical Terms).

▣ **“Mizpah”** Mizpah (BDB 859) means “watchtower” or “outlook point.” There are several sites by this name. This gathering site, about three and a half miles south of Bethel (Jdgs. 20:26-28), is also mentioned in 1 Sam. 7:5-6,16; 10:17. See *The MacMillan Bible Atlas*, map #81.

Josephus (*Antiq.* 5.2.9) says they gathered at “Shiloh” (cf. Jdgs. 18:31). The ark is located at Shiloh in 1 Sam. 1:3.

**20:2 “chiefs”** This is the Hebrew word for “corner” (BDB 819, #2), used in the sense of “leader” (lit. “cornerstones of the people”; cf. 1 Sam. 14:38; Isa. 19:13; Zech. 10:4. This becomes imagery for the Messiah. See Special Topic: Cornerstone.

▣ **“400,000”** There are several large numbers in this chapter. They do not all add up to the precise total. Remember,

1. it is difficult to translate Hebrew numbers correctly
2. the term “thousand” is used in several senses; see Special Topic: Thousand (*eleph*)
3. round numbers were often used to convey more than just an accurate number of people; see Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture

**20:3-7** The tribes want to hear the story firsthand from the Levite. This is a brief repetition of Judges 19.

**20:5 “because of me”** Josephus says it was because his concubine was beautiful but here the homosexual intent of the mob is made clear.

The Levite clearly thought the homosexual rape would have killed him (as it did his concubine).

**20:6** See note in Contextual Insights, C.

**20:7** The Levite asks (BDB 396, KB 393, *Qal* IMPERATIVE) for

1. advice – BDB 182
2. counsel – BDB 420

Notice how other translations handle the implication of this IMPERATIVE.

1. JPSOA – “Now you are all Israelites; produce a plan of action here and now.”
2. NJB – “Now, all you Israelites, discuss the matter and give your decision here and now.”

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:1-8-11**

**<sup>8</sup>Then all the people arose as one man, saying, “Not one of us will go to his tent, nor will any of us return to his house. <sup>9</sup>But now this is the thing which we will do to Gibeah; *we will go up* against it by lot. <sup>10</sup>And we will take 100 men out of 100 throughout the tribes of Israel, and 100 out of 1,000, and 1,000 out of 10,000 to supply food for the people, that when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, they may punish *them* for all the disgraceful acts that they have committed in Israel.” <sup>11</sup>Thus all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united as one man.**

**20:8 “all the people arose as one man”** This tribal unity is surprising during the period of the Judges (cf. Jdgs. 20:2,8,11). Note some of the tension expressed in Jdgs. 5:15-17; 8:1-3; 12:1-6. Many scholars think this emphasis on unity was the work of a later editor during David’s day. During the period of the judges, there was only a loose, often regional, cooperation between the tribes. Unity came only with a king.

▣ **“his tent. . .his house”** It is possible to see these as

1. some lived in tents and some in houses
2. “tents” is an anachronism
3. just literary variety for the same thought

**20:9 “by lot”** This was a means of knowing YHWH’s will in a matter (i.e., Jonah 1:7; Acts 1:26). See Special Topic: Urim and Thummim. In Jdgs. 20:26-28 Israel consults with the High Priest.

**20:10** This is a practical verse that details how the troops will be supplied.

▣ **“to Gibeah”** The MT has “Geba” (BDB 148, cf. Jdgs. 20:33; Jos. 18:24; 21:17), but in Jdgs. 19:12; 20:31, it is “Gibeah” (BDB 149 II).

Notice the combined army of Israel was only going to attack Gibeah (Jdgs. 20:11) but in 20:14 all Benjamin assembled to resist them (Jdgs. 20:14).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:12-16**

**<sup>12</sup>Then the tribes of Israel sent men through the entire tribe of Benjamin, saying, “What is this wickedness that has taken place among you? <sup>13</sup>Now then, deliver up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and remove *this* wickedness from Israel.” But the sons of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the sons of Israel. <sup>14</sup>The sons of Benjamin gathered from the cities to Gibeah, to go out to battle against the sons of Israel. <sup>15</sup>From the cities on that day the sons of Benjamin were numbered, 26,000 men who draw the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah who were numbered, 700 choice men. <sup>16</sup>Out of all these people 700 choice men were left-handed; each one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.**

**20:12-13** The united Israeli army asked the tribe of Benjamin to turn over “the worthless fellows” for execution but Benjamin, for whatever reason, would not (possibly tribal pride).

**20:15 “26,000”** This is the total number of Benjamin’s troops plus the 700 from Gibeah. But the numbers do not add up. Notice

1. total 26,700, Jdgs. 20:15 (LXX<sup>A</sup>, 25,700; LXX<sup>B</sup>, 23,700)

2. those killed
  - a. 22,000 – Jdgs. 20:21, of Israel
  - b. 18,000 – Jdgs. 20:25, of Israel
  - c. 25,100 – Jdgs. 20:35, of Benjamin
  - d. 18,000 – Jdgs. 44, of Benjamin
  - e. 2,000 – Jdgs. 20:45, of Benjamin
3. only 600 left – Jdgs. 20:47, but what of the 3,000 in Jdgs. 20:45 who were captured not killed?

**20:16 “left handed”** This was unusual (lit. “bound [BDB 32] on the right (BDB 411) hand” [BDB 383]), which shows that most people were right handed. This phrase always relates to Benjamite warriors (cf. Jdgs. 3:15 and 1 Chr. 12:2). They were very accurate with the sling. This is ironic because the name “Benjamin” (BDB 122) means “son of the right hand.”

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:17**

**<sup>17</sup>Then the men of Israel besides Benjamin were numbered, 400,000 men who draw the sword; all these were men of war.**

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:18**

**<sup>18</sup>Now the sons of Israel arose, went up to Bethel, and inquired of God and said, “Who shall go up first for us to battle against the sons of Benjamin?” Then the LORD said, “Judah *shall go up first*.”**

**20:18 “Bethel”** This was the location of the ark at this period (cf. Jdgs. 20:26-28).

▣ **“inquired of God”** This would involve asking a priest (cf. Jdgs. 20:18,23,27; the first two gatherings may have taken place at Mizpah). Here the High Priest would either

1. use the Urim and Thummim (NIDOTTE, vol. 1, pp. 329-330)
2. receive a direct revelation

Notice the term “God” (*Elohim*) is parallel to YHWH. See Special Topic: Names for Deity, C. and D. This parallelism also occurs in Exod. 3:2-12, where

1. the angel of YHWH
2. *Elohim*
3. YHWH

all appear in a unified context. I do not think this reflects multiple sources (see Special Topic: Pentateuch Source Criticism), but either

1. literary variety
2. the specialized connotation of the different names for Deity in Israel

▣ **“Judah *shall go up first*”** Judges is written to clearly demonstrate the need for a righteous king. It was probably written during the reign of David, who was from the tribe of Judah (cf. Gen. 49:10). The appendix to Judges (chapters 17-21) highlights the sins of Benjamin, which was the tribe of Saul, the first king.

By YHWH choosing Judah to go first (as during the exodus), He was establishing their priority. This phrase has no VERBAL but functions as an IMPERATIVE.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:19-23**

**<sup>19</sup>So the sons of Israel arose in the morning and camped against Gibeah. <sup>20</sup>The men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin, and the men of Israel arrayed for battle against them at Gibeah. <sup>21</sup>Then the sons of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and felled to the ground on that day 22,000 men of Israel. <sup>22</sup>But the people, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves and arrayed for battle again in the place where they had arrayed themselves the first day. <sup>23</sup>The sons of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until evening, and inquired of the LORD, saying, “Shall we again draw near for battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin?” And the LORD said, “Go up against him.”**

**20:19-28** These verses document the Israeli army’s two defeats. This is surprising because they had sought YHWH’s will at the tabernacle in Bethel and it received His blessing.

YHWH tells them to attack three times (Jdgs. 20:18,23,28). The unexpected defeats by a much smaller group (i.e., Benjamin’s military) can be seen in Jdgs. 20:23,26.

1. 22,000 of Israel are killed in 20:21
2. 18,000 of Israel are killed in 20:25

One wonders if Mizpah was not an approved worship site and only when Israel came to the tabernacle and ark at Bethel did YHWH honor their request. But this is just speculation. The Jewish Study Bible, p. 552, says, “On the first two days Israel was defeated, for reasons that are not clear.”

Remember, this is not western, chronological, cause-and-effect history. This is history recorded for theological purposes. Usually several chapters are involved in making the main point (i.e., this was a period of confusion and evil in Israel’s history; they needed a righteous king who would uphold and honor the Mosaic covenant (i.e., David). See Special Topic: The Old Testament as History.

**20:21 “20,000”** Again, the true number is hard to know.

1. the use of round numbers
2. the different connotations of “thousand”

**20:22-23** Many scholars and translations believe these verses have been transposed; Jdgs. 20:23 should come first.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:24-28**

**<sup>24</sup>Then the sons of Israel came against the sons of Benjamin the second day. <sup>25</sup>Benjamin went out against them from Gibeah the second day and felled to the ground again 18,000 men of the sons of Israel; all these drew the sword. <sup>26</sup>Then all the sons of Israel and all the people went up and came to Bethel and wept; thus they remained there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening. And they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. <sup>27</sup>The sons of Israel inquired of the LORD (for the ark of the covenant of God *was* there in those days, <sup>28</sup>and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, Aaron’s son, stood before it to *minister* in those days), saying, “Shall I yet again go out to battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?” And the LORD said, “Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand.”**

**20:26 “Bethel”** This worship site called Bethel in central Canaan (Luz, Gen. 28:19) has two possible origins.

1. the vision of Jacob about a ladder reaching from earth to heaven with angels ascending and descending (cf. Gen. 28:10-19)
2. the place where Jacob wrestled with the angel and his name was changed to Israel (cf. Gen. 35:5,9-15)

The location of the tabernacle with the ark was moved several times during the period from Joshua to David (i.e., Gilgal, Shechem, Shiloh, Bethel, Shiloh, Jerusalem).

▣ **“fasting”** See Special Topic: Grieving Rites.

There are two other places in the OT where Israel fasted in preparation for a battle (cf. 1 Sam. 7:6; 2 Chr. 20:1-4).

**20:27 “the ark of the covenant”** This is the only mention of the ark in Judges. See Special Topic: Ark of the Covenant.

**20:28 “Phinehas”** This is an Egyptian name meaning “dark skinned child” or “Negro” (BDB 810). He was a very loyal priest (cf. Numbers 25) and High Priest (cf. Num. 31:6; Jos. 22:13).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:29-35**

**<sup>29</sup>So Israel set men in ambush around Gibeah. <sup>30</sup>The sons of Israel went up against the sons of Benjamin on the third day and arrayed themselves against Gibeah as at other times. <sup>31</sup>The sons of Benjamin went out against the people and were drawn away from the city, and they began to strike and kill some of the people as at other times, on the highways, one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah, and in the field, about thirty men of Israel. <sup>32</sup>The sons of Benjamin said, “They are struck down before us, as at the first.” But the sons of Israel said, “Let us flee that we may draw them away from the city to the highways.” <sup>33</sup>Then all the men of Israel arose from their place and arrayed themselves at Baal-tamar; and the men of Israel in ambush broke out of their place, even out of Maareh-geba. <sup>34</sup>When ten thousand choice men from all Israel came against Gibeah, the battle became fierce; but Benjamin did not know that disaster was close to them. <sup>35</sup>And the LORD struck Benjamin before Israel, so that the sons of Israel destroyed 25,100 men of Benjamin that day, all who draw the sword.**

**20:28-35** The Israeli army used the same military tactic (i.e., ambush) used by Joshua at Ai (cf. Jos. 8:3-28). There are several ambushes mentioned in Judges.

1. Gideon against Midian – Jdgs. 8:4-12
2. men of Shechem against Abimelech – Jdgs. 9:25,32,43
3. Philistines against Samson – Jdgs. 16:2
4. Israeli army against the men of Benjamin – Jdgs. 20:29-48
5. remnant of Benjamin against the women of Shiloh – Jdgs. 21:19-23

**20:33-36a** The NET Bible suggests that Jdgs. 20:33-36a contains a “condensed account of the battle,” while 20:36b-48 has a more detailed account. If true, this would help reconcile the differing numbers of troops killed and those who escaped.

**20:33 “Baal-tamar”** *Ba'al* was the male fertility god of the Canaanite pantheon, son of *El*. He was worshiped at local shrines (i.e., high places, either manmade or natural). See Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the Ancient Near East.

The location of this particular site is on the road between Gibeah and Bethel (ABD, vol. 1, p. 553).

▣ **“Maareh-geba”** The JPSOA footnote suggests an emendation so that this may be translated “west of Gibeah” (see NRSV). The difference would be

1. הרעממ – “clearing” (BDB 780, possibly “meadow”)
2. ברעממ – “west” (BDB 787)

The UBS Text Project, p. 130, gives #1 a “B” rating (some doubt).

Geba and Gibeah may

1. be two separate cities (James D. Martin Commentary, p. 209, asserts they are three miles apart)
2. a variant spelling of the same city; they are often associated
  - a. Jdgs. 20:10,32-33
  - b. 1 Sam 13:1,16; 14:5
  - c. Isa. 10:29

## 20:34

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV “against Gibeah”

TEV, NJB “attacked Gibeah”

JPSOA “to a point south of Gibeah”

REB, NEB “came in on the east side of town”

NET “a frontal assault against Gibeah”

LXX “came in front of Gibeah”

Peshitta “toward Gibeah”

The MT has the PREPOSITION (BDB 617), which is very close to the NOUN for “south” (BDB 616, JPSOA). The basic meaning of the common PREPOSITION is “which is conspicuous” or “in front of,” “opposite.”

**20:35 “the LORD struck Benjamin”** This is YHWH as Divine Warrior. Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel* (p. 260) has a good list of methods.

1. asserted – Jos. 10:14,42; Jdgs. 20:35
2. uses elements of nature – Jos. 10:11; 24:7; Jdgs. 5:20; 1 Sam. 7:10
3. threw the enemy into confusion – Jdgs. 4:15; 7:22; 1 Sam. 7:10; 14:20
4. sending “divine terror” – 1 Sam. 14:15

## **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:36-48**

**<sup>36</sup>So the sons of Benjamin saw that they were defeated. When the men of Israel gave ground to Benjamin because they relied on the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah, <sup>37</sup>the men in ambush hurried and rushed against Gibeah; the men in ambush also deployed and struck all the city with the edge of the sword. <sup>38</sup>Now the appointed sign between the men of Israel and the men in ambush was that they would make a great cloud of smoke rise from the city. <sup>39</sup>Then the men of Israel turned in the battle, and Benjamin began to strike and kill about thirty men of Israel, for they said, “Surely they are defeated before us, as in the first battle.” <sup>40</sup>But when the cloud began to rise from the city in a column of smoke, Benjamin looked behind them; and behold, the whole city was going up *in smoke* to heaven. <sup>41</sup>Then the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were terrified; for they saw that disaster was close to them. <sup>42</sup>Therefore, they turned their backs before the men of Israel toward the direction of the wilderness, but the battle overtook them while those who came out of the cities destroyed them in the midst of them. <sup>43</sup>They surrounded Benjamin, pursued them without rest *and* trod them down opposite Gibeah toward the east. <sup>44</sup>Thus 18,000 men of Benjamin fell; all these were valiant warriors. <sup>45</sup>The rest turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, but they caught 5,000 of them on the highways and overtook them at Gidom and killed 2,000 of them. <sup>46</sup>So all of Benjamin who fell that day were 25,000 men who draw the sword; all these were valiant warriors. <sup>47</sup>But 600 men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and they remained at the rock of Rimmon four months. <sup>48</sup>The men of Israel then turned back against the sons**

**of Benjamin and struck them with the edge of the sword, both the entire city with the cattle and all that they found; they also set on fire all the cities which they found.**

**20:38** The prearranged sign between the Israeli force pretending to flee (i.e., in order to draw out the army of Benjamin) and the Israeli force which attacked Gibeah, was the city being set on fire. This sign caused both groups to attack Benjamin, caught between them (Jdgs. 20:41), with no place to retreat.

The MT has the *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE, “make many” (BDB 915, KB 1176), which seems to refer to a large fire.

**20:39 “Surely they are defeated”** This is an intensified Hebrew grammatical feature (i.e., a *Niphal* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and PARTICIPLE of the same root, BDB 619, KB 669).

**20:43** The Jewish Study Bible, p. 555, calls this verse a “difficult poem,” but no English translation, including JPSOA, shows it indented.

▣

**NASB, REB** “without rest”

**NRSV, NET,**

**LXX<sup>B</sup>** “from Nohah”

**TEV, LXX<sup>A</sup>** “without stopping”

**NJB** “relentlessly”

**JPSOA** “from Menuhah”

The MT has “at their resting place” (BDB 629). The UBS Text Project, p. 130, gives this a “B” rating (some doubt). There are several suggested emendations following the same basic thought (see pp. 130-131).

The name Nohah appears in 1 Chr. 8:2 as a person’s name (i.e., one of Benjamin’s sons). So surely it could have been the name of a region, locality, or town.

**20:45-47** The numbers through here are uncertain (i.e., Jdgs. 20:45), but the remnant is only 600 men!

**20:45**

**NASB, NKJV** “at Gidom”

**NRSV** “as far as Gidom”

**NJB, Peshitta** “up to Gidom”

**REB** “had cut down”

**LXX<sup>A</sup>** “as far as Gadaam”

**LXX<sup>B</sup>** “as far as Gedan”

The UBS Text Project, p. 132, lists four possibilities but gives a “B” rating (i.e., some doubt) to the REB version, which is a VERB, not a place name.

**20:47 “the rock of Rimmon”** This location was about 4 miles west of Bethel (*The MacMillan Bible Atlas*, map #86). However, there are several locations which include this name (a Benjamite, cf. 2 Sam. 4:2,5,9). Wherever it was, it was a large rock formation, or possibly a high cave which gave protection to the remnant of Benjamin (ABA, vol. 5, pp. 173-174).

**20:48** The Holy War techniques used in the conquest are employed against the cities of Benjamin; everything that breathes dies! Archeology records that Gibeah was destroyed in the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

▣ “all that they found” This may be a Hebrew idiom for “captured people” (cf. Isa. 13:15; 22:3; note parallelism).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Was Mizpah an approved worship site?
2. Why is 400,000 too large a number? If so, how does one deal with it?
3. Why did Israel feel they must act against the wickedness of one Benjamite city?
4. Why would Benjamin not turn over these “worthless fellows”?
5. How does Jdgs. 20:18 fit into the overall purpose of the book?
6. Is the worship site at Bethel the location of the tabernacle or was Shiloh?
7. Why did the Israeli military destroy all the Benjamite cities and kill their entire population?

# JUDGES 21

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Mourning Lost Tribe	Wives Provided for the Benjamites	The Failure of the Israelite Tribes (17:1-21:25) Repopulating Benjamin	Wives for the Tribe of Benjamin	Remorse of the Israelites
21:1-4	21:1-7	21:1-7	21:1-3 21:4-7	21:1-5
21:5-7				21:6-7
Provision for Their Survival				The Girls of Jabesh Given to the Benjamites
21:8-12	21:8-12	21:8-12	21:8-12	21:8-12
21:13-18	21:13-15	21:13-14	21:13-14	21:12-14
		21:15-24	21:15-18	The Rape of the Daughters of Shiloh 21:15-18
21:19-24	21:16-22		21:19-22	21:19-22
	21:23-24		21:23-24	21:23 21:24
21:25	21:25	21:25	21:25	21:25

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. The Israeli tribes were justified in their horror over the actions at Gibeah and the refusal of Benjamin to take responsibility.
- B. However, the immorality of the day is clearly documented in their actions.
  1. slaughter of the tribe of Benjamin as if they were Canaanites
  2. the slaughter of Jabesh-gilead (i.e., the tribal allocation of east Manasseh)
  3. the forced marriage of the remaining 400 virgins (Jdgs. 21:12)
  4. the kidnaping and forced marriage of Israelite virgins from Shiloh (Jdgs. 21:19-23)
  5. cavalier dismissal of the families' concern about their daughters (Jdgs. 21:22)
- C. The chapter could be read in two ways.
  1. their actions were YHWH's will (cf. Jdgs. 20:18,23,28)
  2. about the other actions
    - a. YHWH did not answer them (Jdgs. 21:2-4)
    - b. they came up with the plan themselves, referring to B. #2,3,4

- D. What a moral mess this book reveals. Israel, with such hope (cf. Rom. 9:4-5), had violated YHWH's covenant (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). There were consequences!

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:1-4

<sup>1</sup>Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpah, saying, “None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin in marriage.” <sup>2</sup>So the people came to Bethel and sat there before God until evening, and lifted up their voices and wept bitterly. <sup>3</sup>They said, “Why, O LORD, God of Israel, has this come about in Israel, so that one tribe should be *missing* today in Israel?” <sup>4</sup>It came about the next day that the people arose early and built an altar there and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.

**21:1 “the men of Israel had sworn”** The VERB (BDB 989, KB 1396, *Niphal* PERFECT) reflects an oath, taken in YHWH's name, that cannot be broken (cf. Jdgs. 21:7,18; 11:30-31; Num. 30:2; Deut. 23:21-23).

The content of their sacred oath is “None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin in marriage.”

▣ **“in Mizpah”** This is where the combined Israeli fighters from all the tribes assembled against Benjamin (cf. Jdgs. 20:1,3). See full note at Jdgs. 20:1.

**21:2** The good news is that the men of Israel came to YHWH! Their “sitting,” “praying,” and “weeping” show the intensity of their desire to know YHWH's will in this matter. He is the one who sent them into battle against Benjamin (cf. Jdgs. 20:18,23,28). See Special Topic: Grieving Rites.

▣ **“Bethel”** See note at Jdgs. 20:26.

▣ **“wept bitterly”** This VERB (BDB 113, KB 129, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*) and NOUN (BDB 113) have similar roots and meaning.

1. weep – כּבּוּ
2. weep – כּבּ (plus ADJECTIVE, “great,” BDB 152)

**21:3 “O LORD, God of Israel”** This combines the two major names of Israel's Deity.

1. LORD is literally YHWH
2. God is literally *Eloah* (the PLURAL form is *Elohim*)

For their connotations see Special Topic: Names for Deity, C. and D.

▣ The NASB has the VERB “missing” in italics but the VERB (BDB 823, KB 955, *Niphal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT) is present in the MT. BDB says “missed” or “lacking” is one of the uses of the *Niphal* stem (i.e., #1 option).

**21:4** Jacob had earlier built a worship site (i.e., raised pillar/stone, cf. Gen. 28:10-22). It was a special place where YHWH had chosen to reveal Himself to Jacob, later renamed Israel.

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:5-7

<sup>5</sup>Then the sons of Israel said, “Who is there among all the tribes of Israel who did not come up in the assembly to the LORD” For they had taken a great oath concerning him who did not come up to the LORD at Mizpah, saying, “He shall surely be put to death.” <sup>6</sup>And the sons of Israel were sorry for their brother Benjamin and said, “One tribe is cut off from Israel today. <sup>7</sup>What shall we do for

**wives for those who are left, since we have sworn by the LORD not to give them any of our daughters in marriage?"**

**21:5 “a great oath”** This may refer to

1. the united tribes’ attack on Benjamin recorded in Judges 20; it referred to putting someone or something under the *herem* (ban)
2. the oath not to give their daughters to Benjamin

▣ **“He shall surely be put to death”** This is an intensified grammatical form (i.e., an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and an ACTIVE PARTICIPLE of the same root, BDB 619, KB 669).

This is “holy war” terminology. The citizens of Jabesh-gilead, who were probably a mixture of Canaanite and Israeli backgrounds, will all be killed, except the virgin young women (cf. Jdgs. 21:10-11).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:8-12**

<sup>8</sup>And they said, “What one is there of the tribes of Israel who did not come up to the LORD at Mizpah?” And behold, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh-gilead to the assembly. <sup>9</sup>For when the people were numbered, behold, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead was there. <sup>10</sup>And the congregation sent 12,000 of the valiant warriors there, and commanded them, saying, “Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the little ones. <sup>11</sup>This is the thing that you shall do: you shall utterly destroy every man and every woman who has lain with a man.” <sup>12</sup>And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead 400 young virgins who had not known a man by lying with him; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

**21:8 “Jebesh-gilead”** This was a major city on the eastern Jordan who did not respond to the central muster. This was a repudiation of YHWH and the tribal confederacy!

In 1 Sam. 11:1-11, King Saul saved this same city, even later, men of this city buried Saul (1 Sam. 31:11-13). The Benjamites and Jabesh-gilead were related by these 400 women who became the mothers of the tribe of Benjamin.

**21:10 “valiant warriors”** This title (BDB 298) can have two connotations.

1. brave fighting men
2. an upper level of society

It occurs often in Judges (cf. Jdgs. 3:29; 6:12; 11:1; 18:2; 20:44,46; also note Jos. 1:14; 6:2; 8:3; 10:7).

**21:11 “utterly destroy”** This is the Hebrew VERB *herem* (BDB 355 I, KB 353, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT), which denotes that which has been dedicated to God and has become holy, therefore, it cannot be used by humans (i.e., “under the ban,” Joshua 6). See Special Topic: Curse.

There is an exception to this total slaughter of “holy war” in Num. 31:17-18, where the virgins are also spared.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:13-18**

<sup>13</sup>Then the whole congregation sent *word* and spoke to the sons of Benjamin who were at the rock of Rimmon, and proclaimed peace to them. <sup>14</sup>Benjamin returned at that time, and they gave them the women whom they had kept alive from the women of Jabesh-gilead; yet they were not enough for them. <sup>15</sup>And the people were sorry for Benjamin because the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel. <sup>16</sup>Then the elders of the congregation said, “What shall we do for wives for those who are

left, since the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?” <sup>17</sup>They said, “*There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, so that a tribe will not be blotted out from Israel.*” <sup>18</sup>But we cannot give them wives of our daughters.” For the sons of Israel had sworn, saying, “Cursed is he who gives a wife to Benjamin.”

**21:14 “they gave them the women”** This is shocking to moderns! This was a different time and culture. Jesus gave dignity and worth to both women and children. See Special Topic: Women of the Bible.

▣ **“yet there were not enough for them”** There were 400 virgins from Jabesh-gilead who were spared but there were 600 Benjamite warriors at the rock of Rimmon (cf. Jdgs. 20:47).

**21:15** Notice YHWH is the one who allowed/directed the attack on Benjamin (cf. Jdgs. 20:18,23,28).

**21:16 “elders”** See Special Topic: Elder.

▣ **“since the women are destroyed out of Benjamin”** YHWH visited “holy war” (i.e., *herem*) on Benjamin, as He did on Jericho (cf. Jdgs. 20:37,48). All that breathed was killed.

**21:17** Notice all the italicized words at the beginning of the verse. The MT has somehow lost the first of the sentence but it is available from the LXX.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:19-24**

<sup>19</sup>So they said, “Behold, there is a feast of the LORD from year to year in Shiloh, which is on the north side of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south side of Lebonah.” <sup>20</sup>And they commanded the sons of Benjamin, saying, “Go and lie in wait in the vineyards, <sup>21</sup>and watch; and behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to take part in the dances, then you shall come out of the vineyards and each of you shall catch his wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin. <sup>22</sup>It shall come about, when their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, that we shall say to them, ‘Give them to us voluntarily, because we did not take for each man of Benjamin a wife in battle, nor did you give *them* to them, *else* you would now be guilty.’” <sup>23</sup>The sons of Benjamin did so, and took wives according to their number from those who danced, whom they carried away. And they went and returned to their inheritance and rebuilt the cities and lived in them. <sup>24</sup>The sons of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family, and each one of them went out from there to his inheritance.

**21:19 “a feast of the LORD from year to year”** There has been much speculation about this unnamed agricultural feast (cf. Jdgs. 21:20). Here are some suggestions.

1. Feast of Booths (mention of vineyards)
2. Passover (mention of dancing, cf. Exod. 15:20-21)
3. The Day of Atonement based on Taanith IV, 8 (the Mishnah)
4. a local harvest festival

The question remains, if it is #4, was the festival “Canaanite” or “Israelite”? I think the context, the use of YHWH’s name, and the sensitivity of the assembled tribes to the covenant, strongly suggest it was #1,2 or 3, cf. Ps. 68:26), not a Canaanite fertility festival.

▣ **“in Shiloh”** It is surprising that such a lengthy description of its location is given to Israelite readers. This implies it was long in ruins (possibly connected to but not mentioned in 1 Samuel 4) by the time Judges was compiled.

**21:18** See note at Jdgs. 21:1.

**21:22** The capture of the virgins of Shiloh was a scheme of the tribes to get around their oath to YHWH (see Josephus , *Antiq.* 5.2.12).

The fathers and brothers were grieving over the loss of a dowery, not their daughters.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:25**

**<sup>25</sup>In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.**

**21:25** This is the purpose of the book of Judges—the need for a righteous king. The terrible immorality is characterized by “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (cf. Jdgs. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1). This is always a characteristic of fallen mankind—self!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How is Judges 20 related to Judges 21?
2. Where was the ark during this period?
3. Why did YHWH not give a specific answer to Israel’s collective prayers, as He did in Judges 20?
4. What is “the great oath” of Jdgs. 21:5?
5. Why was Jabesh-gilead put under the ban? Explain the “ban.”
6. How does one view the treatment of women in the OT compared to the teachings of Jesus?
7. How is Jdgs. 21:25 the purpose statement of the entire book of Judges?

# INTRODUCTION TO RUTH

I. Name of the Book – The book is named after one of its main characters, Ruth the Moabitess, ancestress of David and Jesus, Matthew 1:5.

## II. Canonization

- A. This book is part of the third division of the Hebrew canon called “the Writings.”
- B. It is also part of a special group of five small books called the Megilloth or “Five Rolls.” Each of these five small books: Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs and Lamentations, is read at a different feast day. Ruth is read at Pentecost or Feast of Weeks.
- C. The LXX places Ruth after Judges. Josephus, in *Contra Apion*, 1:8, says there were only 22 books in the OT. This would mandate that Judges and Ruth were counted as one book. Therefore, its inclusion in “the Writings” section may be later (Jerome).

## III. GENRE

- A. This book is clearly historical narrative (see Special Topic: Old Testament Historical Narrative), told through dialogue (see Fee and Stuart, *How To Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, pp. 96-97). The book is made up of 85 verses; of this number, 50 are dialogue. This author was a wonderful story teller.
- B. Some scholars (Jewish Study Bible, p. 1580) feel this book is drama, not history, because of:
  - 1. the symbolic meaning of the characters’ names (found nowhere else in the OT)
    - a. Mahlon = weakness or sickness (BDB 563)
    - b. Chilion = failing or wasting (BDB 479)
    - c. Orpah = stiff-necked (BDB 791)
    - d. Naomi = pleasantness or sweetness (BDB 654)
    - e. Mara = bitterness (BDB 600)
    - f. Ruth = similar root to friendship (BDB 946)Leon Morris, in the *Tyndale OT Commentary Series*, p. 249, mentions that these names have been found in Ugaritic texts, which shows they were known in Canaanite areas of a similar period. Therefore, one must not automatically assume they are symbolic/typological.
  - 2. the uncharacteristic way that all of the characters are seen as noble during the period of the Judges
  - 3. the strong religious faith expressed by the characters in the period of the Judges (which was so godless, cf. Judges 17-21)

## IV. AUTHORSHIP

- A. Like so many Old Testament books, it is anonymous.
- B. *Baba Bathra* 14b (Talmud) says Samuel wrote his book and Judges and Ruth. Since Ruth 4:17,22 implies that David was well known, this seems unlikely but not impossible.
- C. Ruth 4:7 shows a later author or editor by the phrase “this was the custom in former times.”

## V. DATE

- A. The events of the story occur during the Period of the Judges, Ruth 1:1, which would be 1350 or 1200 B.C. (See Special Topic: Date of the Exodus) to 1020 B.C.. This is probably why the LXX places the book after Judges.
- B. It must have occurred during a period of peace between Israel and Moab.
  - 1. This is surprising in light of Judges 3:12-30.
  - 2. However, there must have been peace at times, 1 Sam. 22:3-4 (i.e., Saul).
- C. When was the book written?
  - 1. The date of the writing is obviously during David's reign, Ruth 4:17,22. The historicity of the account is confirmed by the fact that a Moabitess in David's lineage was not a compliment to him! (cf. Deut. 23:3-4).
  - 2. The style and vocabulary of Ruth is similar to Samuel but not Chronicles.

VI. SOURCES CORROBORATING HISTORICAL SETTING – the only aspect of this book that has been found in archaeological discoveries is the transferring of the sandal as a legal sign of the transfer of inheritance rights. A similar custom has been documented in the Nuzi tablets. These are Akkadian cuneiform tablets from the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. period, which we call the Patriarchal Period (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob).

## VII. LITERARY UNITS (Context)

- A. Naomi's family flees God's judgment on Israel, moves to Moab where all the men of her family die, Ruth 1:1-5.
- B. Naomi returns to Bethlehem with her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth 1:6-22.
- C. Ruth meets Boaz at the barley harvest. He is kind to her, Ruth 2:1-23.
- D. Naomi and Ruth plan to entice Boaz and they succeed, Ruth 3:1-18.
- E. Boaz takes the initiative to become the *go'el* for Naomi's surrogate, Ruth, Ruth 4:1-22.

## VIII. MAIN TRUTHS

- A. The godly character of a Gentile believer, Ruth 1:16-17 (especially a Moabite, cf. Deut. 23:3).
- B. The godly character of women, both Jewish and Gentile (see Special Topic: Women in the Bible).
- C. The lineage of King David and King Messiah includes foreign women, Matt. 1:5, Luke 3:32, and it was by God's plan to show the inclusion of all people (i.e., Gen. 1:26-27; see Special Topic: YHWH's Eternal Redemptive Plan).

# RUTH 1

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Naomi Widowed 1:1-5	Elimelech's Family Goes to Moab 1:1-5	Ruth and Naomi 1:1-5	Elimelech and His Family Move to Moab 1:1-5	Ruth and Naomi 1:1-7
1:6-13	Naomi Returns to Judah 1:6-14	1:6-14	Naomi and Ruth Return to Bethlehem 1:6-9a 1:9b-10 1:11-13 1:14-15	1:8-14
Ruth's Loyalty 1:14				
1:15-18	1:15-18 (16-17)	1:15-18 (16-17)	1:16-17 1:18	1:15 1:16-17 (16-17) 1:18
1:19-21	1:19-21	1:19-21 (20)	1:19 1:20-21	1:19-20 1:21 (21)
1:22	1:22	1:22	1:22	1:22

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

#### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:1-5

<sup>1</sup>Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons. <sup>2</sup>The name of the man *was* Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons *were* Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there. <sup>3</sup>Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup>They took for themselves Moabite women *as* wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years. <sup>5</sup>Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband.

1:1 "Now it came about in the days when the judges governed" It is best to understand the term "judges" (BDB 1647, KB 1623), not in the judicial sense but as a supernaturally empowered, military deliverer.

There is a double use of the word “judged” here, in both the NOUN and the VERB. The “judges who judged” would be an attempt to translate this idiom. This first verse also shows us the general historical setting into which the book of Ruth fits.

It is interesting that although the book of Ruth appears in the final section of the Hebrew Canon called “The Writings,” in the LXX it was placed immediately after the book of Judges. This was followed in the Latin Vulgate and then in the modern English translations.

▣ **“days”** The term “days” refers to a period of time. See Special Topic: Day (*yom*).

▣ **“there was a famine in the land”** Throughout the book, one of the central motifs which is repeated again and again, in rather oblique ways, is God’s sovereignty over the affairs of nations/history. Here, the famine seems to be the direct result of God’s activity. It possibly reflects the cursing and blessing sections of Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 27,28, and Joshua 8.

▣ **“And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah”** This “certain man” was a very wealthy and influential man in his community. His leaving the Promised Land during the time of famine almost seems to be a recrimination on his faith in YHWH. The Jewish writing, *Baba Bathra* 91a, attributes the death of Elimelech and his two sons to their leaving the Promised Land.

There is a possible word play between “the famine” (not mentioned in Judges) and the name “Bethlehem,” which means “house of bread.” There should have been agricultural abundance in Israel (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27-30), but because of the sin of the Israelite tribes (i.e., especially Judges 17-21), there was judgment (i.e., lack of bread in the house of bread).

▣ **“to sojourn”** This VERB (BDB 157, KB 184, *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT) is used often of Abraham (eight times in Genesis). It refers to “an alien resident,” or someone who

1. had no permanent citizenship
2. had limited rights
3. apparently planned to dwell for a long period of time in a given land (see NIDOTTE, vol. 1, pp. 836-839)

▣ **“in the land of Moab”** Moab, though a relative of Abraham through Lot and the incestuous relationship with one of his daughters, is not seen as an appropriate covenant partner (cf. Deut. 23:3). This event must have occurred when there were relatively good relationships between Judah and Moab. The historical setting, because of the genealogy at the closing of the book, seems to be during the time of David. 1 Samuel 22:3-4 shows this amiable relationship between David and Moab that was during this time.

**1:2 “Elimelech”** The name (BDB 45) means “God is king” or “My God is king” (surprisingly the LXX has “Abimelek”). The implication of the name is that, although it reflected the authority of God, his life showed him fleeing from the presence of YHWH and His judgment on the land of Judah. This is the result of Judah’s sin, which is evident when one reads the book of Judges.

▣ **“Ephrathites”** There were two Bethlehems in Israelite territory (cf. Joshua 19:15). This designation identifies this family as being from Judah.

In Genesis the city, later called Bethlehem, is named Ephrah (cf. Gen. 35:19; 48:7).

The UBS *Handbook for Translators*, p. 7, lists several things “Ephrathites” might mean.

1. the inhabitants of the country around Bethlehem
2. the citizens of Bethlehem; Ephrathah is another name for Bethlehem (Micah 5:2)
3. refers to a clan of Judah which settled at Bethlehem

▣ **“Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there”** This was not a visit. It was a planned, permanent move.

**1:3** See note in the Introduction to Ruth, III. Genre, B. 1. for the surprising meaning of these names.

▣ **“died”** See Jewish tradition in *Baba Bathra* 91a, which attributes his death, and the death of his sons, to their leaving Judah.

**1:4 “They took for themselves Moabite women as wives”** Although there is no specific condemnation on Moabite wives at this point in Scripture, there is tension between Israel and Moab, as can be seen in Balaam’s account in Numbers 22-25.

The rabbis assert that the cause of death of these three men was because (1) they moved to Moab or (2) the boys married Moabite women (this seems to be somewhat unrealistic in light of the favor in which Ruth is treated in this book).

▣ **“And they lived there about ten years”** This would be significant later on because although they were married for ten years, Ruth had no children. She was barren (or her husband was infertile), as are other women (i.e., the wives of the Patriarchs) in the OT, in order to show God’s power and sovereignty over the line of the Messiah.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:6-13**

**“Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the LORD had visited His people in giving them food. <sup>7</sup>So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. <sup>8</sup>And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. May the LORD deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. <sup>9</sup>May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.” Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. <sup>10</sup>And they said to her, “No, but we will surely return with you to your people.” <sup>11</sup>But Naomi said, “Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? <sup>12</sup>Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, <sup>13</sup>would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me.”**

**1:6** The VERB “return” (BDB 996, KB 1427) is used ten times in this chapter. The VERB can also have the connotation of “repentance.” See Special Topic: Repentance in the OT.

▣ **“for she had heard in the land of Moab that the LORD had visited His people in giving them food”** Israel was meant to be a witness to the nations of God’s generosity and graciousness. Apparently the fact that God had visited (i.e., here, in a positive sense, cf. Gen. 21:1; Ps. 8:4; Zeph. 2:7) the land with fruitfulness was a fulfillment of this statement. Naomi decides to return home because of the change of circumstances in her home village and the loss of her husband and children.

The phrase “land of Moab” (NASB) occurs twice in this verse, but in the MT one is PLURAL and one SINGULAR. It is lexically possible that the PLURAL (cf. Ruth 1:1,2) is an archaic SINGULAR form.

**1:7 “and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah”** Both women began the journey with Naomi but as they were on the way, Naomi spells out the implication of their decision.

**1:8 “Go, return each of you to your mother’s house”** This does not so much reflect a matriarchal system as it does the separate abodes for the wives and the men of the family. These widows would obviously return to the women’s quarters.

This verse has several commands used as requests.

1. go – BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERFECT; literally it means “walk” or “go” (i.e., return home)
2. return – BDB 996, KB 1427, *Qal* IMPERATIVE, cf. Ruth 1:11,12
- 3.-4. the VERB “do” (BDB 793, KB 889) is used twice
  - a. the MT has an IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense (“may the LORD deal kindly with you”)
  - b. the Masoretic scholars changed it to a JUSSIVE form
  - c. this is followed by a *Qal* PERFECT form (i.e., “as you have dealt with the dead”)

Numbers 3 and 4 are prayer requests, as is Ruth 1:9a. This possible use of IMPERFECTS as JUSSIVES continues in Ruth 1:16,17,20.

▣ **“deal kindly”** This is the power of the Hebrew term *hesed*. See Special Topic: Lovingkindness (*hesed*).

**1:9 “May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband”** There are two significant things here.

1. Naomi addresses these two girls in the covenant name for God. Naomi had apparently shared with them her faith in YHWH (see Special Topic: Names for Deity, D), as is evident from Ruth’s response. Orpah seems to have rejected this witness because she returned to her own family and, by implication, to her own gods, although it does not specifically say this.
2. Naomi assumes that the girls are young enough that they should remarry and have families of their own and she blesses this possibility.

▣

NASB, NKJV,

LXX “rest”

NRSV, JPSOA,

REB “security”

TEV

“marry again”

NJB

“happiness”

This is the FEMININE form of a NOUN (BDB 629) that has several connotations.

1. a resting place – Num. 10:33; Ps. 23:2
2. word of comfort – 2 Sam. 14:17
3. an idiom for the Promised Land – Deut. 12:9; Ps. 95:11; 132:14; Isa. 32:18
4. YHWH’s ark – 2 Chr. 6:41; Ps. 132:8; Isa. 11:10; 66:1
5. here it denotes the security of a husband’s protection and care, cf. Ruth 3:1

▣ **“Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept”** These women had been through a lot together. They felt deeply for each other (cf. Ruth 1:14). They were family!

**1:11-13** These verses describe an unusual Hebrew practice known as Levirate marriage (cf. Deut. 25:5-10; NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 902-905). The inheritance rights in Israel were so important that if a man died childless, his brother or near relative would try to raise up an heir by his widowed wife. Naomi’s assertion that she was too old to provide suitable husbands for these two girls, even if she married that very day, is an obvious logical attempt to convince them to return to their homes with the hope of a normal family life.

**1:13 “for it is harder for me than for you”** “Harder” is literally the word “bitter” (BDB 600), a Hebrew word that will be developed in Ruth 1:20. Naomi is asserting that although these two women had lost their

husbands, she had lost her own husband as well as her children. Notice that in this verse she attributes this to the activity of the covenant God in her life. This is another underlying sign that God is in control of history, although it often seems negative; it is somehow in the plan of God. This will be brought out in Ruth 4, as God uses this event in the line of the Messiah.

▣ **“the hand of God has gone forth against me”** The term “hand of God” is an anthropomorphic use of this physical term. We know that God does not have a physical body, that He is a spirit; however, the only vocabulary we have to describe Him is by human physical characteristics.

The term “gone forth” is a military term to reflect Naomi’s attitude that God has been aggressively against her. See Special Topic: Hand and Special Topic: God Described As Human.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:14**

**<sup>14</sup>And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.**

**1:14 “but Ruth clung to her”** This VERB (BDB 179, KB 209, *Qal* PERFECT) is a powerful VERB.

1. used of Adam’s love for Eve – Gen. 2:24
2. used of holding fast to YHWH – Deut. 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; Jos. 22:5; 23:8; 2 Kgs. 18:6; Ps. 101:3
3. used of Boaz telling Ruth to stay close to his female servants – Ruth 2:8,21,23
4. used of Solomon’s idolatry to his young wives’ gods – 1 Kgs. 11:2
5. used of holding fast to YHWH’s covenant – Ps. 119:31

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:15-18**

**<sup>15</sup>Then she said, “Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” <sup>16</sup>But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you *or* turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people *shall be* my people, and your God, my God. <sup>17</sup>Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if *anything* but death parts you and me.” <sup>18</sup>When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.**

**1:15 “her gods”** This refers to the fertility god, *Chemosh* (cf. Num. 21:29; 1 Kgs. 11:7).

**1:16-17** This is a beautiful and strongly-worded statement of

1. Ruth’s love and loyalty to Naomi
2. Ruth’s faith commitment to YHWH

Ruth fully realized the consequences of returning to the land of Israel with Naomi. It would be a life of poverty and lack of a husband’s love. It shows the relationship between these two ladies. Ruth had decided to stay with Naomi, no matter the consequences. This is one of the character traits of this Moabitess which is developed with such positiveness, but must have been shocking to the Israelites who read it.

**1:17 “Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if *anything* but death parts you and me”** It is interesting that Ruth uses a covenant oath formula in the name of YHWH (cf. 1 Sam. 3:17; 14:44; 20:13; 25:22; 2 Sam. 3:9,35). It is obvious that she converted to the faith of YHWH, as is seen in the way she is addressed in YHWH’s name by both Naomi and Boaz, and here as she swears a basic oath in His name. See Special Topic: “The Name” of YHWH (OT).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:19-21**

<sup>19</sup>So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, “Is this Naomi?” <sup>20</sup>She said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. <sup>21</sup>I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?”

**1:19 “all the city was stirred because of them”** This VERB (BDB 223, KB, 242, *Niphal* IMPERFECT with *waw*) is a strong word. This stem is used in

1. 1 Sam. 4:5 for the Israelites’ shouting as the ark came into the camp
2. 1 Kgs. 1:45 for Solomon’s anointing as David’s successor

The *Qal* stem is used in Deut. 7:23 for YHWH’s defeat of the nations in “holy war.”

There has been some speculation among commentators about why all the city was stirred because of the return of a widow and her foreign daughter-in-law. Some of the theories are:

1. Elimelech’s was a well known family
2. there was curiosity about Naomi’s return after all these years
3. the presence of a young Moabitess with her

Possibly all three theories are developed in the story.

▣ **“the women said”** The men would have been in the field, involved in the harvest (Ruth 1:22). Naomi’s former friends and neighbors recognized her and began to spread the news.

**1:20 “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara”** The term “Naomi” means “pleasant” or “sweetness” (BDB 654), while the term “Mara” means “bitter” (BDB 600). This is Naomi’s theological view of the situation, as reflected in Ruth 1:20-21, where she says that “the Almighty” (see Special Topic: The Almighty) has dealt bitterly with me. She recognizes God’s hand in her life but not the means or the reason for the tragedy that has befallen her family.

The term “Almighty” is the patriarchal name for God, “*El Shaddai*” (BDB 994, cf. Exod. 6:3). Many translations assume that this means “the Mighty One,” but further archaeological evidence gives some validity for the interpretation that it comes from the metaphor of a woman’s breast (i.e., a nursing mother), which may mean that God is the “all sufficient One.”

The root “bitter” occurs twice.

1. the NOUN (BDB 600) is Naomi’s new name
2. the VERB (BDB 600, KB 638, *Hiphil* PERFECT) refers to YHWH’s treatment of her family (cf. Ruth 1:13)

**1:21 “I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty”** Again, we have another hint of the theological attitude of Naomi at this point (i.e., left “full”; came back “empty”), which will totally change by the end of the book. It is best for us to take the long look in our lives, for tunnel vision will always cause us to have a bitter spirit, while faith in God will always see us through the dark days and will even, sometimes, see the purpose of them! A book that has helped me is Hannah Whithall Smith, *The Christian’s Secret Of a Happy Life*.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:22**

<sup>22</sup>So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

**1:22 “Ruth the Moabitess”** Throughout the book, Ruth’s national origin is stated repeatedly (cf. Ruth 2:2,6,21; 4:5,10; also note 2:10). The very fact that a Moabitess is in the line of David was no compliment and, therefore, shows the historicity of this book and yes, may even be the very purpose as God shows His faithfulness to a non-Jew in her family dealings and personal life.

▣ **“barley harvest”** Much of the plot of the book centers around this harvest (note Lev. 23:9-14). This was the first grain to ripen (i.e., in May).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why did Elimelech and his family go to the land of Moab?
2. Does Naomi believe that God caused the death of her husband and two children?
3. What is the implication of Ruth’s strong statement in Ruth 1:16-17?
4. What is the implication of Naomi blaming God for her life situation in Ruth 1:20,21?

# RUTH 2

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Ruth Gleans Boaz' Field	Ruth Meets Boaz	Ruth and Boaz	Ruth Works in the Field of Boaz	Ruth in the Fields of Boaz
2:1-7	2:1-7	2:1-7	2:1-2a 2:2b 2:3 2:4 2:5 2:6-7	2:1 2:2-7
2:8-13	2:8-13	2:8-13	2:8-9 2:10 2:11-12 2:13	2:8-13
2:14-16	2:14-16	2:14-16	2:14-16	2:14-17
2:17-23	2:17-23	2:17-23	2:17-19a 2:19b 2:20 2:21 2:22-23	2:18-23

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

#### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:1-7

<sup>1</sup>Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. <sup>2</sup>And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." <sup>3</sup>So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. <sup>4</sup>Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, "May the LORD be with you." And they said to him, "May the LORD bless you." <sup>5</sup>Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" <sup>6</sup>The servant in charge of the reapers replied, "She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab. <sup>7</sup>And she said, 'Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.' Thus she came and has remained from the morning until now; she has been sitting in the house for a little while."

## 2:1 Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech”

The exact relationship between Naomi and Boaz is not specified (i.e., *Kethiv*, כֶּתִיב, “friend,” while *Qere* has “relative,” מַעֲדוֹ). The Hebrew kinship terms are rather loose in their specificity. It seems that Boaz was somehow related to Elimelech. The fact that Boaz was a man of great wealth probably meant that Elimelech was a man of considerable wealth also.

The phrase, “a man of great wealth” is literally “a mighty man of valor.” This phrase can be used of

1. military valor
2. social position (i.e., respected elder or tribal leader)
3. wealth (i.e., land)

▣ **“Boaz”** Although the etymology of the word “Boaz” (BDB 126) is somewhat uncertain, many believe that it can be derived from the name of one of the bronze pillars in the temple (BDB 126, cf. 1 Kgs. 7:21; 2 Chr. 3:17). If this is true, it could mean “in whom is strength” (LXX). He is included in Jesus’ genealogy (cf. Matt. 1:5; Luke 3:32).

Modern scholarship has supposed a homonym for the name “Boaz” from an Arabic root (*bagz*) which means “quickness” (see UBS *Handbook for Translators*, p. 83, #4).

## 2:2 Ruth asks permission from Naomi.

1. please let me go to the field – BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* COHORTATIVE
2. please let me glean – BDB 544, KB 535, *Piel* COHORTATIVE

Naomi responds with a *Qal* IMPERATIVE of #1. These women had no means of support. They had to act (cf. Ruth 2:7).

▣ **“glean”** This refers to an OT law where the poor, the widowed, and the alien could go into a grain field and reap the corners to sustain themselves. The practice is described in Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22 and Deut. 24:19. It was one of many ways that the Mosaic Law took notice of and provided care for the socially ostracized or impoverished.

▣ **“after one in whose sight I may find favor”** This is a rather ambiguous phrase which may imply that

1. Ruth was just going to the field where she had the least resistance from the locals
2. possibly, as other parts of the book of Ruth, Divine planning and foreknowledge would help her to know where she should go (i.e., “she happened to come. . .”)
3. Naomi and she had plans to lure Boaz (Ruth 2:7)

▣ **“Go, my daughter”** This was a common idiom (Ruth 2:8).

2:3 **“she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz”** In the ancient world every village had a large, common grain field. Within that large field, each individual field was marked off by stones. The whole field would have been ready to be harvested about the same time. The Hebrew text implies that it was by chance that she came upon the field of Boaz, but the theology of the book of Ruth shows the sovereignty of God in this entire matter.

2:4 **“Boaz came from Bethlehem”** It was not uncommon for the owner of the field to come and supervise the reaping and threshing of his crop. It was very significant that he gave the YHWHistic greeting to his workers and they did the same in return. This could refer to

1. a normal greeting of the day
2. a theological implication of the faith of all who were involved

**2:5 “Boaz said. . . ‘Whose young woman is this?’”** This is not to be a disparaging comment about women in the ancient world. All women were the property of some male. It may have been a father, brother, or husband. Boaz was simply asking a question about Ruth’s relatives. Apparently, even at this point, he was somewhat physically attracted to her.

**2:7 “And she said, ‘Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves’”** The law demanded that she be allowed along the edges and corners of the field, but to glean among the sheaves was something that the foreman could not permit. This was not a part of the Deuteronomic law. Later in the chapter, Boaz will specifically allow her to do this.

The MT is ambiguous. It is possible that it refers to her making her own “sheaves,” which she will have to beat the heads of the grain out later (cf. Ruth 2:17).



- NASB “she has been sitting in the house for a little while”
- NKJV “though she rested a little in the house”
- NRSV “without resting even for a moment”
- TEV “and has just now stopped to rest a while under the shelter”
- NJB “with hardly a rest from morning until now”
- JPSOA “she has rested but little in the hut”
- REB “she has hardly had a moment’s rest in the shelter”
- LXX “she did not rest a bit in the field”
- Vulgate “not even for a moment has she returned to the house”

As is obvious, there are two ways to interpret this phrase.

1. NASB – she has been resting for a long time (i.e., she is exhausted)
2. NRSV – she has worked all day without rest (i.e., a very strong woman)

This is a very unusual Hebrew phrase and scholars are not exactly sure of its meaning.

The word “house” (BDB 108) has several possible meanings. The theories are

1. it was a field house basically for the workers to go and sit in the shade to recuperate
2. it was a field toilet
3. Ruth returned to Naomi’s house periodically for rest

The context implies that #1 is the best possibility.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:8-13**

**<sup>8</sup>Then Boaz said to Ruth, “Listen carefully, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field; furthermore, do not go on from this one, but stay here with my maids. <sup>9</sup>Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Indeed, I have commanded the servants not to touch you. When you are thirsty, go to the water jars and drink from what the servants draw.” <sup>10</sup>Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, “Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?” <sup>11</sup>Boaz replied to her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you did not previously know. <sup>12</sup>May the LORD reward your work, and your wages be full from the LORD the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge.” <sup>13</sup>Then she said, “I have found favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and indeed have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants.”**

**2:8** The VERBS in this verse are all IMPERFECTS, but several could be used in a JUSSIVE sense.

1. do not go
2. do not leave
3. stay here

It was dangerous during the harvest time for unaccompanied women (cf. Ruth 2:22).

**2:9 “I have commanded my servants not to touch you”** A single woman out in the field during harvest was possibly in physical danger. This danger may have been from sexual abuse or from the harassment of those who were working for the owner. This same concern for her safety can be seen also in Ruth 2:15-16,22.

▣ **“When you are thirsty”** Boaz even provided her physical needs (i.e., water/shade here and food in Ruth 2:14).

**2:10 “Why have I found favor in your sight”** We can see something of the boldness in Ruth here, by her asking this very specific question of Boaz. We also see from his response in Ruth 2:11, that he knew all about her and her return with Naomi. The implication of 2:11 is that she had become a full proselyte of Judaism (cf. Ruth 2:12) and was held in high regard of the citizens of Bethlehem.

**2:11** The phrase, “has been fully reported to me,” is in an emphatic form (i.e., a *Hophal* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and a *Hophal* PERFECT VERB of the same root, BDB 616, KB 665).

**2:12 “May the LORD reward your work. . .under whose wings you have come to seek refuge”** The fact of YHWH’s name and the mention of the idiom, “under His wing” (see Special Topic: Shadow As a Metaphor for Protection and Care), seems to reflect Exod. 19:4, God bearing Israel on eagle’s wings. It is also the metaphor of a mother bird under whose wings the little ones find care (cf. Matt. 23:37). This speaks of the fact that Ruth had become a full proselyte. Boaz praises her for that by invoking a blessing (i.e., *Piel* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense and a *Qal* JUSSIVE).

▣ **“the LORD, the God of Israel”** These are two of the special names for Deity.

1. YHWH
2. *Eloah* (SINGULAR form of *Elohim*)

See Special Topic: Names for Deity, C and D.

**2:13** The term *adon* appears in Ruth 2:13a. See Special Topic: Lord (*kurios*).

Notice the compliments Ruth gives to Boaz.

1. she found favor in his sight
2. he comforted her
3. he spoke kindly to her

All of this, even though she was a foreigner.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:14-16**

<sup>14</sup>At mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come here, that you may eat of the bread and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar.” So she sat beside the reapers; and he served her roasted grain, and she ate and was satisfied and had some left. <sup>15</sup>When she rose to glean, Boaz commanded his servants, saying, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not insult her. <sup>16</sup>Also you shall purposely pull out for her *some grain* from the bundles and leave *it* that she may glean, and do not rebuke her.”

**2:14**

NASB, NKJV,

NJB, JPSOA	“vinegar”
NRSV	“sour wine”
TEV	“sauce”
LXX	“wine vinegar”
Peshitta	“milk”

The MT has “in the wine” (BDB 330). BDB calls it “a common condiment.” KB 329 I takes it from the root for “sour” or Arabic “acid” and sees it as “wine vinegar.”

The Jewish Study Bible, p. 1582, calls it “a refreshing drink of sour wine and oil.”

The UBS *Handbook for Translators*, p. 86, #44, explains the Peshitta’s “milk” as a scribal error.

1. milk in Syriac was *chalba*
2. vinegar in Syriac was *challa*

▣ **“he served her roasted grain, and she ate and was satisfied and had some left”** The Septuagint’s translation implies that he gave her far more than she could eat. Eating roasted grain in the field was a delicacy for the reapers. Boaz is showing something either of

1. his growing love for Ruth or
2. his sense of care for Naomi in the fact that he provided extra grain which he knew Ruth would take to Naomi (Ruth 2:18).

It is interesting to note that the Septuagint adds to Ruth 2:1 that Boaz gave Naomi a widow’s house in which to live. Because of the content of this verse, this seems to be a real possibility.

**2:15-16** These verses show Boaz’s extra care for Ruth and Naomi.

1. she was allowed to glean behind the reapers, not only in the corners of the field
2. Boaz’s servants were not to rebuke her (twice, Ruth 2:15, 16)
3. Boaz’s servants were to “purposely pull out” some grain for her (this is an intensified form, a *Qal* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and *Qal* IMPERFECT VERB of the same root, BDB 1021, KB 1531)

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:17-23**

**<sup>17</sup>So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. <sup>18</sup>She took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also took it out and gave Naomi what she had left after she was satisfied. <sup>19</sup>Her mother-in-law then said to her, “Where did you glean today and where did you work? May he who took notice of you be blessed.” So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, “The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.” <sup>20</sup>Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead.” Again Naomi said to her, “The man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives.” <sup>21</sup>Then Ruth the Moabite said, “Furthermore, he said to me, ‘You should stay close to my servants until they have finished all my harvest.’” <sup>22</sup>Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, “It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maids, so that *others* do not fall upon you in another field.” <sup>23</sup>So she stayed close by the maids of Boaz in order to glean until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law.**

**2:17 “ephah of barley”** There were different “ephahs” in the ancient world, and we are uncertain as to this exact measurement. It is about five to eight gallons, which would be quite heavy, but a young woman like Ruth could carry it home. See Special Topic: Ancient Near East Weights and Volumes.

**2:19 “The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz”** This implies that Naomi did not know where Ruth was going to reap and that she did not plan to go to Boaz’s field, but this was the hand of God, unseen behind this entire account.

**2:20 “Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead”**” In context this may refer to

1. Boaz (i.e., YHWH’s agent), who showed kindness to Ruth and, therefore, to Naomi
2. the theological implication that Naomi is seeing the hand of YHWH (LORD) in her life again

The fact that the word “kindness” is the special covenant word, *hesed* (see Special Topic: Lovingkindness), shows that YHWH is the focus of the statement. However, the immediate context seems to be Boaz. The ambiguity may be reflected as God’s care through Boaz!

▣ **“The man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives”** The New American Standard translation conceals the fact that we have the term *go’el* here. It is often translated “the kinsman redeemer” or “the kinsman avenger.” It is the closest relative who bore responsibility for the extended family. It is one of those family activities that God chooses to describe Himself to mankind. See Special Topic: Ransom/Redeem.

It is possible (LXX of Ruth 2:1) that Boaz had already provided a house for Naomi and Ruth to use.

**2:23 “the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest”** This shows an extended time of care during the both harvests. Ruth gleaned daily in the field and the implication is that Boaz saw her there from time to time.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. What does the phrase “a man of great wealth” in Ruth 2:1 mean?
2. Explain the theological implication to the phrase “she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz.”
3. What is Ruth 2:7 trying to say about Ruth?
4. How does Ruth 2:12 confirm Ruth’s conversion to faith in YHWH?
5. List the ways the text shows Boaz’s special care for Ruth.
6. Explain the theological implication of Ruth 2:20.

# RUTH 3

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Boaz Will Redeem Ruth	Ruth's Redemption Assured	Naomi's Instructions	Ruth Finds A Husband	Boaz Sleeps
3:1-5	3:1-5	3:1-5	3:1-4 3:5	3:1-5
3:6-13	3:6-7 3:8-13	3:6-13	3:6-9a 3:9b 3:10-13	3:6-15
3:14-18	3:14-18	3:14-18	3:14-16a 3:16b-17 3:18	3:16-18

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

#### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:1-5

<sup>1</sup>Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you? <sup>2</sup>Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight. <sup>3</sup>Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your *best* clothes, and go down to the threshing floor; *but* do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. <sup>4</sup>It shall be when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies, and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down; then he will tell you what you shall do.” <sup>5</sup>She said to her, “All that you say I will do.”

#### 3:1

NASB, NKJV,

NJB “Then”

NRSV —

TEV “Sometime later”

JPSOA —

REB “One day”

It is uncertain how much time passes between chapter 2 and chapter 3. The harvest is concluded and the winnowing was in process.

It was obvious that these two widows could not continue supporting themselves by gleaning.

▣ **“My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you”** The implication here is that Naomi is acting as the matchmaker for Ruth. She really cares about Ruth’s happiness. The Moffatt translation has “I must see you settled in life,” which accurately reflects the Hebrew of this verse.



NASB, NKJV,

NRSV

“security”

TEV

“have a home of our own”

NJB, REB

“happily settled”

JPSOA

“where you may be happy”

LXX, Peshitta

“rest”

The MT has the MASCULINE NOUN, “resting-place” (BDB 629 I), which here implies a “condition of rest and security attained by marriage.” This connotation is unique to this text. For other usages see Gen. 8:9; Deut. 28:65; Ps. 116:7; Isa. 34:14; Lam. 1:3. The FEMININE NOUN is far more common. It is the form used in Ruth 1:9.

**3:2** This is the FEMININE form “kinsman” (BDB 396, found only here). The MASCULINE form of the same root is in Ruth 2:1. It denotes a blood relative who had some cultural/legal responsibility for the welfare of the extended family.

The usual term for this person is *go’el* (BDB 145 I, cf. Lev. 25:25-26; Num. 5:8; Ruth 2:20; 3:9,12; 4:1,3,6,8,14; 1 Kgs. 16:11). See Special Topic: Ransom/Redeem.

▣ **“he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight”** The emphasis on the word “tonight” may mean that she had inside information that he would be there that particular night or that the owners usually went to the threshing floor to sleep in order to protect their grain. Winnowing was basically a two part process where animals would walk over the grain to separate the grain from the husks. Then the husks and chaff would be thrown into the air with a pitchfork and the wind would blow the chaff away.

**3:3** There seems to be a series of suggestions (not IMPERATIVES but *Qal* PERFECTS with the *waw*) here of what Ruth should do. These are all very common sense suggestions but it is important that Ruth follow them explicitly. The idea of anointing oneself was a common Semitic way of preparing for a festival. It simply meant to smear one’s face (and hands) with olive oil to make it glisten.

The translation “put on your best clothes” is somewhat dubious because I am sure Ruth, in her poverty, did not have many sets of clothes. Maybe it simply means “clean the clothes you have.” It is possible these suggestions by Naomi would make Ruth look and smell like a bride. This would add to the marriage imagery.

The phrase “until he has finished eating and drinking” implies these harvest festivals were rather risqué, party times. This can be seen from Isa. 9:3; 16:9-10; and Jer. 48:33. Ruth 3:7-8 also seems to imply that Boaz was intoxicated. See Special Topic: Alcohol – Alcoholism.

**3:4 “when he lies down”** The owner would stay close to his stack of grain to protect it from thieves.

**3:4,7,8,14 “uncover his feet”** This word has been interpreted in two literally different ways.

1. The Syrian translation and the NEB simply imply that this means that she lay down at his feet, as a symbol of submission and lowliness.
2. Because of several passages in other parts of the OT, many believe that “feet” may be a euphemistic way of speaking of the male genitalia (cf. Exod. 4:25; Deut. 28:57; Jdgs. 3:24; 1 Sam. 24:3; and possibly Isa. 6:2; 7:20; see NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 1049, #6).

The Moffatt Translation seems to follow this line of interpretation by translating it as “uncover his waist.”

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:6-13**

**“So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law had commanded her. <sup>7</sup>When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came secretly, and uncovered his feet and lay down. <sup>8</sup>It happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward; and behold, a woman was lying at his feet. <sup>9</sup>He said, “Who are you?” And she answered, “I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative.” <sup>10</sup>Then he said, “May you be blessed of the LORD, my daughter. You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich. <sup>11</sup>Now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence. <sup>12</sup>Now it is true I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I. <sup>13</sup>Remain this night, and when morning comes, if he will redeem you, good; let him redeem you. But if he does not wish to redeem you, then I will redeem you, as the LORD lives. Lie down until morning.”**

**3:6 “threshing floor”** This was a flat area on a hilltop which the entire village used to winnow grain. See NIDOTTE, vol. 1, pp. 893-894.

**3:7**

NASB, Peshitta “secretly”

NKJV “softly”

NRSV, JPSOA,

LXX “stealthily”

TEV, NJB “quietly”

The MT has a NOUN (BDB 532) which can mean (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 794)

1. secretly (i.e., so no one else will see her since there were surely other servants of Boaz close by)
2. quietly (i.e., so as not to wake Boaz)

**3:8 “in the middle of the night”** This is an idiom for the middle of the night (cf. Jdgs. 16:3). It is literally the word “divide” or “half” (BDB 345). This is not meant to be a precise time designation, but after everyone had gone to sleep (i.e., Boaz, his servants, and other winnowers).

☐ **“the man was startled”** This Hebrew word (BDB 353) has the implication of “afraid.” However, in this context, “surprised” or “startled” is the thought. He either had a dream or in rolling over he touched another warm body and was afraid it was an animal or a burglar, we are just not certain.

**3:9 “spread your covering over your maid”** Literally this is the word “wing” (BDB 489, cf. LXX). There seems to be some connection between the “wing” of Boaz’s garment and the “wing of the Lord,” mentioned in Ruth 2:12. Ruth had come under the wing of YHWH by coming to Bethlehem; now she wanted to come under the wing of the protection of Boaz. The covering with his skirt (wing, outer garment) was an idiom for a marriage proposal (cf. Deut. 22:30; 27:20; Ezra 16:8).

☐ **“for you are a close relative”** This is again the term *go’el* (BDB 145 I, cf. Ruth 2:22). This reflects something of the Levirate marriage spoken of in Deut. 25:5-10. In Boaz’s family, Levirate marriage was involved between Judah and his ancestor, Tamar, cf. Genesis 38. It is spelled out very specifically in Ruth 4:5 and 12.

The use of the terms in Ruth 3:12, “acquire” and “in order that,” show the legal relationship that will be involved in this marriage proposal. Really, it should have been that Boaz married Naomi; they were both the same age and this was the relationship spoken of in Deuteronomy 25, but Naomi was too old to have more children (cf. Ruth 1:11).

**3:10 “You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first”** Boaz’s praise is because Ruth was willing not to go after the younger, eligible men of the community, but to have more of the family concern not only for her mother-in-law, Naomi, but for an heir for her dead husband. Her kindness to her husband and his mother has now clearly demonstrated her respect for their family.

**3:11 “do not fear”** In this chapter there are several IMPERFECTS used in a JUSSIVE sense.

1. Ruth 3:3 – “do not make yourself known”
2. Ruth 3:11 – “do not fear”
3. Ruth 3:13 – “let him redeem you”
4. Ruth 3:14 – “let it not be known”
5. Ruth 3:17 – “do not go to. . .”

▣ **“for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence”** This is the same word used to describe Elimelech earlier (cf. Ruth 2:1). It also shows the character of Ruth, that everyone knew from her loving, faithful acts (Ruth 4:11; Pro. 12:4; 31:10). This must have been shocking to an ancient Israelite who condemned Moabites as heathens (i.e., Deut. 23:3).

**3:12 “There is a relative closer than I”** This could mean that simply everybody in a small town knew who everyone’s relatives were or it may be that Boaz had already been checking on this very thing! See Special Topic: Ransom/Redeem.

**3:13 “as the LORD lives”** Here we have Boaz taking an oath in YHWH’s name. This oath seems to be the root idea of the word YHWH, which comes from the Hebrew VERB “to be,” Exod. 3:14, and I think it means the ever-living, only-living God. See Special Topic: Names for Deity, D.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:14-18**

**<sup>14</sup>So she lay at his feet until morning and rose before one could recognize another; and he said, “Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.” <sup>15</sup>Again he said, “Give me the cloak that is on you and hold it.” So she held it, and he measured six *measures* of barley and laid it on her. Then she went into the city. <sup>16</sup>When she came to her mother-in-law, she said, “How did it go, my daughter?” And she told her all that the man had done for her. <sup>17</sup>She said, “These six *measures* of barley he gave to me, for he said, ‘Do not go to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’” <sup>18</sup>Then she said, “Wait, my daughter, until you know how the matter turns out; for the man will not rest until he has settled it today.”**

**3:14 “and rose before one could recognize another”** Apparently Boaz realized it would be better if this encounter was kept as a private matter and, therefore, he sent her home well before dawn.

One possible reason for his giving her this large measure of grain in Ruth 3:15 is not to show his kindness to her and Naomi but also to give her an excuse for being out in the street so early in the morning.

**3:15**

**NASB, NRSV,  
TEV, NJB,**

<b>REB</b>	<b>“cloak”</b>
<b>NKJV, JPSOA</b>	<b>“shawl”</b>
<b>LXX</b>	<b>“apron”</b>
<b>Peshitta</b>	<b>“mantle”</b>

This FEMININE NOUN (BDB 381) is found only here, and the PLURAL in Isa. 3:22. It is uncertain exactly to which garment of clothing it referred.

1. head covering
2. bridal shawl
3. outer cloak

Obviously, it is something Ruth had brought with her at Naomi’s instruction (i.e., Ruth 3:3).

The rare VERBAL form means “to extend” or “to spread” (i.e., Isa. 48:13; Lam. 2:22).

▣ **“he measured six *measures* of barley and laid it on her”** It is characteristic of Hebrew to leave out the specific measure, which would have been understood. However, it is uncertain what measure is spoken of here. If it was an “ephah,” it would be almost 150 pounds; if a “seah,” which is 1/3 ephah, it would be about 88 pounds, but it seems that the phrase, “laid it on her” implies it was an extra amount of weight and this would be enough for Naomi and Ruth to eat going for a long time. It was also a gesture of his kindness. See Special Topic: Ancient Near East Weights and Volumes.

▣ **“Then she went into the city”** The Hebrew Masoretic text has “he went into the city.” It is obviously an inappropriate scribal error because he will not go into the city until Ruth 4:1, and this refers to Ruth in this context.

**3:16 “How did it go, my daughter”** The Hebrew literally has “who are you” (cf. Ruth 3:9), as a question, but this seems somewhat out of context unless it was so early in the morning and was so dark that Naomi did not recognize Ruth at the door, especially with the large amount of grain on her shoulder.

**3:17** There is an implication from the amount of grain that possibly there is an underlying implication of “seed” as descendants. Ruth will have surrogate children for Naomi and blood descendants of her dead husband. This family tree is the theological purpose of the book.

**3:18 “for the man will not rest until he has settled it today”** This either means that Naomi knew the personality of Boaz quite well or she recognized his intense feelings by the amount of grain and knew that he would settle the marriage/redemption issue quickly.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. What does “security” mean in Ruth 3:1?
2. Explain the difference in “kinsman” in Ruth 3:2 and “close relative” in Ruth 3:9.
3. What do Ruth’s preparations in Ruth 3:3 imply?
4. What does it mean to uncover someone’s feet?
5. Explain the cultural implications of Ruth 3:9.
6. For what is Boaz praising Ruth in Ruth 3:10?
7. Why did Boaz give Ruth so much grain?

# RUTH 4

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Marriage of Ruth 4:1-6	Boaz Redeems Ruth 4:1-6	Boaz and Ruth Will Marry 4:1-6	Boaz Marries Ruth 4:1-4a 4:4b 4:5 4:6	Boaz Marries Ruth 4:1-6
4:7-12	4:7-12	4:7-12	4:7 4:8-10 4:11-12	4:7-8 4:9-12 (11b)
4:13-15	Descendants of Boaz and Ruth 4:13-17	Ruth's Child 4:13-17	Boaz and His Descendants 4:13-16	4:13-16
The Line of David Begins Here 4:16-17			4:17a 4:17b	4:17 The Genealogy of David
4:18-22	4:18-22	4:18-22	4:18-22	4:18-22

### READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

#### CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. Ruth 4 concludes this wonderful story and reveals the purpose of its writing (i.e., David's family tree).
- B. Not only does this book teach
  1. the great faith of a non-Israelite
  2. the great faith of a man from Bethlehem
 but the directing purposes of God in human history. The great king, David, will come from this particular family.
- C. The book of Ruth uses two OT legal procedures of
  1. Levirate marriage – Deut. 25:5-10, see NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 902-904
  2. responsibilities of the family *go'el* – Lev. 25:25-28
 and combines them. There is so much that moderns do not know about ANE and Israelite customs. See Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, pp. 37-38

- D. The fact of a ten-name genealogy points toward a theological purpose, not just a family genealogy.

God has a bigger purpose for Boaz and Ruth than just helping Naomi. See Special Topic: YHWH's Eternal Redemptive Plan.

- E. For a good brief article on "Genealogy in the OT," see NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 654-663.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:1-6

**<sup>1</sup>Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there, and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz spoke was passing by, so he said, "Turn aside, friend, sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down. <sup>2</sup>He took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down. <sup>3</sup>Then he said to the closest relative, "Naomi, who has come back from the land of Moab, has to sell the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. <sup>4</sup>So I thought to inform you, saying, 'Buy *it* before those who are sitting *here*, and before the elders of my people. If you will redeem *it*, redeem *it*; but if not, tell me that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem *it*, and I am after you.' And he said, "I will redeem *it*." <sup>5</sup>Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased, in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance." <sup>6</sup>The closest relative said, "I cannot redeem it for myself, because I would jeopardize my own inheritance. Redeem *it* for yourself; you *may have* my right of redemption, for I cannot redeem *it*."**

**4:1 "Now Boaz went up to the gate"** The gate was a center of social life, business, and justice. It was the only place in these ancient cities where large groups of people could meet. This is where the leaders of the city (i.e., elders, Ruth 4:2) gathered daily (see James M. Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, pp. 110-111).

▣ **"close relative"** This is the *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE (BDB 145 I, KB 169) of the term *go'el*. It is used in Ruth 2:20; 3:9,12; 4:1,3,6,8,14. The key text explaining the purpose of this person is Lev. 25:25. See Special Topic: Ransom/Redeem.

▣ **"friend"** Literally the Hebrew here means "a so-and-so" (BDB 811 I), but it is not a put down of this person but simply a way of not wanting to name him (cf. Dan. 8:13; see JPSOA), for that would be extraneous to the story. There is some ambiguity in the Hebrew word. It is usually used of a place, not a person (i.e., 1 Sam. 21:3; 2 Kgs. 6:8).

**4:2 "He took ten men of the elders of the city"** This either refers to a legal quorum (Israel's first place for justice in local matters), or some rabbis say that it took ten men to pronounce a marriage blessing and that seems to be recorded at the end of the chapter (i.e., Ruth 4:11-12). See Special Topic: Elder and NIDOTTE, vol. 1, pp. 1137-1139.

**4:3 "has to sell the piece of land which belonged to our brother, Elimelech"** The Hebrew here is uncertain whether it was sold before Elimelech left or whether Naomi had to sell it now to make ends meet (i.e., JPSOA). Whatever the situation, it meant that the land was going to be sold outside the immediate family. It was the responsibility of the closest relative or *go'el* to try to prevent this.



NASB, NKJV,  
 NJB, LXX “our brother”  
 NRSV, JPSOA,  
 REB “our kinsman”  
 TEV “our relative”

This kinship term (BDB 26 I) has several usages (see NIDOTTE, vol. 1, pp. 345-348).

1. literal brother, i.e., Gen. 4:2,8,9,10,11
2. indefinite kinship
  - a. Lot to Abraham – Gen. 13:8
  - b. Jacob to Laban – Gen. 29:12,15
  - c. same tribe – Num. 16:10; 18:2,6
  - d. same people – Exod. 2:11; 4:18
  - e. of a friend – 2 Sam. 1:26; 1 Kgs. 9:13; 20:32,33

Here it is an aspect of c, but with some ambiguity.

**4:4 “So I thought to inform you”** The literal Hebrew idiom is “to uncover your ear.” The implication is that these two men had known about this for quite a while but had not acted on it, and now Boaz is bringing it to some kind of legal resolution.

**“redeem”** This (BDB 145 I, KB 169) is a crucial theological term related to Lev. 25:25. It is used multiple times in this chapter.

1. Ruth 4:1,3 – *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE
2. Ruth 4:4 – *Qal* IMPERFECT (thrice)
3. Ruth 4:4 – *Qal* IMPERATIVE
4. Ruth 4:4 – *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT
5. Ruth 4:6 – *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE
6. Ruth 4:6 – *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT (twice)
7. Ruth 4:6 – *Qal* IMPERATIVE
8. Ruth 4:8 – *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE

This concept of buying something back for the good of the family is also expressed by the VERB “buy” (BDB 888, KB 1111, although here it refers to rights being exchanged and not money given), also used multiple times in this chapter.

1. Ruth 4:4 – *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. Ruth 4:5 – *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT
3. Ruth 4:5 – *Qal* PERFECT (twice)
4. Ruth 4:8 – *Qal* IMPERATIVE
5. Ruth 4:9 – *Qal* PERFECT
6. Ruth 4:10 – *Qal* PERFECT

For more information see (1) Special Topic: Ransom/Redeem, (2) Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, pp. 21-22,166-167, and (3) NIDOTTE, vol. 1, pp. 789-795.

**“that I may know”** The MT has the *Qal* IMPERFECT but the Masoretic scholars suggested (*Qere*) a change to the COHORTATIVE form.

**4:5 “you”** The MT has “I” but the Masoretic scholars suggest (*Qere*) the second person fits the context better.

▣ **“you must also acquire Ruth, the Moabite”** Although the man was willing to buy the field for himself, he was not willing to perform the rite of Levirate marriage (see note online at Deut. 25:5-6), because it might jeopardize his own inheritance (cf. Ruth 4:6). The son born to this relationship would be considered a son of Naomi and would, in time, inherit the field.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:7-12**

<sup>7</sup>Now this was *the custom* in former times in Israel concerning the redemption and the exchange of land to confirm any matter: a man removed his sandal and gave it to another; and this was the manner of attestation in Israel. <sup>8</sup>So the closest relative said to Boaz, “Buy it for yourself.” And he removed his sandal. <sup>9</sup>Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “You are witnesses today that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. <sup>10</sup>Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his *birth place*; you are witnesses today.” <sup>11</sup>All the people who were in the court, and the elders, said, “*We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel; and may you achieve wealth in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem.* <sup>12</sup>Moreover, may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah, through the offspring which the LORD will give you by this young woman.”

**4:7 “a man removed his sandal”** We learn from the Nuzi Tablets (see R. K. Harrison, *OT Times*, pp.78-79) that this action was the cultural legal norm. It is also possibly mentioned in the OT (cf. Deut. 25:9,10; Ps. 60:8; 108:9; Amos 2:6; 8:6). The implication from the MT is that the ancient practice was no longer done in the Israel of the author’s time.

**4:8** The PRONOUN “he” is ambiguous. It could refer to Boaz taking off his sandal but probably it was a cultural sign of the relinquishment of one’s legal right, so it would refer to the unnamed nearer kin.

**4:9,10-11** The ten elders were legal witnesses.

**4:11** This is a blessing that reflects on the history of the people of God, particularly Jacob’s two wives, Leah and Rachel. This marriage blessing is found in both Ruth 4:11 and 12, and seems to show both the importance of the family of Boaz and the importance of the family of Elimelech. Chapter 4 clearly shows the theological purpose of Ruth (i.e., David’s lineage).

▣ **“May. . .may”** The first “may” is a *Qal* IMPERFECT functioning as a JUSSIVE. The second “may” reflects a *Qal* IMPERATIVE.

A JUSSIVE (i.e., “may,” 4:12) is used in the next verse, which is a continuation of the elders’ blessing.

▣ **“built the house of Israel”** This is idiomatic language using construction terms to describe the growth of a family/clan/nation.

The theological implication of the fourth chapter of Ruth is that the seed of Ruth and Boaz, which will ultimately result in David, will build the house of Israel. For those of us who are Christians, the promise of the Messiah and a universal salvation is “the ultimate” fulfillment.

▣

NASB	“wealth”
NKJV, JPSOA	“prosper”
NRSV	“produce children”
TEV	“rich”
REB	“do a worthy deed”
LXX	“produce might”

In this context it (BDB 298) must refer to the older Boaz producing a male heir. He was already wealthy.

▣ **“Ephrathah”** This is a way of identifying the Bethlehem in Judah (cf. Ruth 1:2; Gen. 35:16,19; 48:7; Micah 5:2).

▣ **“in Bethlehem”** This small village, close to Jerusalem, is mentioned because it would be the birthplace of David (i.e., and later, the Messiah, cf. Micah 5:2-5).

**4:12** Ruth 4:12 specifically mentions the child of Judah by his own daughter-in-law (i.e., an unusual and unexpected instance of the Levirate marriage practice; cf. Gen. 46:12). So too, will Ruth’s child by Boaz.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:13-15**

<sup>13</sup>So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went in to her. And the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. <sup>14</sup>Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel. <sup>15</sup>May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.”

**4:13 “And the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son”** Apparently the theological emphasis of the sovereignty of God returns at this point. She had been married over ten years and had no children by her first husband. As is quite common in the OT, God uses barren women to show His power in raising descendants for the line of the Messiah (i.e., Rebekah and Rachel in Genesis and Elizabeth, John the Baptist’s mother, in Luke 2).

▣ **“to conceive”** This is a rare form of the NOUN (BDB 248), found only here and Hosea 9-11 (used in a judgment statement).

**4:14-15 “may...May”** As Ruth 4:11-12 reflects the blessing of the ten elders, 4:14-15 reflects the blessing of the women of Bethlehem.

1. “may,” 4:14 – *Niphal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
2. “may,” 4:15 – *Qal* PERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense

**4:14 “Then the women said to Naomi, ‘Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel’”** Notice that the people of Bethlehem understood the theological significance of what God had done for Naomi, and how this totally reversed her previous statements about how God had brought her back empty. Many people see Naomi as a symbol of Israel’s unbelief (cf. Ruth 1:20,21), but here in Ruth 4:13-17, the blessings of God return even amidst the problematic vicissitudes of life.

The Hebrew text is ambiguous about who “the redeemer” refers to.

1. Boaz

2. the child of Ruth and Boaz

**4:15 “your daughter-in-law who, loves you and is better to you than seven sons”** This blessing must have been shocking in a culture where sons were so valuable and here a Moabite woman is more valuable than seven of them. Of course, this number “seven” reflects the ideal family (cf. 1 Sam. 2:5; 1 Chr. 2:15; Job 1:2; Jer. 15:9). See Special Topic: Symbolic Numbers in Scripture, #4.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:16-17**

**<sup>16</sup>Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and became his nurse. <sup>17</sup>The neighbor women gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi!” So they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.**

**4:16** This may reflect a cultural adoption procedure. The OT does not specifically address the method of adoption, but Gen. 30:3; 48:12; and 50:23 are probably examples of the procedure. See Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, pp. 51-52.

**4:17 “The neighbor women gave him a name, saying”** It was extremely unusual for neighbor women to be able to name this special child. Why Boaz allowed it is uncertain. Josephus (*Antiq.* 5.9.4) says Naomi named him. Maybe the women are just repeating the name. However, it does show God’s faithfulness.

The name “Obed,” is the word for “servant” (BDB 714), but the implication of the name is “YHWH is my servant” (i.e., Obadiah).

▣ **“He is the father of Jesse, the father of David”** This is the purpose of the book (i.e., to delineate the line of David).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:18-22**

**<sup>18</sup>Now these are the generations of Perez: to Perez was born Hezron, <sup>19</sup>and to Hezron was born Ram, and to Ram, Amminadab, <sup>20</sup>and to Amminadab was born Nahshon, and to Nahshon, Salmon, <sup>21</sup>and to Salmon was born Boaz, and to Boaz, Obed, <sup>22</sup>and to Obed was born Jesse, and to Jesse, David.**

**4:18-22** There are ten names listed here but some of David’s ancestors are left out. This list is somewhat different from the list in 1 Chr. 2:9-13 (i.e., Salma – Salmon). It is exactly like the list in Matt. 1:3-6, and with slight variation, the list in Luke 3:32,33. This genealogy starts out with the phrase “now these are the generations of,” which is exactly the phrase used so often in the book of Genesis to mark genealogies. This genealogy shows that through the child of promise, God is faithful to produce and fulfill His covenant promises to Abraham, not only of the Promised Land, but also the promised seed (i.e., Genesis 12; 15). See Special Topic: Covenant Promises to the Patriarchs and Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Explain the role of the *go'el*.
2. Explain Levirate marriage.
3. What is the literary implication of the first phrase in Ruth 4:7?
4. What does "wealth" mean in Ruth 4:11?
5. How is Perez like the new child of Boaz and Ruth?
6. Why is Ruth 4:13 so theologically significant?
7. What is the purpose of the concluding genealogy?