

THE BOOK OF

JUDGES

Commentary by **ROBERT JAMIESON**

CHAPTER 1

JUDGES 1:1-3.

THE ACTS OF JUDAH AND SIMEON.

1. *Now after the death of Joshua* — probably not a long period, for the Canaanites seem to have taken advantage of that event to attempt recovering their lost position, and the Israelites were obliged to renew the war.

the children of Israel asked the Lord — The divine counsel on this, as on other occasions, was sought by Urim and Thummim, by applying to the high priest, who, according to JOSEPHUS, was Phinehas.

saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first — The elders, who exercised the government in their respective tribes, judged rightly, that in entering upon an important expedition, they should have a leader nominated by divine appointment; and in consulting the oracle, they adopted a prudent course, whether the object of their inquiry related to the choice of an individual commander, or to the honor of precedency among the tribes.

2. *the Lord said, Judah shall go up* — The predicted pre-eminence (^{<small>GEN</small>}Genesis 49:8) was thus conferred upon Judah by divine direction, and its appointment to take the lead in the ensuing hostilities was of great importance, as the measure of success by which its arms were crowned,

would animate the other tribes to make similar attempts against the Canaanites within their respective territories.

I have delivered the land into his hand — not the whole country, but the district assigned for his inheritance.

3. Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me ..., that we may fight against the Canaanites — Being conterminous tribes (⁶⁸⁹¹Joshua 19:1,2), they had a common interest, and were naturally associated in this enterprise.

~~6890~~ JUDGES 1:4-21.

ADONI-BEZEK JUSTLY REQUESTED.

5, 6. Bezek — This place lay within the domain of Judah, about twelve miles south of Jerusalem.

found Adoni-bezek — that is, “lord of Bezek” — he was “found,” that is, surprised and routed in a pitched battle, whence he fled; but being taken prisoner, he was treated with a severity unusual among the Israelites, for they “cut off his thumbs and great toes.” Barbarities of various kinds were commonly practiced on prisoners of war in ancient times, and the object of this particular mutilation of the hands and feet was to disable them for military service ever after. The infliction of such a horrid cruelty on this Canaanite chief would have been a foul stain on the character of the Israelites if there were not reason for believing it was done by them as an act of retributive justice, and as such it was regarded by Adoni-bezek himself, whose conscience read his atrocious crimes in their punishment.

7. Threescore and ten kings — So great a number will not appear strange, when it is considered that anciently every ruler of a city or large town was called a king. It is not improbable that in that southern region of Canaan, there might, in earlier times, have been even more till a turbulent chief like Adoni-bezek devoured them in his insatiable ambition.

8. Now the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and had taken it — The capture of this important city, which ranks among the

early incidents in the war of invasion (⁴⁶⁵⁶Joshua 15:63), is here noticed to account for its being in the possession of the Judahites; and they brought Adoni-bezek thither [⁴⁰⁰⁷Judges 1:7], in order, probably, that his fate being rendered so public, might inspire terror far and wide. Similar inroads were made into the other unconquered parts of Judah's inheritance [⁴⁰⁰⁹Judges 1:9-11]. The story of Caleb's acquisition of Hebron is here repeated (⁴⁶⁵⁶Joshua 15:16-19). [See on ⁴⁶⁵⁶Joshua 15:16.]

16. *the children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah* — called "the Kenite," as probably descended from the people of that name (⁴⁰²²Numbers 24:21,22). If he might not himself, his posterity did accept the invitation of Moses (⁴⁰⁰²Numbers 10:32) to accompany the Israelites to Canaan. Their first encampment was in the "city of palm trees" — not Jericho, of course, which was utterly destroyed, but the surrounding district, perhaps Engedi, in early times called Hazezon-tamar (⁴⁰⁴⁷Genesis 14:7), from the palm-grove which sheltered it. Thence they removed for some unknown cause, and associating themselves with Judah, joined in an expedition against Arad, in the southern part of Canaan (⁴⁰²¹Numbers 21:1). On the conquest of that district, some of this pastoral people pitched their tents there, while others migrated to the north (⁴⁰⁴⁷Judges 4:17).

17-29. *And Judah went with Simeon his brother* — The course of the narrative is here resumed from ⁴⁰⁰⁹Judges 1:9, and an account given of Judah returning the services of Simeon (⁴⁰⁰³Judges 1:3), by aiding in the prosecution of the war within the neighboring tribes.

slew the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath — or Zephathah (⁴⁴⁴⁰2 Chronicles 14:10), a valley lying in the southern portion of Canaan.

Hormah — destroyed in fulfillment of an early vow of the Israelites (see on ⁴⁰²¹Numbers 21:2). The confederate tribes, pursuing their incursions in that quarter, came successively to Gaza, Askalon, and Ekron, which they took. But the Philistines seem soon to have regained possession of these cities.

19. *the Lord was with Judah; ... but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley* — The war was of the Lord, whose omnipotent aid would have ensured their success in every encounter, whether on the

mountains or the plains, with foot soldiers or cavalry. It was distrust, the want of a simple and firm reliance on the promise of God, that made them afraid of the iron chariots (see on ^{<0104>}Joshua 11:4-9).

21. *the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem* — Judah had expelled the people from their part of Jerusalem (^{<0005>}Judges 1:8). The border of the two tribes ran through the city — Israelites and natives must have been closely intermingled.

^{<0002>}JUDGES 1:22-26.

SOME CANAANITES LEFT.

22, 23. *the house of Joseph* — the tribe of Ephraim, as distinguished from Manasseh (^{<0027>}Judges 1:27).

24. *the spies ... said, ... Show us, ... the entrance into the city* — that is, the avenues to the city, and the weakest part of the walls.

we will show thee mercy — The Israelites might employ these means of getting possession of a place which was divinely appropriated to them: they might promise life and rewards to this man, though he and all the Canaanites were doomed to destruction (^{<0022>}Joshua 2:12-14); but we may assume the promise was suspended on his embracing the true religion, or quitting the country, as he did. If they had seen him to be firmly opposed to either of these alternatives, they would not have constrained him by promises any more than by threats to betray his countrymen. But if they found him disposed to be serviceable, and to aid the invaders in executing the will of God, they might promise to spare him.

26. *Luz* — (See on ^{<0117>}Genesis 12:7; ^{<0288>}Genesis 28:18).

27-36. The same course of subjugation was carried on in the other tribes to a partial extent, and with varying success. Many of the natives, no doubt, during the progress of this exterminating war, saved themselves by flight and became, it is thought, the first colonists in Greece, Italy, and other countries. But a large portion made a stout resistance and retained possession of their old abodes in Canaan. In other cases, when the natives

were vanquished, avarice led the Israelites to spare the idolaters, contrary to the express command of God; and their disobedience to His orders in this matter involved them in many troubles which this book describes.

CHAPTER 2

JUDGES 2:1-10.

AN ANGEL SENT TO REBUKE THE PEOPLE AT BOCHIM.

1-3. *an angel ... came from Gilgal to Bochim* — We are inclined to think, from the authoritative tone of his language, that he was the Angel of the Covenant (^{<023>}Exodus 23:20 ^{<054>}Joshua 5:14); the same who appeared in human form and announced himself captain of the Lord's host. His coming from Gilgal had a peculiar significance, for there the Israelites made a solemn dedication of themselves to God on their entrance into the promised land [^{<001>}Joshua 4:1-9]; and the memory of that religious engagement, which the angel's arrival from Gilgal awakened, gave emphatic force to his rebuke of their apostasy.

Bochim — “the weepers,” was a name bestowed evidently in allusion to this incident or the place, which was at or near Shiloh.

I said, I will never break my covenant with you ... but ye have not obeyed my voice — The burden of the angel's remonstrance was that God would inviolably keep His promise; but they, by their flagrant and repeated breaches of their covenant with Him, had forfeited all claim to the stipulated benefits. Having disobeyed the will of God by voluntarily courting the society of idolaters and placing themselves in the way of temptation, He left them to suffer the punishment of their misdeeds.

4, 5. *when the angel of the Lord spake these words ... the people lifted up their voice, and wept* — The angel's expostulation made a deep and painful impression. But the reformation was but temporary, and the gratifying promise of a revival which this scene of emotion held out, was, ere long, blasted by speedy and deeper relapses into the guilt of defection and idolatry.

6-10. *And when Joshua had let the people go* — This passage is a repetition of ^{<029>}Joshua 24:29-31. It was inserted here to give the reader the

reasons which called forth so strong and severe a rebuke from the angel of the Lord. During the lifetime of the first occupiers, who retained a vivid recollection of all the miracles and judgments which they had witnessed in Egypt and the desert, the national character stood high for faith and piety. But, in course of time, a new race arose who were strangers to all the hallowed and solemnizing experience of their fathers, and too readily yielded to the corrupting influences of the idolatry that surrounded them.

JUDGES 2:11-19.

WICKEDNESS OF THE NEW GENERATION AFTER JOSHUA.

11-19. *the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord* — This chapter, together with the first eight verses of the next [⁽¹⁰²¹⁾Judges 2:11-3:8], contains a brief but comprehensive summary of the principles developed in the following history. An attentive consideration of them, therefore, is of the greatest importance to a right understanding of the strange and varying phases of Israelitish history, from the death of Joshua till the establishment of the monarchy.

served Baalim — The plural is used to include all the gods of the country.

13. *Ashtaroth* — Also a plural word, denoting all the female divinities, whose rites were celebrated by the most gross and revolting impurities.

14. *the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them* — Adversities in close and rapid succession befell them. But all these calamities were designed only as chastisements — a course of correctional discipline by which God brought His people to see and repent of their errors; for as they returned to faith and allegiance. He “raised up judges” (⁽¹⁰²⁶⁾Judges 2:16).

16. *which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them* — The judges who governed Israel were strictly God’s vicegerents in the government of the people, He being the supreme ruler. Those who were thus elevated retained the dignity as long as they lived; but there was no regular, unbroken succession of judges. Individuals, prompted by the inward, irresistible impulse of God’s Spirit when they witnessed the

depressed state of their country, were roused to achieve its deliverance. It was usually accompanied by a special call, and the people seeing them endowed with extraordinary courage or strength, accepted them as delegates of Heaven, and submitted to their sway. Frequently they were appointed only for a particular district, and their authority extended no farther than over the people whose interests they were commissioned to protect. They were without pomp, equipage, or emoluments attached to the office. They had no power to make laws; for these were given by God; nor to explain them, for that was the province of the priests — but they were officially upholders of the law, defenders of religion, avengers of all crimes, particularly of idolatry and its attendant vices.

CHAPTER 3

000 JUDGES 3:1-4.

NATIONS LEFT TO PROVE ISRAEL.

1. *these are the nations which the Lord left, to prove Israel* — This was the special design of these nations being left, and it evinces the direct influence of the theocracy under which the Israelites were placed. These nations were left for a double purpose: in the first instance, to be instrumental, by their inroads, in promoting the moral and spiritual discipline of the Israelites; and also to subserve the design of making them acquainted with war, in order that the young, more especially, who were total strangers to it, might learn the use of weapons and the art of wielding them.

000 JUDGES 3:5-7.

BY COMMUNION WITH THESE THE ISRAELITES COMMIT IDOLATRY.

5-7. *the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites* — The two peoples by degrees came to be on habits of intercourse. Reciprocal alliances were formed by marriage till the Israelites, relaxing the austerity of their principles, showed a growing conformity to the manners and worship of their idolatrous neighbors.

000 JUDGES 3:8-11.

OTHNIEL DELIVERS ISRAEL.

8-11. *sold them* — that is, “delivered them”

into the hand of Chushan-rishathaim — or, Chushan, “the wicked.” This name had been probably given him from his cruel and impious character.

served Chushan-rishathaim eight years — by the payment of a stipulated tribute yearly, the raising of which must have caused a great amount of labor and privation.

9. *when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord* — In their distress they had recourse to earnest prayer, accompanied by humble and penitent confession of their errors.

Othniel — (See on ^{<0256}Joshua 15:16; ^{<0013}Judges 1:13). His military experience qualified him for the work, while the gallant exploits he was known to have performed, gained him the full confidence of his countrymen in his ability as a leader.

10. *The Spirit of the Lord came upon him and he judged Israel, and went out to war* — Impelled by a supernatural influence, he undertook the difficult task of government at this national crisis — addressing himself to promote a general reformation of manners, the abolition of idolatry, and the revival of pure religion. After these preliminary measures, he collected a body of choice warriors to expel the foreign oppressors.

the Lord delivered Chushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushan-rishathaim — No details are given of this war, which, considering the resources of so potent a monarch, must have been a determined struggle. But the Israelitish arms were crowned through the blessing of God with victory, and Canaan regained its freedom and independence.

11. *Othniel ... died* — How powerful the influence of one good man is, in church or state, is best found in his loss [BISHOP HALL].

JUDGES 3:12-30.

EHUD SLAYS EGLON.

12-14. *the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord* — The Israelites, deprived of the moral and political influences of Othniel, were not long in following their native bias to idolatry.

the Lord strengthened Eglon the king of Moab — The reigning monarch's ambition was to recover that extensive portion of his ancient territory possessed by the Israelites. In conjunction with his neighbors, the Ammonites and the Amalekites, sworn enemies of Israel, he first subjected the eastern tribes; then crossing the Jordan, he made a sudden incursion on western Canaan, and in virtue of his conquests, erected fortifications in the territory adjoining Jericho [JOSEPHUS], to secure the frontier, and fixed his residence there. This oppressor was permitted, in the providence of God, to triumph for eighteen years.

15. *Ehud the son of Gera* — descended from Gera, one of Benjamin's sons (^{<0462>}Genesis 46:21).

left-handed — This peculiarity distinguished many in the Benjamite tribe (^{<0206>}Judges 20:16). But the original word is rendered in some versions "both-handed," a view countenanced by ^{<1320>}1 Chronicles 12:2.

by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab — the yearly tribute, which, according to Eastern fashion, would be borne with ostentatious ceremony and offered (^{<0088>}Judges 3:18) by several messengers.

16. *Ehud made him a dagger ... and he did gird it ... upon his right thigh* — The sword was usually worn on the left side; so that Ehud's was the more likely to escape detection.

19. *quarries* — rather, "graven images" (^{<0572>}Deuteronomy 7:25 ^{<2089>}Jeremiah 8:19 ^{<2653>}51:52); statues of Moabite idols, the sight of which kindled the patriotic zeal of Ehud to avenge this public insult to Israel on its author.

I have a secret errand unto thee, O king: who said, Keep silence — "Privacy" — a signal for all to withdraw.

20. *a summer parlour* — *Hebrew*, “chamber of cooling” — one of those retired edifices which Oriental grandees usually have in their gardens, and in which they repose during the heat of the day.

21-26. *Ehud put forth his left hand* — The whole circumstance of this daring act — the death of Eglon without a shriek, or noise — the locking of the doors — the carrying off the key — the calm, unhurried deportment of Ehud — show the strength of his confidence that he was doing God service.

27. *he blew a trumpet in the mountain of Ephraim* — summoned to arms the people of that mountainous region, which, adjoining the territory of Benjamin, had probably suffered most from the grievous oppression of the Moabites.

28. *they went down after him, and took the fords* — (See on ^{ORIG}Joshua 2:7). With the view of preventing all escape to the Moabite coast, and by the slaughter of ten thousand men [^{ORIG}Judges 3:29], Ehud rescued his country from a state of ignominious vassalage.

31. *after him was Shamgar* — No notice is given of the tribe or family of this judge; and from the Philistines being the enemy that roused him into public service, the suffering seems to have been local — confined to some of the western tribes.

slew ... six hundred men with an oxgoad — This instrument is eight feet long and about six inches in circumference. It is armed at the lesser end with a sharp prong for driving the cattle, and on the other with a small iron paddle for removing the clay which encumbers the plough in working. Such an instrument, wielded by a strong arm, would do no mean execution. We may suppose, however, for the notice is very fragmentary, that Shamgar was only the leader of a band of peasants, who by means of such implements of labor as they could lay hold of at the moment, achieved the heroic exploit recorded.

CHAPTER 4

JUDGES 4:1-17.

DEBORAH AND BARAK DELIVER ISRAEL FROM JABIN AND SISERA.

1. *The children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, when Ehud was dead* — The removal of the zealous judge Ehud again left his infatuated countrymen without the restraint of religion.

2, 3. *Jabin king of Canaan* — “Jabin,” a royal title (see on ^{<ORIG>}Joshua 11:1). The second Jabin built a new capital on the ruins of the old (^{<ORIG>}Joshua 11:10,11). The northern Canaanites had recovered from the effect of their disastrous overthrow in the time of Joshua, and now triumphed in their turn over Israel. This was the severest oppression to which Israel had been subjected. But it fell heaviest on the tribes in the north, and it was not till after a grinding servitude of twenty years that they were awakened to view it as the punishment of their sins and to seek deliverance from God.

4. *And Deborah, a prophetess* — A woman of extraordinary knowledge, wisdom, and piety, instructed in divine knowledge by the Spirit and accustomed to interpret His will; who acquired an extensive influence, and was held in universal respect, insomuch that she became the animating spirit of the government and discharged all the special duties of a judge, except that of military leader.

the wife of Lapidoth — rendered by some, “a woman of splendors.”

5. *she dwelt under the palm tree* — or, collectively, “palm-grove.” It is common still in the East to administer justice in the open air, or under the canopy of an umbrageous tree.

6. *she sent and called Barak* — by virtue of her official authority as judge.

Kedesh-naphtali — situated on an eminence, little north of the Sea of Galilee, and so called to distinguish it from another Kedesh in Issachar.

Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded? — a Hebrew form of making an emphatic communication.

Go and draw toward mount Tabor — an isolated mountain of Galilee, northeast corner of the plain of Esdraelon. It was a convenient place of rendezvous, and the enlistment is not to be considered as limited to ten thousand, though a smaller force would have been inadequate.

8. *Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go* — His somewhat singular request to be accompanied by Deborah was not altogether the result of weakness. The Orientals always take what is dearest to the battlefield along with them; they think it makes them fight better. The policy of Barak, then, to have the presence of the prophetess is perfectly intelligible as it would no less stimulate the valor of the troops, than sanction, in the eyes of Israel, the uprising against an oppressor so powerful as Jabin.

9. *the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman* — This was a prediction which Barak could not understand at the time; but the strain of it conveyed a rebuke of his unmanly fears.

11. *Now Heber the Kenite ... pitched his tent* — It is not uncommon, even in the present day, for pastoral tribes to feed their flocks on the extensive commons that lie in the heart of inhabited countries in the East (see on ^{<0016>}Judges 1:16).

plain of Zaanaim — This is a mistranslation for “the oaks of the wanderers.” The site of the encampment was under a grove of oaks, or terebinths, in the upland valley of Kedesh.

13. *the river of Kishon* — The plain on its bank was chosen as the battlefield by Sisera himself, who was unconsciously drawn thither for the ruin of his army.

14. *Barak went down from mount Tabor* — It is a striking proof of the full confidence Barak and his troops reposed in Deborah’s assurance of

victory, that they relinquished their advantageous position on the hill and rushed into the plain in face of the iron chariots they so much dreaded.

15. *the Lord discomfited Sisera* — *Hebrew*, “threw his army into confusion”; men, horses, and chariots being intermingled in wild confusion. The disorder was produced by a supernatural panic (see on ⁽¹⁰⁸⁾Judges 5:20).

so that Sisera lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet — His chariot being probably distinguished by its superior size and elegance, would betray the rank of its rider, and he saw therefore that his only chance of escape was on foot.

16. *But Barak pursued ... unto Harosheth* — Broken and routed, the main body of Sisera’s army fled northward; others were forced into the Kishon and drowned (see on ⁽¹⁰⁸⁾Judges 5:21).

17, 18. *Sisera fled ... to the tent of Jael* — According to the usages of nomadic people, the duty of receiving the stranger in the sheik’s absence devolves on his wife, and the moment the stranger is admitted into his tent, his claim to be defended or concealed from his pursuers is established.

19. *she ... gave him drink, and covered him* — Sisera reckoned on this as a pledge of his safety, especially in the tent of a friendly sheik. This pledge was the strongest that could be sought or obtained, after he had partaken of refreshments, and been introduced in the inner or women’s apartment.

20. *he said unto her, ... when any man doth come and enquire of thee and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No* — The privacy of the harem, even in a tent, cannot be intruded on without express permission.

21. *Then Jael took a nail of the tent* — most probably one of the pins with which the tent ropes are fastened to the ground. Escape was almost impossible for Sisera. But the taking of his life by the hand of Jael was murder. It was a direct violation of all the notions of honor and friendship that are usually held sacred among pastoral people, and for which it is impossible to conceive a woman in Jael’s circumstances to have had any

motive, except that of gaining favor with the victors. Though predicted by Deborah [¹⁰⁴⁹Judges 4:9], it was the result of divine foreknowledge only — not the divine appointment or sanction; and though it is praised in the song [¹⁰⁵⁴Judges 5:24-27], the eulogy must be considered as pronounced not on the moral character of the woman and her deed, but on the public benefits which, in the overruling providence of God, would flow from it.

CHAPTER 5

JUDGES 5:1-31.

DEBORAH AND BARAK'S SONG OF THANKSGIVING.

1. *Then sang Deborah and Barak ... on that day* — This noble triumphal ode was evidently the composition of Deborah herself.

2, 3. The meaning is obscurely seen in our version; it has been better rendered thus, "Praise ye Jehovah; for the free are freed in Israel — the people have willingly offered themselves" [ROBINSON].

4, 5. Allusion is here made, in general terms, to God's interposition on behalf of His people.

Seir ... the field of Edom — represent the mountain range and plain extending along the south from the Dead Sea to the Elanitic Gulf.

thou wentest out — indicates the storm to have proceeded from the south or southeast.

6-8. The song proceeds in these verses to describe the sad condition of the country, the oppression of the people, and the origin of all the national distress in the people's apostasy from God. Idolatry was the cause of foreign invasion and internal inability to resist it.

9. expresses gratitude to the respective leaders of the tribes which participated in the contest; but, above all, to God, who inspired both the patriotic disposition and the strength.

10. *Speak* — that is, join in this song of praise.

white asses — Those which are purely white are highly prized, and being costly, are possessed only by the wealthy and great.

Ye that sit in judgment — has been rendered, "ye that repose on tapestries."

11-14. The wells which are at a little distance from towns in the East, are, in unsettled times, places of danger. But in peace they are scenes of pleasant and joyous resort. The poetess anticipates that this song may be sung, and the righteous acts of the Lord rehearsed at these now tranquil “places of drawing water.” Deborah now rouses herself to describe, in terms suitable to the occasion, the preparation and the contest, and calls in a flight of poetic enthusiasm on Barak to parade his prisoners in triumphal procession. Then follows a eulogistic enumeration of the tribes which raised the commanded levy, or volunteered their services — the soldiers of Ephraim who dwelt near the mount of the Amalekites, the small quota of Benjamin; “the governors,” valiant leaders “out of Machir,” the western Manasseh; out of Zebulun.

15. Then comes a reproachful notice of the tribes which did not obey the summons to take the field against the common enemy of Israel. By the

divisions — that is, the watercourses which descend from the eastern hills unto the Jordan and Dead Sea.

For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart — They felt the patriotic impulse and determined, at first, to join the ranks of their western brethren, but resiled from the purpose, preferring their peaceful shepherd songs to the trumpet sound of war.

17, 18. *Gilead abode beyond Jordan* — that is, Both Gad and the eastern half to Manasseh chose to dwell at ease in their Havoth-jair, or “villages of tents,” while Daniel and Asher, both maritime tribes, continued with their ships and in their “breaches” (“havens”). The mention of these craven tribes (^{CHS}Judges 5:18) is concluded with a fresh burst of commendation on Zebulun and Naphtali.

19-22. describes the scene of battle and the issue. It would seem (^{CHS}Judges 5:19) that Jabin was reinforced by the troops of other Canaanite princes. The battlefield was near Taanach (now Ta’annuk), on a tell or mound in the level plain of Megiddo (now Leijun), on its southwestern extremity, by the left bank of the Kishon.

they took no gain of money — They obtained no plunder.

20. *the stars in their courses fought* — A fearful tempest burst upon them and threw them into disorder.

21. *the river of Kishon swept them away* — The enemy was defeated near “the waters of Megiddo” — the sources and side streams of the Kishon: they that fled had to cross the deep and marshy bed of the torrent, but the Lord had sent a heavy rain — the waters suddenly rose — the warriors fell into the quicksands, and sinking deep into them, were drowned or washed into the sea [VAN DE VELDE].

22. *Then were the horse hoofs broken by the means of the prancings* — Anciently, as in many parts of the East still, horses were not shod. The breaking of the hoofs denotes the hot haste and heavy irregular tramp of the routed foe.

23. *Curse ye Meroz* — a village on the confines of Issachar and Naphtali, which lay in the course of the fugitives, but the inhabitants declined to aid in their destruction.

24-27. is a most graphic picture of the treatment of Sisera in the tent of Jael.

25. *butter* — curdled milk; a favorite beverage in the East.

28-30. In these verses a sudden transition is made to the mother of the Canaanite general, and a striking picture is drawn of a mind agitated between hope and fear — impatient of delay, yet anticipating the news of victory and the rewards of rich booty.

the lattice — a lattice window, common to the houses in warm countries for the circulation of air.

29. *her wise ladies* — maids of honor.

30. *to every man a damsel or two* — Young maidens formed always a valued part of Oriental conquerors’ war-spoils. But Sisera’s mother wished other booty for him; namely, the gold-threaded, richly embroidered, and scarlet-colored cloaks which were held in such high esteem. The ode concludes with a wish in keeping with the pious and patriotic character of the prophetess.

CHAPTER 6

⌘ JUDGES 6:1-6.

THE ISRAELITES, FOR THEIR SINS, OPPRESSED BY MIDIAN.

1. *and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian* — Untaught by their former experiences, the Israelites again apostatized, and new sins were followed by fresh judgments. Midian had sustained a severe blow in the time of Moses (⌘ Numbers 31:1-18); and the memory of that disaster, no doubt, inflamed their resentment against the Israelites. They were wandering herdsmen, called “children of the East,” from their occupying the territory east of the Red Sea, contiguous to Moab. The destructive ravages they are described as at this time committing in the land of Israel are similar to those of the Bedouin Arabs, who harass the peaceful cultivators of the soil. Unless composition is made with them, they return annually at a certain season, when they carry off the grain, seize the cattle and other property; and even life itself is in jeopardy from the attacks of those prowling marauders. The vast horde of Midianites that overran Canaan made them the greatest scourge which had ever afflicted the Israelites.

2. *made ... dens ... in the mountains and caves* — not, of course, excavating them, for they were already, but making them fit for habitation.

⌘ JUDGES 6:7-10.

A PROPHET REBUKES THEM.

8. *the Lord sent a prophet unto the children of Israel* — The curse of the national calamity is authoritatively traced to their infidelity as the cause.

JUDGES 6:11-16.

AN ANGEL SENDS GIDEON TO DELIVER THEM.

11. *there came an angel of the Lord* — He appeared in the character and equipments of a traveler (^(~~OR~~)Judges 6:21), who sat down in the shade to enjoy a little refreshment and repose. Entering into conversation on the engrossing topic of the times, the grievous oppression of the Midianites, he began urging Gideon to exert his well-known prowess on behalf of his country. Gideon, in replying, addresses him at first in a style equivalent (in *Hebrew*) to “sir,” but afterwards gives to him the name usually applied to God.

an oak — *Hebrew*, “the oak” — as famous in after-times.

Ophrah — a city in the tribe of Manasseh, about sixteen miles north of Jericho, in the district belonging to the family of Abiezer (^(~~OR~~)Joshua 17:2).

his son Gideon threshed wheat by the wine-press — This incident tells emphatically the tale of public distress. The small quantity of grain he was threshing, indicated by his using a flail instead of the customary treading of cattle — the unusual place, near a wine-press, under a tree, and on the bare ground, not a wooden floor, for the prevention of noise — all these circumstances reveal the extreme dread in which the people were living.

13. *if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?* — Gideon’s language betrays want of reflection, for the very chastisements God had brought on His people showed His presence with, and His interest in, them.

14-16. *the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might ... have not I sent thee?* — The command and the promise made Gideon aware of the real character of his visitor; and yet like Moses, from a sense of humility, or a shrinking at the magnitude of the undertaking, he excused himself from entering on the enterprise. And even though assured that, with the divine aid, he would overcome the Midianites as easily as if they were but one man, he still hesitates and wishes to be better assured that the mission was really from God. He resembles Moses also in the desire for a sign; and in both cases it was the rarity of revelations in such periods

of general corruption that made them so desirous of having the fullest conviction of being addressed by a heavenly messenger. The request was reasonable, and it was graciously granted [⁴⁰⁶⁸Judges 6:18].

~~4067~~JUDGES 6:17-32.

GIDEON'S PRESENT CONSUMED BY FIRE.

18. *Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I ... bring forth my present* — Hebrew, my *mincha*, or “meat offering”; and his idea probably was to prove, by his visitor’s partaking of the entertainment, whether or not he was more than man.

19-23. *Gideon went in, and made ready a kid; ... the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot* — (See on ⁴¹⁸⁷Genesis 18:7). The flesh seems to have been roasted, which is done by cutting it into kobab, that is, into small pieces, fixed on a skewer, and put before the fire. The broth was for immediate use; the other, brought in a hand-basket was intended to be a future supply to the traveler. The miraculous fire that consumed it and the vanishing of the stranger, not by walking, but as a spirit in the fire, filled Gideon with awe. A consciousness of demerit fills the heart of every fallen man at the thought of God, with fear of His wrath; and this feeling was increased by a belief prevalent in ancient times, that whoever saw an angel would forthwith die. The acceptance of Gideon’s sacrifice betokened the acceptance of his person; but it required an express assurance of the divine blessing, given in some unknown manner, to restore his comfort and peace of mind.

24-32. *it came to pass the same night, that the Lord said unto him* — The transaction in which Gideon is here described as engaged was not entered on till the night after the vision.

25. *Take thy father’s ... second bullock* — The Midianites had probably reduced the family herd; or, as Gideon’s father was addicted to idolatry, the best may have been fattened for the service of Baal; so that the second was the only remaining one fit for sacrifice to God.

throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath — standing upon his ground, though kept for the common use of the townsmen.

cut down the grove that is by it — dedicated to Ashtaroth. With the aid of ten confidential servants he demolished the one altar and raised on the appointed spot the altar of the Lord; but, for fear of opposition, the work had to be done under cover of night. A violent commotion was excited next day, and vengeance vowed against Gideon as the perpetrator. “Joash, his father, quieted the mob in a manner similar to that of the town clerk of Ephesus. It was not for them to take the matter into their own hands. The one, however, made an appeal to the magistrate; the other to the idolatrous god himself” [CHALMERS].

~~0083~~ JUDGES 6:33-39.

THE SIGNS.

33. *all the Midianites ... pitched in Jezreel* — The confederated troops of Midian, Amalek, and their neighbors, crossing the Jordan to make a fresh inroad on Canaan, encamped in the plains of Esdraelon (anciently Jezreel). The southern part of the Ghor lies in a very low level, so that there is a steep and difficult descent into Canaan by the southern wadies. Keeping this in view, we see the reason why the Midianite army, from the east of Jordan, entered Canaan by the northern wadies of the Ghor, opposite Jezreel.

34. *the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon* — Called in this sudden emergency into the public service of his country, he was supernaturally endowed with wisdom and energy commensurate with the magnitude of the danger and the difficulties of his position. His summons to war was enthusiastically obeyed by all the neighboring tribes. On the eve of a perilous enterprise, he sought to fortify his mind with a fresh assurance of a divine call to the responsible office. The miracle of the fleece was a very remarkable one — especially, considering the copious dews that fall in his country. The divine patience and condescension were wonderfully manifested in reversing the form of the miracle. Gideon himself seems to

have been conscious of incurring the displeasure of God by his hesitancy and doubts; but He bears with the infirmities of His people.

CHAPTER 7

JUDGES 7:1-8.

GIDEON'S ARMY.

1. *Jerubbaal* — This had now become Gideon's honorable surname, "the enemy of Baal."

well — rather "spring of Harod," that is, "fear, trembling"; probably the same as the fountain in Jezreel (⁽¹²⁰¹⁾1 Samuel 29:1). It was situated not far from Gilboa, on the confines of Manasseh, and the name "Harod" was bestowed on it with evident reference to the panic which seized the majority of Gideon's troops. The host of the Midianites were on the northern side of the valley, seemingly deeper down in the descent towards the Jordan, near a little eminence.

2. *the Lord said unto Gideon, The people ... are too many* — Although the Israelitish army mustered only thirty-two thousand (or one-sixth of the Midianitish host), the number was too great, for it was the Lord's purpose to teach Israel a memorable lesson of dependence on Him.

3. *Now therefore ..., proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful ... let him return* — This proclamation was in terms of an established law (⁽¹²⁰²⁾Deuteronomy 20:8).

4. *too many* — Two reductions were ordered, the last by the application of a test which was made known to Gideon alone.

5. *bring them down unto the water* — When the wandering people in Asia, on a journey or in haste, come to water, they do not stoop down with deliberation on their knees, but only bend forward as much as is necessary to bring their hand in contact with the stream, and throw it up with rapidity, and at the same time such address, that they do not drop a particle. The Israelites, it seems, were acquainted with the practice; and those who adopted it on this occasion were selected as fit for a work that

required expedition. The rest were dismissed according to the divine direction.

7. *the Lord said, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you* —

It is scarcely possible to conceive a more severe trial than the command to attack the overwhelming forces of the enemy with such a handful of followers. But Gideon's faith in the divine assurance of victory was steadfast, and it is for this he is so highly commended (^{scrip} Hebrews 11:32).

8. *the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley* — Attention to the relative position of the parties is of the greatest importance to an understanding of what follows.

JUDGES 7:9-15.

**HE IS ENCOURAGED BY THE DREAM AND THE
INTERPRETATION OF THE BARLEY CAKE.**

9, 10. *Arise, get thee down unto the host ... But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant* — In ancient times it was reckoned no degradation for persons of the highest rank and character to act as spies on an enemy's camp; and so Gideon did on this occasion. But the secret errand was directed by God, who intended that he should hear something which might animate his own valor and that of his troops.

11. *the outside of the armed men that were in the host* — "Armed," means embodied under the five officers established by the ordinary laws and usages of encampments. The camp seems to have been unprotected by any rampart, since Gideon had no difficulty in reaching and overhearing a conversation, so important to him.

12. *the Midianites and the Amalekites ... lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number* — a most graphic description of an Arab encampment. They lay wrapt in sleep, or resting from their day's plunder, while their innumerable camels were stretched round about them.

13. *I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian* — This was a characteristic and very expressive dream for an Arab in the circumstances. The rolling down the hill, striking against the tents, and overturning them, naturally enough connected it in his mind with the position and meditated attack of the Israelitish leader. The circumstance of the cake, too, was very significant. Barley was usually the food of the poor, and of beasts; but most probably, from the widespread destruction of the crops by the invaders, multitudes must have been reduced to poor and scanty fare.

15. *when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation ... he worshipped* — The incident originated in the secret overruling providence of God, and Gideon, from his expression of pious gratitude, regarded it as such. On his mind, as well as that of his followers, it produced the intended effect — that of imparting new animation and impulse to their patriotism.

JUDGES 7:16-24.

HIS STRATAGEM AGAINST MIDIAN.

16-22. *he divided the three hundred men into three companies* — The object of dividing his forces was, that they might seem to be surrounding the enemy. The pitchers were empty to conceal the torches, and made of earthenware, so as to be easily broken; and the sudden blaze of the held-up lights — the loud echo of the trumpets, and the shouts of Israel, always terrifying (⁰⁰²⁰Numbers 23:21), and now more terrible than ever by the use of such striking words, broke through the stillness of the midnight air. The sleepers started from their rest; not a blow was dealt by the Israelites; but the enemy ran tumultuously, uttering the wild, discordant cries peculiar to the Arab race. They fought indiscriminately, not knowing friend from foe. The panic being universal, they soon precipitately fled, directing their flight down to the Jordan, by the foot of the mountains of Ephraim, to places known as the “house of the acacia” [Beth-shittah], and “the meadow of the dance” [Abel-meholah].

23. *the men of Israel gathered themselves together* — These were evidently the parties dismissed, who having lingered at a little distance from the scene of contest, now eagerly joined in the pursuit southwestward through the valley.

24, 25. *Gideon sent messengers throughout all mount Ephraim* — The Ephraimites lay on the south and could render seasonable aid.

Come ... take before them the waters unto Beth-barah — (See on ^{CHIEFS}Judges 3:28). These were the northern fords of the Jordan, to the east-northeast of wady Maleh.

the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together ... unto Beth-barah — A new conflict ensued, in which two secondary chiefs were seized and slain on the spots where they were respectively taken. The spots were named after these chiefs, Oreb, “the Raven,” and Zeeb, “the Wolf” — appropriate designations of Arab leaders.

CHAPTER 8

JUDGES 8:1-9.

THE EPHRAIMITES OFFENDED, BUT PACIFIED.

- 1. *the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus?*** — Where this complaint was made, whether before or after the crossing of the Jordan, cannot be determined. By the overthrow of the national enemy, the Ephraimites were benefited as largely as any of the other neighboring tribes. But, piqued at not having been sharers in the glory of the victory, their leading men could not repress their wounded pride; and the occasion only served to bring out an old and deep-seated feeling of jealous rivalry that subsisted between the tribes (^{<2021>}Isaiah 9:21). The discontent was groundless, for Gideon acted according to divine directions. Besides, as their tribe was conterminous with that of Gideon, they might, had they been really fired with the flame of patriotic zeal, have volunteered their services in a movement against the common enemy.
- 2, 3. *he said unto them, What have I done now in comparison of you?*** — His mild and truly modest answer breathes the spirit of a great as well as good man, who was calm, collected, and self-possessed in the midst of most exciting scenes. It succeeded in throwing oil on the troubled waters (^{<2161>}Proverbs 16:1), and no wonder, for in the height of generous self-denial, it ascribes to his querulous brethren a greater share of merit and glory than belonged to himself (^{<4331>}1 Corinthians 13:4 ^{<5181>}Philippians 2:3).
- 4. *Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over*** — much exhausted, but eager to continue the pursuit till the victory was consummated.
- 5. *he said unto the men of Succoth*** — that is, a place of tents or booths. The name seems to have been applied to the whole part of the Jordan valley on the west, as well as on the east side of the river, all belonging to the tribe of Gad (compare ^{<4337>}Genesis 33:17 ^{<11741>}1 Kings 7:46; with ^{<6137>}Joshua 13:27). Being engaged in the common cause of all Israel, he had a right to expect support and encouragement from his countrymen everywhere.

6. *the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand* — an insolent as well as a time-serving reply. It was insolent because it implied a bitter taunt that Gideon was counting with confidence on a victory which they believed he would not gain; and it was time-serving, because living in the near neighborhood of the Midianite sheiks, they dreaded the future vengeance of those roving chiefs. This contumelious manner of acting was heartless and disgraceful in people who were of Israelitish blood.

7. *I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers* — a cruel torture, to which captives were often subjected in ancient times, by having thorns and briers placed on their naked bodies and pressed down by sledges, or heavy implements of husbandry being dragged over them.

8. *he went up thence to Penuel, and spake unto them likewise* — a neighboring city, situated also in the territory of Gad, near the Jabbok, and honored with this name by Jacob (^{<0E23>}Genesis 32:30,31).

9. *he spake ..., When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower* — Intent on the pursuit, and afraid of losing time, he postponed the merited vengeance till his return. His confident anticipation of a triumphant return evinces the strength of his faith; and his specific threat was probably provoked by some proud and presumptuous boast, that in their lofty watchtower the Penuelites would set him at defiance.

^{<0E8D>}JUDGES 8:10-27.

ZEBAH AND ZALMUNNA TAKEN.

10. *Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor* — a town on the eastern confines of Gad. The wreck of the Midianite army halted there.

11. *Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east* — He tracked the fugitives across the mountain range of Gilead to the northeast of the Jabbok, and there came upon them unexpectedly while they were resting secure among their own nomadic tribes. Jogbehah is supposed to be Ramoth-gilead; and, therefore, the Midianites must have

found refuge at or near Abela, “Abel-cheramim,” “the plain of the vineyards.”

12. *when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them* — A third conflict took place. His arrival at their last quarters, which was by an unwonted path, took the fugitives by surprise, and the conquest of the Midianite horde was there completed.

13. *Gideon returned from battle before the sun was up* — He seems to have returned by a nearer route to Succoth, for what is rendered in our version “before the sun was up,” means “the heights of Heres, the sun-hills.”

14. *he described* — wrote the names of the seventy princes or elders. It was from them he had received so inhospitable a treatment.

16. *he took ... the thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth* — By refusing his soldiers refreshment, they had committed a public crime, as well as an act of inhumanity, and were subjected to a horrible punishment, which the great abundance and remarkable size of the thorn bushes, together with the thinness of clothing in the East, has probably suggested.

18. *Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor?* — This was one of the countless atrocities which the Midianite chiefs had perpetrated during their seven years’ lawless occupancy. It is noticed now for the first time when their fate was about to be determined.

each one resembled the children of a king — An Orientalism for great beauty, majesty of appearance, uncommon strength, and grandeur of form.

19. *They were my brethren, even the sons of my mother* — That is, uterine brothers; but, in all countries where polygamy prevails, “the son of my mother” implies a closeness of relationship and a warmth of affection never awakened by the looser term, “brother.”

20. *he said unto Jether his first-born, Up, and slay them* — The nearest of kin was the blood-avenger; but a magistrate might order any one to do the work of the executioner; and the person selected was always of a rank

equal or proportioned to that of the party doomed to suffer (^{<1129>}1 Kings 2:29). Gideon intended, then, by the order to Jether, to put an honor on his son, by employing him to slay two enemies of his country; and on the youth declining, he performed the bloody deed himself.

22, 23. *the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us ... Gideon said unto them, the Lord shall rule over you* — Their unbounded admiration and gratitude prompted them, in the enthusiasm of the moment, to raise their deliverer to a throne, and to establish a royal dynasty in his house. But Gideon knew too well, and revered too piously the principles of the theocracy, to entertain the proposal for a moment. Personal and family ambition was cheerfully sacrificed to a sense of duty, and every worldly motive was kept in check by a supreme regard to the divine honor. He would willingly act as judge, but the Lord alone was King of Israel.

24-26. *Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you* — This was the contribution of an earring (singular). As the ancient Arabians (*Ishmaelites* and *Midianites* being synonymous terms, ^{<1325>}Genesis 37:25,28) were gorgeously adorned with barbaric pearl and gold, an immense amount of such valuable booty had fallen into the hands of the Israelitish soldiers. The contribution was liberally made, and the quantity of gold given to him equalled about \$25,000 in to-day's measure.

26. *ornaments* — crescent-like plates of gold suspended from the necks, or placed on the breasts of the camels.

collars — rather, “earrings,” or drops of gold or pearl.

purple — a royal color. The ancient, as well as modern Arabs, adorned the necks, breasts, and legs, of their riding animals with sumptuous housing.

27. *Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, ... Ophrah* — That no idolatrous use was in view, nor any divisive course from Shiloh contemplated, is manifest from ^{<1183>}Judges 8:33. Gideon proposed, with the gold he received, to make an ephod for his use *only* as a civil magistrate or ruler, as David did (^{<1357>}1 Chronicles 15:27), and a magnificent pectoral or breastplate also. It would seem, from the history, that he was not blamable in making this ephod, as a civil robe or ornament merely, but that it

afterward became an object to which religious ideas were attached; whereby it proved a snare, and consequently an evil, by *perversion*, to Gideon and his house [TAYLOR, *Fragments*].

~~1083~~ JUDGES 8:28.

MIDIAN SUBDUED.

28. *Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel* — This invasion of the Arab hordes into Canaan was as alarming and desolating as the irruption of the Huns into Europe. It was the severest scourge ever inflicted upon Israel; and both it and the deliverance under Gideon lived for centuries in the minds of the people (~~1331~~ Psalm 83:11).

CHAPTER 9

JUDGES 9:1-6.

ABIMELECH IS MADE KING BY THE SHECHEMITES.

1. *Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem* — The idolatry which had been stealthily creeping into Israel during the latter years of Gideon was now openly professed; Shechem was wholly inhabited by its adherents; at least, idolaters had the ascendancy. Abimelech, one of Gideon's numerous sons, was connected with that place. Ambitious of sovereign power, and having plied successfully the arts of a demagogue with his maternal relatives and friends, he acquired both the influence and money by which he raised himself to a throne.

communed ... with all the family of the house of his mother's father — Here is a striking instance of the evils of polygamy — one son has connections and interests totally alien to those of his brothers.

2. *Whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal, ... or that one reign over you* — a false insinuation, artfully contrived to stir up jealousy and alarm. Gideon had rejected, with abhorrence, the proposal to make himself or any of his family king, and there is no evidence that any of his other sons coveted the title.

4. *the house of Baal-berith* — either the temple, or the place where this idol was worshipped; Baal-berith, "god of the covenant," by invocation of whom the league of cities was formed.

Abimelech hired vain and light persons, which followed him — idle, worthless vagabonds, the scum of society, who had nothing to lose, but much to gain from the success of a revolutionary movement.

5. *went unto ... Ophrah, and slew his brethren* — This is the first mention of a barbarous atrocity which has, with appalling frequency, been perpetrated in the despotic countries of the East — that of one son of the

deceased monarch usurping the throne and hastening to confirm himself in the possession by the massacre of all the natural or legitimate competitors. Abimelech slew his brethren *on one stone*, either by dashing them from one rock, or sacrificing them on one stone altar, in revenge for the demolition of Baal's altar by their father. This latter view is the more probable, from the Shechemites (^{<0024>}Judges 9:24) aiding in it.

threescore and ten persons — A round number is used, but it is evident that two are wanting to complete that number.

6. *all the men of Shechem ..., and all the house of Millo* — that is, a mound or rampart, so that the meaning is, all the men in the house or temple; namely, the priests of Baal.

made Abimelech king, by the plain of the pillar — rather, “by the oak near a raised mound” — so that the ceremony of coronation might be conspicuous to a crowd.

^{<0021>}JUDGES 9:7-21.

JOTHAM BY A PARABLE REPROACHES THEM.

7. *he ... stood in the top of mount Gerizim and lifted up his voice* — The spot he chose was, like the housetops, the public place of Shechem; and the parable [^{<0025>}Judges 9:8-15] drawn from the rivalry of the various trees was appropriate to the diversified foliage of the valley below. Eastern people are exceedingly fond of parables and use them for conveying reproofs, which they could not give in any other way. The top of Gerizim is not so high in the rear of the town, as it is nearer to the plain. With a little exertion of voice, he could easily have been heard by the people of the city; for the hill so overhangs the valley, that a person from the side or summit would have no difficulty in speaking to listeners at the base. Modern history records a case, in which soldiers on the hill shouted to the people in the city and endeavored to instigate them to an insurrection. There is something about the elastic atmosphere of an Eastern clime which causes it to transmit sound with wonderful celerity and distinctness [HACKETT].

13. *wine, which cheereth God and man* — not certainly in the same manner. God might be said to be “cheered” by it, when the sacrifices were accepted, as He is said also to be honored by oil (~~1099~~Judges 9:9).

21. *Joatham ... went to Beer* — the modern village El-Bireh, on the ridge which bounds the northern prospect of Jerusalem.

~~1092~~JUDGES 9:22-49.

GAAL’S CONSPIRACY.

22. *When Abimelech had reigned three years* — His reign did not, probably at first, extend beyond Shechem; but by stealthy and progressive encroachments he subjected some of the neighboring towns to his sway. None could “reign” in Israel, except by rebellious usurpation; and hence the reign of Abimelech is expressed in the original by a word signifying “despotism,” not that which describes the mild and divinely authorized rule of the judge.

23. *Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem* — In the course of providence, jealousy, distrust, secret disaffection, and smothered rebellion appeared among his subjects disappointed and disgusted with his tyranny; and God permitted those disorders to punish the complicated crimes of the royal fratricide and idolatrous usurper.

26. *Gaal ... came with his brethren ..., and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him* — An insurrection of the original Canaanites, headed by this man, at last broke out in Shechem.

28-45. *would to God this people were under my hand* — He seems to have been a boastful, impudent, and cowardly person, totally unfit to be a leader in a revolutionary crisis. The consequence was that he allowed himself to be drawn into an ambush, was defeated, the city of Shechem destroyed and strewn with salt. The people took refuge in the stronghold, which was set on fire, and all in it perished.

⌘ JUDGES 9:50-57.

ABIMELECH SLAIN.

50. *Then went Abimelech to Thebez, and encamped against Thebez* — now Tubas — not far from Shechem.

51-53. *all the men and women, ... gat them up to the top of the tower* — The Canaanite forts were generally mountain fastnesses or keeps, and they often had a strong tower which served as a last refuge. The Assyrian bas-reliefs afford counterparts of the scene here described so vivid and exact, that we might almost suppose them to be representations of the same historic events. The besieged city — the strong tower within — the men and *women* crowding its battlements — the fire applied to the doors, and even the huge fragments of stone dropping from the hands of one of the garrison on the heads of the assailants, are all well represented to the life — just as they are here described in the narrative of inspired truth [GOSS].

CHAPTER 10

JUDGES 10:1-5.

TOLA JUDGES ISRAEL IN SHAMIR.

1. *after Abimelech there arose to defend Israel, Tola* — that is, “to save.” Deliverance was necessary as well from intestine usurpation as from foreign aggression.

the son of Puah — He was uncle to Abimelech by the father’s side, and consequently brother of Gideon; yet the former was of the tribe of Issachar, while the latter was of Manasseh. They were, most probably, uterine brothers.

dwelt in Shamir in mount Ephraim — As a central place, he made it the seat of government.

3. *Jair, a Gileadite* — This judge was a different person from the conqueror of that northeastern territory, and founder of Havoth-jair, or “Jair’s villages” (^{<OR34>}Numbers 32:41 ^{<OR34>}Deuteronomy 3:14 ^{<OR33>}Joshua 13:3 ^{<OR2>}1 Chronicles 2:22).

4. *he had thirty sons that rode on thirty ass colts* — This is a characteristic trait of Eastern manners in those early times; and the grant of a village to each of his thirty sons was a striking proof of his extensive possessions. His having thirty sons is no conclusive evidence that he had more than one wife, much less that he had more than one at a time. There are instances, in this country, of men having as many children by two successive wives.

JUDGES 10:6-9.

ISRAEL OPPRESSED BY THE PHILISTINES AND AMMONITES.

6. *the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord* — This apostasy seems to have exceeded every former one in the grossness and universality of the idolatry practiced.

7. *Philistines, and ... the children of Ammon* — The predatory incursions of these two hostile neighbors were made naturally on the parts of the land respectively contiguous to them. But the Ammonites, animated with the spirit of conquest, carried their arms across the Jordan; so that the central and southern provinces of Canaan were extensively desolated.

JUDGES 10:10-15.

THEY CRY TO GOD.

10. *The children of Israel cried unto the Lord, saying, We have sinned against thee* — The first step of repentance is confession of sin, and the best proof of its sincerity is given by the transgressor, when he mourns not only over the painful consequences which have resulted from his offenses to himself, but over the heinous evil committed against God.

11. *the Lord said ... Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians* — The circumstances recorded in this and the following verses were not probably made through the high priest, whose duty it was to interpret the will of God.

12. *Maonites* — that is, “Midianites.”

JUDGES 10:16-18.

THEY REPENT; GOD PITIES THEM.

16. *they put away the strange gods ... and served the Lord; and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel* — On their abandonment of idolatry and return to purity of worship, God graciously abridged the term of national affliction and restored times of peace.

17, 18. *the children of Ammon were gathered together* — From carrying on guerrilla warfare, the Ammonites proceeded to a continued campaign. Their settled aim was to wrest the whole of the trans-jordanic territory from its actual occupiers. In this great crisis, a general meeting of the Israelitish tribes was held at Mizpeh. This Mizpeh was in eastern Manasseh (⁴⁶¹⁰Joshua 11:3).

CHAPTER 11

JUDGES 11:1-3.

JEPHTHAH.

1. *Jephthah* — “opener.”

son of an harlot — a concubine, or foreigner; implying an inferior sort of marriage prevalent in Eastern countries. Whatever dishonor might attach to his birth, his own high and energetic character rendered him early a person of note.

Gilead begat Jephthah — His father seems to have belonged to the tribe of Manasseh (¹³⁷⁴1 Chronicles 7:14,17).

2. *Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house* — As there were children by the legitimate wife, the son of the secondary one was not entitled to any share of the patrimony, and the prior claim of the others was indisputable. Hence, as the brothers of Jephthah seem to have resorted to rude and violent treatment, they must have been influenced by some secret ill-will.

3. *Jephthah ... dwelt in the land of Tob* — on the north of Gilead, beyond the frontier of the Hebrew territories (¹⁰⁰⁶2 Samuel 10:6,8).

there were gathered vain men to Jephthah — idle, daring, or desperate.

and went out with him — followed him as a military chief. They led a freebooting life, sustaining themselves by frequent incursions on the Ammonites and other neighboring people, in the style of Robin Hood. The same kind of life is led by many an Arab or Tartar still, who as the leader of a band, acquires fame by his stirring or gallant adventures. It is not deemed dishonorable when the expeditions are directed against those out of his own tribe or nation. Jephthah's mode of life was similar to that of David when driven from the court of Saul.

JUDGES 11:4-11.

THE GILEADITES COVENANT WITH JEPHTHAH.

4. *in process of time* — on the return of the season.

the children of Ammon made war against Israel — Having prepared the way by the introduction of Jephthah, the sacred historian here resumes the thread of his narrative from ^{<0710>}Judges 10:17. The Ammonites seem to have invaded the country, and active hostilities were inevitable.

5, 6. *the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah* — All eyes were directed towards him as the only person possessed of the qualities requisite for the preservation of the country in this time of imminent danger; and a deputation of the chief men was despatched from the Hebrew camp at Mizpeh to solicit his services.

7-9. *Jephthah said, Did not ye hate me?* — He gave them at first a haughty and cold reception. It is probable that he saw some of his brothers among the deputies. Jephthah was now in circumstances to make his own terms. With his former experience, he would have shown little wisdom or prudence without binding them to a clear and specific engagement to invest him with unlimited authority, the more especially as he was about to imperil his life in their cause. Although ambition might, to a certain degree, have stimulated his ready compliance, it is impossible to overlook the piety of his language, which creates a favorable impression that his roving life, in a state of social manners so different from ours, was not incompatible with habits of personal religion.

10, 11. *the elders of Israel said unto Jephthah, The Lord be witness between us* — Their offer being accompanied by the most solemn oath, Jephthah intimated his acceptance of the mission, and his willingness to accompany them. But to make “assurance doubly sure,” he took care that the pledge given by the deputies in Tob should be ratified in a general assembly of the people at Mizpeh; and the language of the historian, “Jephthah uttered all his words before the Lord,” seems to imply that his inauguration with the character and extraordinary office of judge was solemnized by prayer for the divine blessing, or some religious ceremonial.

JUDGES 11:12-28.

HIS EMBASSY TO THE KING OF AMMON.

12-28. *Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon* — This first act in his judicial capacity reflects the highest credit on his character for prudence and moderation, justice and humanity. The bravest officers have always been averse to war; so Jephthah, whose courage was indisputable, resolved not only to make it clearly appear that hostilities were forced upon him, but to try measures for avoiding, if possible, an appeal to arms: and in pursuing such a course he was acting as became a leader in Israel (^{<07112>}Deuteronomy 20:10-18).

13. *the king of Ammon ... , Because Israel took away my land* — (See on ^{<07129>}Deuteronomy 2:19). The subject of quarrel was a claim of right advanced by the Ammonite monarch to the lands which the Israelites were occupying. Jephthah's reply was clear, decisive, and unanswerable; — first, those lands were not in the possession of the Ammonites when his countrymen got them, and that they had been acquired by right of conquest from the Amorites [^{<07121>}Judges 11:21]; secondly, the Israelites had now, by a lapse of three hundred years of undisputed possession, established a prescriptive right to the occupation [^{<07122>}Judges 11:22,23]; and thirdly, having received a grant of them from the Lord, his people were entitled to maintain their right on the same principle that guided the Ammonites in receiving, from their god Chemosh, the territory they now occupied [^{<07124>}Judges 11:24]. This diplomatic statement, so admirable for the clearness and force of its arguments, concluded with a solemn appeal to God to maintain, by the issue of events, the cause of right and justice [^{<07127>}Judges 11:27].

28. *Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah* — His remonstrances to the aggressor were disregarded, and war being inevitable, preparations were made for a determined resistance.

JUDGES 11:29-31.

HIS VOW.

29, 30. *Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah* — The calm wisdom, sagacious forethought, and indomitable energy which he was enabled to display, were a pledge to himself and a convincing evidence to his countrymen, that he was qualified by higher resources than his own for the momentous duties of his office.

he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh — the provinces most exposed and in danger, for the purpose of levying troops, and exciting by his presence a widespread interest in the national cause. Returning to the camp at Mizpeh, he then began his march against the enemy. There he made his celebrated vow, in accordance with an ancient custom for generals at the outbreak of a war, or on the eve of a battle, to promise the god of their worship a costly oblation, or dedication of some valuable booty, in the event of victory. Vows were in common practice also among the Israelites. They were encouraged by the divine approval as emanating from a spirit of piety and gratitude; and rules were laid down in the law for regulating the performance. But it is difficult to bring Jephthah's vow within the legitimate range (see on ¹⁸⁷²Leviticus 27:28).

31. *whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me* — This evidently points not to an animal, for that might have been a dog; which, being unclean, was unfit to be offered; but to a person, and it looks extremely as if he, from the first, contemplated a human sacrifice. Bred up as he had been, beyond the Jordan, where the Israelitish tribes, far from the tabernacle, were looser in their religious sentiments, and living latterly on the borders of a heathen country where such sacrifices were common, it is not improbable that he may have been so ignorant as to imagine that a similar immolation would be acceptable to God. His mind, engrossed with the prospect of a contest, on the issue of which the fate of his country depended, might, through the influence of superstition, consider the dedication of the object dearest to him the most likely to ensure success.

shall surely be the Lord's; and [or] *I will offer it up for a burnt offering* — The adoption of the latter particle, which many interpreters suggest,

introduces the important alternative, that if it were a person, the dedication would be made to the service of the sanctuary; if a proper animal or thing, it would be offered on the altar.

JUDGES 11:32,33.

HE OVERCOMES THE AMMONITES.

32. *Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon ... and the Lord delivered them into his hands* — He met and engaged them at Aroer, a town in the tribe of Gad, upon the Arnon. A decisive victory crowned the arms of Israel, and the pursuit was continued to Abel (plain of the vineyards), from south to north, over an extent of about sixty miles.

34-40. *Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances* — The return of the victors was hailed, as usual, by the joyous acclaim of a female band (^{1 Samuel 18:6}), the leader of whom was Jephthah's daughter. The vow was full in his mind, and it is evident that it had not been communicated to anyone, otherwise precautions would doubtless have been taken to place another object at his door. The shriek, and other accompaniments of irrepressible grief, seem to indicate that her life was to be forfeited as a sacrifice; the nature of the sacrifice (which was abhorrent to the character of God) and distance from the tabernacle does not suffice to overturn this view, which the language and whole strain of the narrative plainly support; and although the lapse of two months might be supposed to have afforded time for reflection, and a better sense of his duty, there is but too much reason to conclude that he was impelled to the fulfillment by the dictates of a pious but unenlightened conscience.

CHAPTER 12

JUDGES 12:1-3.

THE EPHRAIMITES QUARRELLING WITH JEPHTHAH.

1. *the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together* — Hebrew, “were summoned.”

and went northward — After crossing the Jordan, their route from Ephraim was, strictly speaking, in a northeasterly direction, toward Mizpeh.

the men of Ephraim ... said unto Jephthah, Wherefore ... didst [thou] not call us? — This is a fresh development of the jealous, rash, and irritable temper of the Ephraimites. The ground of their offense now was their desire of enjoying the credit of patriotism although they had not shared in the glory of victory.

2. *when I called you, ye delivered me not out of their hands* — The straightforward answer of Jephthah shows that their charge was false; their complaint of not being treated as confederates and allies entirely without foundation; and their boast of a ready contribution of their services came with an ill grace from people who had purposely delayed appearing till the crisis was past.

3. *when I saw that ye delivered me not, I put my life in my hands* — A common form of speech in the East for undertaking a duty of imminent peril. This Jephthah had done, having encountered and routed the Ammonites with the aid of his Gileadite volunteers alone; and since the Lord had enabled him to conquer without requiring assistance from any other tribe, why should the Ephraimites take offense? They ought rather to have been delighted and thankful that the war had terminated without their incurring any labor and danger.

~~<0720>~~ **JUDGES 12:4-15.**

**DISCERNED BY THE WORD *SIBBOLETH*,
ARE SLAIN BY THE GILEADITES.**

4-6. *the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim* — The remonstrances of Jephthah, though reasonable and temperate, were not only ineffectual, but followed by insulting sneers that the Gileadites were reckoned both by the western Manassites and Ephraimites as outcasts — the scum and refuse of their common stock. This was addressed to a peculiarly sensitive people. A feud immediately ensued. The Gileadites, determined to chastise this public affront, gave them battle; and having defeated the Ephraimites, they chased their foul-mouthed but cowardly assailants out of the territory. Then rushing to the fords of the Jordan, they intercepted and slew every fugitive. The method adopted for discovering an Ephraimite was by the pronunciation of a word naturally suggested by the place where they stood. *Shibboleth*, means “a stream”; *Sibboleth*, “a burden.” The Eastern tribe had, it seems, a dialectical provincialism in the sound of *Shibboleth*; and the Ephraimites could not bring their organs to pronounce it.

7. *Jephthah died* — After a government of six years, this mighty man of valor died; and however difficult it may be for us to understand some passages in his history, he has been ranked by apostolic authority among the worthies of the ancient church. He was followed by a succession of minor judges, of whom the only memorials preserved relate to the number of their families and their state [~~<0720>~~Judges 12:8-15].

CHAPTER 13

◀713▶ JUDGES 13:1.

ISRAEL SERVES THE PHILISTINES FORTY YEARS.

1. *the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years* — The Israelites were represented (◀716▶ Judges 10:6,7) as having fallen universally into a state of gross and confirmed idolatry, and in chastisement of this great apostasy, the Lord raised up enemies that harassed them in various quarters, especially the Ammonites and Philistines. The invasions and defeat of the former were narrated in the two chapters immediately preceding this; and now the sacred historian proceeds to describe the inroads of the latter people. The period of Philistine ascendancy comprised forty years, reckoning from the time of Elon till the death of Samson.

◀713▶ JUDGES 13:2-10.

AN ANGEL APPEARS TO MANOAH'S WIFE.

2. *Zorah* — a Danite town (◀753▶ Joshua 15:33) lying on the common boundary of Judah and Dan, so that it was near the Philistine border.
3. *the angel of the Lord* — The messenger of the covenant, the divine personage who made so many remarkable appearances of a similar kind already described.
5. *thou shalt conceive, and bear a son* — This predicted child was to be a Nazarite. The mother was, therefore, for the sake of her promised offspring, required to practice the rigid abstinence of the Nazarite law (see on ▶716▶ Numbers 6:2).

he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines — a prophecy encouraging to a patriotic man; the terms of it, however, indicated that the period of deliverance was still to be distant.

6-8. *then Manoah entreated the Lord* — On being informed by his wife of the welcome intimation, the husband made it the subject of earnest prayer to God. This is a remarkable instance, indicative of the connection which God has established between prayer and the fulfillment of His promises.

JUDGES 13:11-14.

THE ANGEL APPEARS TO MANOAH.

11. *Art thou the man that spakest unto the woman?* — Manoah's intense desire for the repetition of the angel's visit was prompted not by doubts or anxieties of any kind, but was the fruit of lively faith, and of his great anxiety to follow out the instructions given. Blessed was he who had not seen, yet had believed.

JUDGES 13:15-23.

MANOAH'S SACRIFICE.

15. *Manoah said unto the angel ..., I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid* — The stranger declined the intended hospitality and intimated that if the meat were to be an offering, it must be presented to the Lord [^(13:6)Judges 13:6]. Manoah needed this instruction, for his purpose was to offer the prepared viands to him, not as the Lord, but as what he imagined him to be, not even an angel (^(13:16)Judges 13:16), but a prophet or merely human messenger. It was on this account, and not as rejecting divine honors, that he spoke in this manner to Manoah. The angel's language was exactly similar to that of our Lord (^(19:17)Matthew 19:17).

17-20. *Manoah said unto the angel ..., What is thy name?* — Manoah's request elicited the most unequivocal proofs of the divinity of his

supernatural visitor — in his name “secret” (in the *Margin*, “wonderful”), and in the miraculous flame that betokened the acceptance of the sacrifice.

JUDGES 13:24,25.

SAMSON BORN.

24. *the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson* — The birth of this child of promise, and the report of the important national services he was to render, must, from the first, have made him an object of peculiar interest and careful instruction.

25. *the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times* — not, probably, as it moved the prophets, who were charged with an inspired message, but kindling in his youthful bosom a spirit of high and devoted patriotism.

Eshtaol — the free city. It, as well as Zorah, stood on the border between Judah and Dan.

CHAPTER 14

THE JUDGES 14:1-5.

SAMSON DESIRES A WIFE OF THE PHILISTINES.

1, 2. *Timnath* — now Tibna, about three miles from Zorah, his birthplace.

saw a woman ... of the Philistines; and told his father and his mother, and said, ... get her for me to wife — In the East parents did, and do in many cases still, negotiate the marriage alliances for their sons. During their period of ascendancy, the Philistine invaders had settled in the towns; and the intercourse between them and the Israelites was often of such a friendly and familiar character as to issue in matrimonial relations. Moreover, the Philistines were not in the number of the seven devoted nations of Canaan [^{CR10}Deuteronomy 7:1-3] — with whom the law forbade them to marry.

3, 4. *Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren* — that is, “of thine own tribe” — a Danite woman.

Samson said ... Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well — literally, “she is right in mine eyes”; not by her beautiful countenance or handsome figure, but *right* or *fit for his purpose*. And this throws light on the historian’s remark in reference to the resistance of his parents: they “knew not that it was of the Lord, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines” — rather, “*from the Philistines*” — originating on their side. The Lord, by a course of retributive proceedings, was about to destroy the Philistine power, and the means which He meant to employ was not the forces of a numerous army, as in the case of the preceding judges, but the miraculous prowess of the single-handed champion of Israel. In these circumstances, the provocation to hostilities could only spring out of a *private* quarrel, and this marriage scheme was doubtless suggested by the secret influence of the Spirit as the best way of accomplishing the intended result.

JUDGES 14:5-9.

HE KILLS A LION.

5-9. *a young lion* — *Hebrew*, a lion in the pride of his youthful prime. The wild mountain passes of Judah were the lairs of savage beasts; and most or all the “lions” of Scripture occur in that wild country. His rending and killing the shaggy monster, without any weapon in his hand, were accomplished by that superhuman courage and strength which the *occasional* influences of the Spirit enabled him to put forth, and by the exertion of which, in such private incidental circumstances, he was gradually trained to confide in them for the more public work to which he was destined.

7. *he went down, and talked with the woman* — The social intercourse between the youth of different sexes is extremely rare and limited in the East, and generally so after they are betrothed.

8. *after a time he returned to take her* — probably after the lapse of a year, the usual interval between the ceremonies of betrothal and marriage. It was spent by the bride elect with her parents in preparation for the nuptials; and at the proper time the bridegroom returned to take her home.

he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion: and, behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcass of the lion — In such a climate, the myriads of insects and the ravages of birds of prey, together with the influences of the solar rays, would, in a few months, put the carcass in a state inviting to such cleanly animals as bees.

JUDGES 14:10,11.

HIS MARRIAGE FEAST.

10, 11. *his father went down* — The father is mentioned as the head and representative of Samson’s relatives.

Samson made there a feast — The wedding festivity lasted a week. The men and women were probably entertained in separate apartments — the

bride, with her female relatives, at her parents' house; Samson, in some place obtained for the occasion, as he was a stranger. A large number of paranymphs, or "friends of the bridegroom," furnished, no doubt, by the bride's family, attended his party, ostensibly to honor the nuptials, but really as spies on his proceedings.

-07412- JUDGES 14:12-18.

HIS RIDDLE.

12-18. *I will now put forth a riddle* — Riddles are a favorite Oriental amusement at festive entertainments of this nature, and rewards are offered to those who give the solution. Samson's riddle related to honey in the lion's carcass. The prize he offered was thirty *sindinim*, or shirts, and thirty changes of garments, probably woolen. Three days were passed in vain attempts to unravel the enigma. The festive week was fast drawing to a close when they secretly enlisted the services of the newly married wife, who having got the secret, revealed it to her friends.

18. *If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle* — a metaphor borrowed from agricultural pursuits, in which not only oxen but cows and heifers were, and continue to be, employed in dragging the plough. Divested of metaphor, the meaning is taken by some in a criminal sense, but probably means no more than that they had resorted to the aid of his wife — an unworthy expedient, which might have been deemed by a man of less noble spirit and generosity as releasing him from the obligation to fulfill his bargain.

-07419- JUDGES 14:19,20.

HE SLAYS THIRTY PHILISTINES.

19, 20. *went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them* — This town was about twenty-four miles west by southwest from Timnah; and his selection of this place, which was dictated by the Divine Spirit, was probably owing to its bitter hostility to Israel.

took their spoil — The custom of stripping a slain enemy was unknown in Hebrew warfare.

20. *Samson's wife was given to his companion, whom he had used as his friend* — that is, “the friend of the bridegroom,” who was the medium of communicating during the festivities between him and his bride. The acceptance of her hand, therefore, was an act of base treachery, that could not fail to provoke the just resentment of Samson.

CHAPTER 15

⌘JUDGES 15:1,2.

SAMSON IS DENIED HIS WIFE.

1. *in the time of wheat harvest* — that is, about the end of our April, or the beginning of our May. The shocks of grain were then gathered into heaps, and lying on the field or on the threshing-floors. It was the dry season, dry far beyond our experience, and the grain in a most combustible state.

Samson visited his wife with a kid — It is usual for a visitor in the East to carry some present; in this case, it might be not only as a token of civility, but of reconciliation.

he said — that is, to himself. It was his secret purpose.

into the chamber — the female apartments or harem.

2. *her father said, I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her* — This allegation was a mere sham, a flimsy pretext to excuse his refusal of admittance. The proposal he made of a marriage with her younger sister was but an insult to Samson, and one which it was unlawful for an Israelite to accept (⌘Leviticus 18:18).

⌘JUDGES 15:3-8.

HE BURNS THE PHILISTINES' CORN.

3. *Samson said ..., Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines* — This nefarious conduct provoked the hero's just indignation, and he resolved to take signal vengeance.

4, 5. *went and caught three hundred foxes* — rather, “jackals”; an animal between a wolf and a fox, which, unlike our fox, a solitary creature, prowls

in large packs or herds and abounds in the mountains of Palestine. The collection of so great a number would require both time and assistance.

took firebrands — torches or matches which would burn slowly, retaining the fire, and blaze fiercely when blown by the wind. He put two jackals together, tail by tail, and fastened tightly a fire match between them. At nightfall he lighted the firebrand and sent each pair successively down from the hills, into the “Shefala,” or plain of Philistia, lying on the borders of Daniel and Judah, a rich and extensive corn district. The pain caused by the fire would make the animals toss about to a wide extent, kindling one great conflagration. But no one could render assistance to his neighbor: the devastation was so general, the panic would be so great.

6. *Who hath done this* — The author of this outrage, and the cause that provoked such an extraordinary retaliation, soon became known; and the sufferers, enraged by the destruction of their crops, rushing with tumultuous fury to the house of Samson’s wife, “burnt her and her father with fire.” This was a remarkable retribution. To avoid this menace, she had betrayed her husband; and by that unprincipled conduct, eventually exposed herself to the horrid doom which, at the sacrifice of conjugal fidelity, she had sought to escape [^{<07415}Judges 14:15].

7. *Samson said ..., Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you* — By that act the husbandmen had been the instruments in avenging his private and personal wrongs. But as a judge, divinely appointed to deliver Israel, his work of retribution was not yet accomplished.

8. *smote them hip and thigh* — a proverbial expression for a merciless slaughter.

he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam — rather went down and dwelt in the cleft — that is, the cave or cavern of the cliff Etam.

~~<1713>~~ **JUDGES 15:9-13.**

HE IS BOUND BY THE MEN OF JUDAH, AND DELIVERED TO THE PHILISTINES.

9-17. *Then the Philistines went up* — to the high land of Judah.

and spread themselves in Lehi — now El-Lekieh, abounding with limestone cliffs; the sides of which are perforated with caves. The object of the Philistines in this expedition was to apprehend Samson, in revenge for the great slaughter he had committed on their people. With a view of freeing his own countrymen from all danger from the infuriated Philistines, he allowed himself to be bound and surrendered a fettered prisoner into their power. Exulting with joy at the near prospect of riddance from so formidable an enemy, they went to meet him. But he exerted his superhuman strength, and finding a new jawbone of an ass, he laid hold of it, and with no other weapon, slew a thousand men at a place which he called Ramath-lehi — that is, “the hill of the jawbone.”

16. *With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men* — The inadequacy of the weapon plainly shows this to have been a miraculous feat, “a case of supernatural strength,” just as the gift of prophecy is a case of supernatural knowledge [CHALMERS].

19. *a hollow place ... in the jaw* — “in Lehi” — taking the word as a proper noun, marking the place.

there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again — His strength, exhausted by the violent and long-continued exertion, was recruited by the refreshing draft from the spring; and it was called

En-hakkore — the “supplication well,” a name which records the piety of this heroic champion.

CHAPTER 16

JUDGES 16:1-3.

SAMSON CARRIES AWAY THE GATES OF GAZA.

1, 2. *Gaza* — now Guzzah, the capital of the largest of the five Philistine principal cities, about fifteen miles southwest of Ashkelon. The object of this visit to this city is not recorded, and unless he had gone in disguise, it was a perilous exposure of his life in one of the enemy's strongholds. It soon became known that he was there; and it was immediately resolved to secure him. But deeming themselves certain of their prey, the Gazites deferred the execution of their measure till the morning.

3. *Samson ... arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city* — A ruinous pile of masonry is still pointed out as the site of the gate. It was probably a part of the town wall, and as this ruin is "toward Hebron," there is no improbability in the tradition.

carried them up to the top of an hill that is before Hebron — That hill is El-Montar; but by Hebron in this passage is meant "the mountains of Hebron"; for otherwise Samson, had he run night and day from the time of his flight from Gaza, could only have come on the evening of the following day within sight of the city of Hebron. The city of Gaza was, in those days, probably not less than three-quarters of an hour distant from El-Montar. To have climbed to the top of this hill with the ponderous doors and their bolts on his shoulders, through a road of thick sand, was a feat which none but a Samson could have accomplished [VAN DE VELDE].

JUDGES 16:4-14.

DELILAH CORRUPTED BY THE PHILISTINES.

4. *he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek* — The location of this place is not known, nor can the character of Delilah be clearly ascertained. Her abode, her mercenary character, and her heartless blandishments afford too much reason to believe she was a profligate woman.

5. *the lords of the Philistines* — The five rulers deemed no means beneath their dignity to overcome this national enemy.

Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lieth — They probably imagined that he carried some amulet about his person, or was in the possession of some important secret by which he had acquired such herculean strength; and they bribed Delilah, doubtless by a large reward, to discover it for them. She undertook the service and made several attempts, plying all her arts of persuasion or blandishment in his soft and communicative moods, to extract his secret.

7. *Samson said ..., If they bind me with seven green withs* — Vine tendrils, pliant twigs, or twists made of crude vegetable stalks are used in many Eastern countries for ropes at the present day.

8. *she bound him with them* — probably in a sportive manner, to try whether he was jesting or in earnest.

9. *there were men lying in wait, abiding ... in the chamber* — The *Hebrew*, literally rendered, is, “in the inner,” or “most secret part of the house.”

10. *And Delilah said* — To avoid exciting suspicion, she must have allowed some time to elapse before making this renewed attempt.

12. *new ropes* — It is not said of what material they were formed; but from their being dried, it is probable they were of twigs, like the former. The *Hebrew* intimates that they were twisted, and of a thick, strong description.

13. *If thou weavest the seven locks of my head* — braids or tresses, into which, like many in the East, he chose to plait his hair. Working at the loom was a female employment; and Delilah's appears to have been close at hand. It was of a very simple construction; the woof was driven into the warp, not by a reed, but by a wooden spatula. The extremity of the web was fastened to a pin or stake fixed in the wall or ground; and while Delilah sat squatting at her loom, Samson lay stretched on the floor, with his head reclining on her lap — a position very common in the East.

14. *went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web* — that is, the whole weaving apparatus.

-0765 JUDGES 16:15-20.

HE IS OVERCOME.

16. *she pressed him daily with her words* — Though disappointed and mortified, this vile woman resolved to persevere; and conscious how completely he was enslaved by his passion for her, she assailed him with a succession of blandishing arts, till she at length discovered the coveted secret.

17. *if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me* — His herculean powers did not arise from his hair, but from his peculiar relation to God as a Nazarite. His unshorn locks were a sign of his Nazaritism, and a pledge on the part of God that his supernatural strength would be continued.

19. *she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head* — It is uncertain, however, whether the ancient Hebrews cut off the hair to the same extent as Orientals now. The word employed is sometimes the same as that for shearing sheep, and therefore the instrument might be only scissors.

20. *he wist not that the Lord was departed from him* — What a humiliating and painful spectacle! Deprived of the divine influences, degraded in his character, and yet, through the infatuation of a guilty passion, scarcely awake to the wretchedness of his fallen condition!

JUDGES 16:21,22.

THE PHILISTINES TOOK HIM AND PUT OUT HIS EYES.

21. *the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes* — To this cruel privation prisoners of rank and consequence have commonly been subjected in the East. The punishment is inflicted in various ways, by scooping out the eyeballs, by piercing the eye, or destroying the sight by holding a red-hot iron before the eyes. His security was made doubly sure by his being bound with fetters of brass (copper), not of leather, like other captives.

he did grind in the prison-house — This grinding with hand-millstones being the employment of menials, he was set to it as the deepest degradation.

22. *Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again* — It is probable that he had now reflected on his folly; and becoming a sincere penitent, renewed his Nazarite vow. “His hair grew together with his repentance, and his strength with his hairs” [BISHOP HALL].

JUDGES 16:23-25.

THEIR FEAST TO DAGON.

23. *the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon* — It was a common practice in heathen nations, on the return of their solemn religious festivals, to bring forth their war prisoners from their places of confinement or slavery; and, in heaping on them every species of indignity, they would offer their grateful tribute to the gods by whose aid they had triumphed over their enemies. Dagon, was a sea idol, usually represented as having the head and upper parts human, while the rest of the body resembled a fish.

JUDGES 16:26-31.

HIS DEATH.

27. *there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport* — This building seems to have been similar to the spacious and open amphitheatres well known among the Romans and still found in many countries of the East. They are built wholly of wood. The standing place for the spectators is a wooden floor resting upon two pillars and rising on an inclined plane, so as to enable all to have a view of the area in the center. In the middle there are two large beams, on which the whole weight of the structure lies, and these beams are supported by two pillars placed almost close to each other, so that when these are unsettled or displaced, the whole pile must tumble to the ground.

28. *Samson called unto the Lord* — His penitent and prayerful spirit seems clearly to indicate that this meditated act was not that of a vindictive suicide, and that he regarded himself as putting forth his strength in his capacity of a public magistrate. He must be considered, in fact, as dying for his country's cause. His death was not designed or sought, except as it might be the inevitable consequence of his great effort. His prayer must have been a silent ejaculation, and, from its being revealed to the historian, approved and accepted of God.

31. *Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought him up, and buried him* — This awful catastrophe seems to have so completely paralyzed the Philistines, that they neither attempted to prevent the removal of Samson's corpse, nor to molest the Israelites for a long time after. Thus the Israelitish hero rendered by his strength and courage signal services to his country, and was always regarded as the greatest of its champions. But his slavish subjection to the domination of his passions was unworthy of so great a man and lessens our respect for his character. Yet he is ranked among the ancient worthies who maintained a firm faith in God (⁸¹³ Hebrews 11:32).

CHAPTER 17

JUDGES 17:1-4.

MICAH RESTORING THE STOLEN MONEY TO HIS MOTHER, SHE MAKES IMAGES.

1. *a man of mount Ephraim* — that is, the mountainous parts of Ephraim. This and the other narratives that follow form a miscellaneous collection, or appendix to the Book of Judges. It belongs to a period when the Hebrew nation was in a greatly disordered and corrupt state. This episode of Micah is connected with ^{17:1}Judges 1:34. It relates to his foundation of a small sanctuary of his own — a miniature representation of the Shiloh tabernacle — which he stocked with images modelled probably in imitation of the ark and cherubim. Micah and his mother were sincere in their intention to honor God. But their faith was blended with a sad amount of ignorance and delusion. The divisive course they pursued, as well as the will-worship they practiced, subjected the perpetrators to the penalty of death.

3. *a graven image and a molten image* — The one carved from a block of wood or stone, to be plated over with silver; the other, a figure formed of the solid metal cast into a mould. It is observable, however, that only two hundred shekels were given to the founder. Probably the expense of making two such figures of silver, with their appurtenances (pedestals, bases, etc.), might easily cost, in those days, two hundred shekels, which would be a sum not adequate to the formation of large statues [TAYLOR, *Fragments*].

5. *the man Micah had an house of gods* — *Hebrew*, “a house of God” — a domestic chapel, a private religious establishment of his own.

an ephod — (see on ^{28:6}Exodus 28:6).

teraphim — tutelary gods of the household (see ^{31:19}Genesis 31:19 and see on ^{31:26}Genesis 31:26).

consecrated one of his sons who became his priest — The assumption of the priestly office by any one out of the family of Aaron was a direct violation of the divine law (^{<4680>}Numbers 3:10 16:17 ^{<4626>}Deuteronomy 21:5 ^{<3834>}Hebrews 5:4).

6. every man did that which was right in his own eyes — From want of a settled government, there was no one to call him to account. No punishment followed any crime.

7. Beth-lehem-judah — so called in contradistinction to a town of the same name in Zebulun (^{<4695>}Joshua 19:15).

of the family — that is, tribe.

of Judah — Men of the tribe of Levi might connect themselves, as Aaron did (^{<4023>}Exodus 6:23), by marriage with another tribe; and this young Levite belonged to the tribe of Judah, by his mother's side, which accounts for his being in Beth-lehem, not one of the Levitical cities.

8. the man departed ... to sojourn where he could find a place — A competent provision being secured for every member of the Levitical order, his wandering about showed him to have been a person of a roving disposition or unsettled habits. In the course of his journeying he came to the house of Micah, who, on learning what he was, engaged his permanent services.

10. Micah said unto him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a father — a spiritual father, to conduct the religious services of my establishment. He was to receive, in addition to his board, a salary of ten shekels of silver.

a suit of apparel — not only dress for ordinary use, but vestments suitable for the discharge of his priestly functions.

12. Micah consecrated the Levite — *Hebrew*, “filled his hand.” This act of consecration was not less unlawful for Micah to perform than for this Levite to receive (see on ^{<4780>}Judges 18:30).

13. Now know I that the Lord will do me good — The removal of his son, followed by the installation of this Levite into the priestly office, seems to have satisfied his conscience, that by what he deemed the orderly

ministrations of religion he would prosper. This expression of his hope evinces the united influence of ignorance and superstition.

CHAPTER 18

◀JUDGES 18:1-26.

THE DANITES SEEK OUT AN INHERITANCE.

1-6. *In those days ... the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in*

— The Danites had a territory assigned them as well as the other tribes. But either through indolence, or a lack of energy, they did not acquire the full possession of their allotment, but suffered a considerable portion of it to be wrested out of their hands by the encroachments of their powerful neighbors, the Philistines. In consequence, being straitened for room, a considerable number resolved on trying to effect a new and additional settlement in a remote part of the land. A small deputation, being despatched to reconnoitre the country, arrived on their progress northward at the residence of Micah. Recognizing his priest as one of their former acquaintances, or perhaps by his provincial dialect, they eagerly enlisted his services in ascertaining the result of their present expedition. His answer, though apparently promising, was delusive, and really as ambiguous as those of the heathen oracles. This application brings out still more clearly and fully than the schism of Micah the woeful degeneracy of the times. The Danites expressed no emotions either of surprise or of indignation at a Levite daring to assume the priestly functions, and at the existence of a rival establishment to that of Shiloh. They were ready to seek, through means of the teraphim, the information that could only be lawfully applied for through the high priest's Urim. Being thus equally erroneous in their views and habits as Micah, they show the low state of religion, and how much superstition prevailed in all parts of the land.

7-10. *the five men departed, and came to Laish* — or, “Leshem” (⁽¹⁸³⁹⁾Joshua 19:47), supposed to have been peopled by a colony of Zidonians. The place was very secluded — the soil rich in the abundance and variety of its produce, and the inhabitants, following the peaceful pursuits of agriculture, lived in their fertile and sequestered valley, according to the Zidonian style of ease and security, happy among

themselves, and maintaining little or no communication with the rest of the world. The discovery of this northern paradise seemed, to the delight of the Danite spies, an accomplishment of the priest's prediction. They hastened back to inform their brethren in the south both of the value of their prize, and how easily it could be made their prey.

11-21. *there went from thence of the family of the Danites ... six hundred men* — This was the collective number of the men who were equipped with arms to carry out this expeditionary enterprise, without including the families and furniture of the emigrants (⁽¹⁷⁸²⁾Judges 18:21). Their journey led them through the territory of Judah, and their first halting place was “behind,” that is, on the west of Kirjath-jearim, on a spot called afterwards “the camp of Dan.” Prosecuting the northern route, they skirted the base of the Ephraimite hills. On approaching the neighborhood of Micah's residence, the spies having given information that a private sanctuary was kept there, the priest of which had rendered them important service when on their exploring expedition, it was unanimously agreed that both he and the furniture of the establishment would be a valuable acquisition to their proposed settlement. A plan of spoliation was immediately formed. While the armed men stood sentinels at the gates, the five spies broke into the chapel, pillaged the images and vestments, and succeeded in bribing the priest also by a tempting offer to transfer his services to their new colony. Taking charge of the ephod, the teraphim, and the graven image, he “went in the midst of the people” — a central position assigned him in the march, perhaps for his personal security; but more probably in imitation of the place appointed for the priests and the ark, in the middle of the congregated tribes, on the marches through the wilderness. This theft presents a curious medley of low morality and strong religious feeling. The Danites exemplified a deep-seated principle of our nature — that men have religious affections, which must have an object on which these may be exercised, while they are often not very discriminating in the choice of the objects. In proportion to the slender influence religion wields over the heart, the greater is the importance attached to external rites; and in the exact observance of these, the conscience is fully satisfied, and seldom or never molested by reflections on the breach of minor morals.

22-26. *the men that were in the houses near to Micah's house were gathered together* — The robbers of the chapel being soon detected, a hot

pursuit was forthwith commenced by Micah, at the head of a considerable body of followers. The readiness with which they joined in the attempt to recover the stolen articles affords a presumption that the advantages of the chapel had been open to all in the neighborhood; and the importance which Micah, like Laban, attached to his teraphim, is seen by the urgency with which he pursued the thieves, and the risk of his life in attempting to procure their restoration. Finding his party, however, not a match for the Danites, he thought it prudent to desist, well knowing the rule which was then prevalent in the land, that

*“They should take who had the power,
And they should keep who could.”*

~~17827~~ JUDGES 18:27-29.

THEY WIN LAISH.

27. *they ... came unto Laish ... smote them* — the inhabitants.

and burnt the city — “We are revolted by this inroad and massacre of a quiet and secure people. Nevertheless, if the original grant of Canaan to the Israelites gave them the warrant of a divine commission and command for this enterprise, that sanctifies all and legalizes all” [CHALMERS]. This place seems to have been a dependency of Zidon, the distance of which, however, rendered it impossible to obtain aid thence in the sudden emergency.

28, 29. *they built a city, and ... call the name of that city Daniel* — It was in the northern extremity of the land, and hence the origin of the phrase, “from Daniel to Beer-sheba.”

~~17830~~ JUDGES 18:30,31.

THEY SET UP IDOLATRY.

30, 31. *the children of Daniel set up the graven image* — Their distance secluded them from the rest of the Israelites, and doubtless this, which

was their apology for not going to Shiloh, was the cause of perpetuating idolatry among them for many generations.

CHAPTER 19

◀761▶ JUDGES 19:1-15.

A LEVITE GOING TO BETHLEHEM TO FETCH HIS WIFE.

1. *it came to pass in those days* — The painfully interesting episode that follows, together with the intestine commotion the report of it produced throughout the country, belongs to the same early period of anarchy and prevailing disorder.

a certain Levite ... took to him a concubine — The priests under the Mosaic law enjoyed the privilege of marrying as well as other classes of the people. It was no disreputable connection this Levite had formed; for a nuptial engagement with a concubine wife (though, as wanting in some outward ceremonies, it was reckoned a secondary or inferior relationship) possessed the true essence of marriage; it was not only lawful, but sanctioned by the example of many good men.

2. *his concubine ... went away from him unto her father's house* — The cause of the separation assigned in our version rendered it unlawful for her husband to take her back (◀761▶ Deuteronomy 24:4); and according to the uniform style of sentiment and practice in the East, she would have been put to death, had she gone to her father's family. Other versions concur with JOSEPHUS, in representing the reason for the flight from her husband's house to be, that she was disgusted with him, through frequent brawls.

3, 4. *And her husband arose, and went after her, to speak friendly unto her* — *Hebrew*, “speak to her heart,” in a kindly and affectionate manner, so as to rekindle her affection. Accompanied by a servant, he arrived at the house of his father-in-law, who rejoiced to meet him, in the hope that a complete reconciliation would be brought about between his daughter and her husband. The Levite, yielding to the hospitable importunities of his father-in-law, prolonged his stay for days.

8. *tarried* — with reluctance.

until afternoon — literally, “the decline of the day.” People in the East, who take little or nothing to eat in the morning, do not breakfast till from ten to twelve A.M., and this meal the hospitable relative had purposely protracted to so late a period as to afford an argument for urging a further stay.

9. *the day draweth toward evening* — *Hebrew*, “the pitching time of day.” Travellers who set out at daybreak usually halt about the middle of the afternoon the first day, to enjoy rest and refreshment. It was, then, too late a time to commence a journey. But duty, perhaps, obliged the Levite to indulge no further delay.

10-12. *the man ... departed, and came over against Jebus* — The note, “which is Jerusalem,” must have been inserted by Ezra or some later hand. Jebus being still, though not entirely (^{QUBS}Judges 1:8) in the possession of the old inhabitants, the Levite resisted the advice of his attendant to enter it and determined rather to press forward to pass the night in Gibeah, which he knew was occupied by Israelites. The distance from Beth-lehem to Jerusalem is about six miles. The event showed that it would have been better to have followed the advice of his attendant — to have trusted themselves among aliens than among their own countrymen.

13. *in Gibeah, or in Ramah* — The first of these places was five miles northeast, the other from four to five north of Jerusalem.

15. *when he went in, he sat him down in a street of the city* — The towns of Palestine at this remote period could not, it seems, furnish any establishment in the shape of an inn or public lodging-house. Hence we conclude that the custom, which is still frequently witnessed in the cities of the East, was then not uncommon, for travelers who were late in arriving and who had no introduction to a private family, to spread their bedding in the streets, or wrapping themselves up in their cloaks, pass the night in the open air. In the Arab towns and villages, however, the sheik, or some other person, usually comes out and urgently invites the strangers to his house. This was done also in ancient Palestine (^{QUBS}Genesis 18:4 ^{QUBS}19:2). That the same hospitality was not shown in Gibeah seems to have been owing to the bad character of the people.

~~17:16~~ **JUDGES 19:16-21.**

AN OLD MAN ENTERTAINS HIM AT GIBEAH.

16. *there came an old man from his work out of the field at even, which was also of mount Ephraim* — Perhaps his hospitality was quickened by learning the stranger's occupation, and that he was on his return to his duties at Shiloh.

19, 20. *there is no want of any thing* — In answering the kindly inquiries of the old man, the Levite deemed it right to state that he was under no necessity of being burdensome on anyone, for he possessed all that was required to relieve his wants. Oriental travelers always carry a stock of provisions with them; and knowing that even the khans or lodging-houses they may find on their way afford nothing beyond rest and shelter, they are careful to lay in a supply of food both for themselves and their beasts. Instead of hay, which is seldom met with, they used chopped straw, which, with a mixture of barley, beans, or the like, forms the provender for cattle. The old man, however, in the warmth of a generous heart, refused to listen to any explanation, and bidding the Levite keep his stocks for any emergency that might occur in the remainder of his journey, invited them to accept of the hospitalities of his house for the night.

20. *only lodge not in the street* — As this is no rare or singular circumstance in the East, the probability is that the old man's earnest dissuasive from such a procedure arose from his acquaintance with the infamous practices of the place.

~~17:22~~ **JUDGES 19:22-28.**

THE GIBEAHITES ABUSE HIS CONCUBINE TO DEATH.

22-24. *certain sons of Belial beset the house* — The narrative of the horrid outrage that was committed; of the proposal of the old man; the unfeeling, careless, and in many respects, inexplicable conduct of the Levite towards his wife, disclose a state of morality that would have appeared incredible, did it not rest on the testimony of the sacred

historian. Both men ought to have protected the women in the house, even though at the expense of their lives, or thrown themselves on God's providence. It should be noted, however, that the guilt of such a foul outrage is not fastened on the general population of Gibeah.

29. *divided her ... into twelve pieces* — The want of a regular government warranted an extraordinary step; and certainly no method could have been imagined more certain of rousing universal horror and indignation than this terrible summons of the Levite.

CHAPTER 20

JUDGES 20:1-7.

THE LEVITE, IN A GENERAL ASSEMBLY, DECLARES HIS WRONG.

1, 2. *all ... the congregation was gathered as one man* — In consequence of the immense sensation the horrid tragedy of Gibeah had produced, a national assembly was convened, at which “the chief of all the people” from all parts of the land, including the eastern tribes, appeared as delegates.

Mizpeh — the place of convention (for there were other Mizpehs), was in a town situated on the confines of Judah and Benjamin (^[4858]Joshua 15:38 18:26). Assemblies were frequently held there afterwards (^[4871]1 Samuel 7:11 10:17); and it was but a short distance from Shiloh. The phrase, “unto the Lord,” may be taken in its usual sense, as denoting consultation of the oracle. This circumstance, together with the convention being called “the assembly of the people of God,” seems to indicate, that amid the excited passions of the nation, those present felt the profound gravity of the occasion and adopted the best means of maintaining a becoming deportment.

3. *Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel were gone up to Mizpeh* — Some suppose that Benjamin had been passed over, the crime having been perpetrated within the territory of that tribe [^[4796]Judges 19:16]; and that, as the concubine’s corpse had been divided into twelve pieces [^[4799]Judges 19:29] — two had been sent to Manasseh, one respectively to the western and eastern divisions. It is more probable that Benjamin had received a formal summons like the other tribes, but chose to treat it with indifference, or haughty disdain.

4-7. *the Levite, the husband of the woman that was slain, answered and said* — The injured husband gave a brief and unvarnished recital of the tragic outrage, from which it appears that force was used, which he could

not resist. His testimony was doubtless corroborated by those of his servant and the old Ephraimite. There was no need of strong or highly colored description to work upon the feelings of the audience. The facts spoke for themselves and produced one common sentiment of detestation and vengeance.

JUDGES 20:8-17.

THEIR DECREE.

8-13. *all the people arose as one man* — The extraordinary unanimity that prevailed shows, that notwithstanding great disorders had broken out in many parts, the people were sound at the core; and remembering their national covenant with God, they now felt the necessity of wiping out so foul a stain on their character as a people. It was resolved that the inhabitants of Gibeah should be subjected to condign punishment. But the resolutions were conditional. For as the common law of nature and nations requires that an inquiry should be made and satisfaction demanded, before committing an act of hostility or vengeance, messengers were despatched through the whole territory of Benjamin, demanding the immediate surrender or execution of the delinquents. The request was just and reasonable; and by refusing it the Benjamites virtually made themselves a party in the quarrel. It must not be supposed that the people of this tribe were insensible or indifferent to the atrocious character of the crime that had been committed on their soil. But their patriotism or their pride was offended by the hostile demonstration of the other tribes. The passions were inflamed on both sides; but certainly the Benjamites incurred an awful responsibility by the attitude of resistance they assumed.

14-17. *the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together out of the cities unto Gibeah* — Allowing their valor to be ever so great, nothing but blind passion and unbending obstinacy could have impelled them to take the field against their brethren with such a disparity of numbers.

16. *left-handed; every one could sling stones at an hair-breadth, and not miss* — The sling was one of the earliest weapons used in war. The Hebrew sling was probably similar to that of the Egyptian, consisting of a

leather thong, broad in the middle, with a loop at one end, by which it was firmly held with the hand; the other end terminated in a lash, which was let slip when the stone was thrown. Those skilled in the use of it, as the Benjamites were, could hit the mark with unerring certainty. A good sling could carry its full force to the distance of two hundred yards.

~~18-28~~ JUDGES 20:18-28.

THE ISRAELITES LOSE FORTY THOUSAND.

18-28. *the children of Israel arose, and went up to the house of God* — This consultation at Shiloh was right. But they ought to have done it at the commencement of their proceedings. Instead of this, all their plans were formed, and never doubting, it would seem, that the war was just and inevitable, the only subject of their inquiry related to the precedency of the tribes — a point which it is likely was discussed in the assembly. Had they asked counsel of God sooner, their expedition would have been conducted on a different principle — most probably by reducing the number of fighting men, as in the case of Gideon's army. As it was, the vast number of volunteers formed an excessive and unwieldy force, unfit for strenuous and united action against a small, compact, and well-directed army. A panic ensued, and the confederate tribes, in two successive engagements, sustained great losses. These repeated disasters (notwithstanding their attack on Benjamin had been divinely authorized) overwhelmed them with shame and sorrow. Led to reflection, they became sensible of their guilt in not repressing their national idolatries, as well as in too proudly relying on their superior numbers and the precipitate rashness of this expedition. Having humbled themselves by prayer and fasting, as well as observed the appointed method of expiating their sins, they were assured of acceptance as well as of victory. The presence and services of Phinehas on this occasion help us to ascertain the chronology thus far, that the date of the occurrence must be fixed shortly after the death of Joshua.

JUDGES 20:29-48.

THEY DESTROY ALL THE BENJAMITES, EXCEPT SIX HUNDRED.

29-48. *And Israel set liers-in-wait round about Gibeah* — A plan was formed of taking that city by stratagem, similar to that employed in the capture of Ai (⁰¹⁸⁹Joshua 8:9).

33. *Baal-tamar* — a palm-grove, where Baal was worshipped. The main army of the confederate tribes was drawn up there.

out of the meadows of Gibeah — *Hebrew*, “the caves of Gibeah.”

34. *there came against Gibeah ten thousand chosen men* — This was a third division, different both from the ambushade and the army, who were fighting at Baal-tamar. The general account stated in ⁰²³⁵Judges 20:35 is followed by a detailed narrative of the battle, which is continued to the end of the chapter.

45. *they turned and fled toward the wilderness unto the rock of Rimmon* — Many of the fugitives found refuge in the caves of this rocky mountain, which is situated to the northeast of Beth-el. Such places are still sought as secure retreats in times of danger; and until the method of blowing up rocks by gunpowder became known, a few men could in such caves sustain a siege for months.

46. *all which fell that day of Benjamin were twenty and five thousand men* — On comparing this with ⁰²³⁵Judges 20:35, it will be seen that the loss is stated here in round numbers and is confined only to that of the third day. We must conclude that a thousand had fallen during the two previous engagements, in order to make the aggregate amount given (⁰²¹⁵Judges 20:15).

48. *the men of Israel turned again upon the children of Benjamin, and smote them with the edge of the sword* — This frightful vengeance, extending from Gibeah to the whole territory of Benjamin, was executed under the impetuous impulse of highly excited passions. But doubtless the Israelites were only the agents of inflicting the righteous retributions of

God; and the memory of this terrible crisis, which led almost to the extermination of a whole tribe, was conducive to the future good of the whole nation.

CHAPTER 21

Ⓜ JUDGES 21:1-15.

THE PEOPLE BEWAIL THE DESOLATION OF ISRAEL.

2-5. *the people came to the house of God, ... and lifted up their voices, and wept sore* — The characteristic fickleness of the Israelites was not long in being displayed; for scarcely had they cooled from the fierceness of their sanguinary vengeance, than they began to relent and rushed to the opposite extreme of self-accusation and grief at the desolation which their impetuous zeal had produced. Their victory saddened and humbled them. Their feelings on the occasion were expressed by a public and solemn service of expiation at the house of God. And yet — this extraordinary observance, though it enabled them to find vent for their painful emotions, did not afford them full relief, for they were lettered by the obligation of a religious vow, heightened by the addition of a solemn anathema on every violator of the oath. There is no previous record of this oath; but the purport of it was, that they would treat the perpetrators of this Gibeah atrocity in the same way as the Canaanites, who were doomed to destruction; and the entering into this solemn league was of a piece with the rest of their inconsiderate conduct in this whole affair.

6. *There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day* — that is, in danger of becoming extinct; for, as it appears from [Ⓜ]Judges 21:7, they had massacred all the women and children of Benjamin, and six hundred men alone survived of the whole tribe. The prospect of such a blank in the catalogue of the twelve tribes, such a gap in the national arrangements, was too painful to contemplate, and immediate measures must be taken to prevent this great catastrophe.

8. *there came none to the camp from Jabesh-gilead to the assembly* — This city lay within the territory of eastern Manasseh, about fifteen miles east of the Jordan, and was, according to JOSEPHUS, the capital of Gilead. The ban which the assembled tribes had pronounced at Mizpeh

seemed to impose on them the necessity of punishing its inhabitants for not joining the crusade against Benjamin; and thus, with a view of repairing the consequences of one rash proceeding, they hurriedly rushed to the perpetration of another, though a smaller tragedy. But it appears (⁴⁰²¹¹Judges 21:11) that, besides acting in fulfillment of their oath, the Israelites had the additional object by this raid of supplying wives to the Benjamite remnant. This shows the intemperate fury of the Israelites in the indiscriminate slaughter of the women and children.

~~40216~~ JUDGES 21:16-21.

THE ELDERS CONSULT HOW TO FIND WIVES FOR THOSE THAT WERE LEFT.

16. *the elders of the congregation said, How shall we do for wives for them that remain* — Though the young women of Jabesh-gilead had been carefully spared, the supply was found inadequate, and some other expedient must be resorted to.

17. *There must be an inheritance for them that be escaped of Benjamin* — As they were the only rightful owners of the territory, provision must be made for transmitting it to their legitimate heirs, and a new act of violence was meditated (⁴⁰²¹⁹Judges 21:19); the opportunity for which was afforded by the approaching festival — a feast generally supposed to be the feast of tabernacles. This, like the other annual feasts, was held in Shiloh, and its celebration was attended with more social hilarity and holiday rejoicings than the other feasts.

19. *on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Beth-el to Shechem* — The exact site of the place was described evidently for the direction of the Benjamites.

21, 22. *daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in dances* — The dance was anciently a part of the religious observance. It was done on festive occasions, as it is still in the East, not in town, but in the open air, in some adjoining field, the women being by themselves. The young women being alone indulging their light and buoyant spirits, arid apprehensive of no

danger, facilitated the execution of the scheme of seizing them, which closely resembles the Sabine rape in Roman history. The elders undertook to reconcile the families to the forced abduction of their daughters. And thus the expression of their public sanction to this deed of violence afforded a new evidence of the evils and difficulties into which the unhappy precipitancy of the Israelites in this crisis had involved them.