PARALLEL GUIDE 19
The Judges

Summary: In Joshua, D presents a picture of sweeping conquest and stresses Yahweh's allegiance to the covenant. In Judges, D presents Israel as a tribal confederacy, gradually occupying Canaan. In the face of Israel's faithlessness and consequent disaster, Yahweh repeatedly provides her with charismatic leaders. Our study highlights the careers of the "judges" and further elaborates the Deuteronomist's theology.

Learning Objectives

• Read Judges 1-16

• State in a diagram D's theology of history

• State what "charismatic" means and how this word applied to the "judges"

• State the attitude toward kingship which the stories about Gideon and Abimelech demonstrate

Assignments to Deepen Your Understanding

1. Define the terms apostasy, syncretism, and charisma.

2. Read Judges 5:1-31 over several times. Read the study notes provided in the Oxford edition of the Bible. Record points of interest to you in your notebook. Look up the passage in a commentary. Read what the scholars say and ask yourself the questions: What did the passage mean to the author? How does the passage fit within the context of the entire book? How does this illuminate your understanding of our faith?

3. Trace out the story of the Book of Judges on a map of this epoch. Look for significant places and note what happened there.

4. Adapt the "Song of Deborah," Judges 5:1-31, into a canticle (a liturgical song) that could be used in your seminar group's worship.

Preparing for Your Seminar

The fourfold pattern of salvation, sin, judgment, repentance, and redemption, is found in the Book of Judges. Look for examples in history, in our own times, and in your own life. Why is this a useful model? What other models do we have in our culture for dealing with the existence of evil that hold less promise because they do not bring a true sense of redemption? How does our penchant for punishment or revenge square with this Judeo/Christian pattern of salvation?

Additional Sources

Robert G. Boling, *Judges*, in the Anchor Bible Series (Doubleday, 1975). This is an excellent commentary even if it is somewhat technical.

John Bright's *History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Westminster Press, 1981) is still a standard in the field. We refer to Bright frequently in chapters to come.

Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (Basic Books, 1971) is an attempt to

read the Old Testament with the eyes of a literary critic. Alter's aim throughout is, in his words, "to illuminate the distinctive principles of the Bible's narrative art." The study is accessible to the lay reader as well as the scholar.

Theodor Gaster's *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament* (Harper and Row, 1969) and H. H. Rowley's *From Joseph to Joshua* (Oxford University Press, 1950) are also mentioned in this chapter.

Chapter 19
THE JUDGES

The story of the conquest of Canaan told in the Book of Joshua presents the picture of a sudden and total victory by Israel over the Canaanites. The Deuteronomic writer wants to show YHWH's faithfulness to the promise to give the land of Canaan to the people. The Book of Judges presents the other side of D's theology: Israel's faithlessness to the covenant with YHWH produces evil times and disaster. The content of the two books clearly shows that Joshua and Judges are dealing with the same time period, but describing it differently. We would miss the point if we simply said that the D writer was confused, or perhaps dishonest, about the history. D was more a ~~theologian~~fabulist using historical events to illustrate a theology than a historian deriving theological insights from the study of history. The Deuteronomist asserts that YHWH is faithful to Israel, but Israel continually slips away from her faithfulness to YHWH. This assertion, rather than the precise details of history, is what D wants us to notice.

This is not to say D's work, from Joshua through II Kings, is only a theological treatise without historical value. Had the Deuteronomist been more interested in history for its own sake, this writer might not have been so valuable to us as a historian: such a writer would presumably have been more careful to remove accounts from the sources which were contradictory to the writer's own purpose or to alter them to make them consistent. As it is, D faithfully reproduces sources even when they contradict a desired theological point.

The Book of Judges

Read the Book of Judges, chapters 1-16, for the pleasure of its interesting and exciting stories. Return to this text when you are done.

The Book of Judges can be divided into four sections:

1:1-2:5—a retelling of the story of the conquest;

2:6-3:6—a theological introduction;

3:7-16:31—the "judges";

17-21—"the migration of Dan" and "the sin of Benjamin."

If you compare Judg. 2:6 with Josh. 24:28, you see that the continuation of the D history was originally intended to begin at Judg. 2:6—here Joshua dismisses the people, who had gathered together for the covenant renewal ceremony. They go to the various places in Canaan which have been assigned to them. From 2:6 through 3:6, the D writer presents a theology of history: when Israel betrays the covenant, she suffers, but

when she repents, God raises up a deliverer for her. The rest of the book through chapter 16 illustrates this point. From 2:6 through chapter 16, we see definite editorial unity, even if the material does come from a variety of sources.

Judges 1:1-2:5 and chapters 17-21 do not fit into this editorial unity. They may have been added to an earlier form of the book, although when and by whom are questions about which there is no scholarly agreement. The account of the conquest given in 1:1-2:5, though added at a date after the composition of the major part of the book, is from very ancient sources and is thought by most scholars to be more reliable in the overall picture it presents than is the Joshua version of the same events. Judges 1:1-2:5 describes the conquest as gradual and piecemeal. Instead of a single unified force under Joshua, it is tribal armies that wage battles in various parts of Canaan:

Judah and Simeon, with the Kenites, fight in the southern area (1:3, 16ff.); the "house of Joseph" takes the ancient Canaanite shrine of Bethel; and the "Joseph" tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh fight in the northern territory surrounding Bethel (1:22-29). Similarly the other tribes are described as active in the areas they are to settle. Many scholars believe this is much more likely to have been the way Israel actually settled into the land than is the unified campaign described in Joshua.

Scholars are not in total agreement on this issue. In his *History of Israel*, John Bright attempts to demonstrate that the picture given in the Book of Joshua is consistent with archaeological evidence and is indeed preferable to the summarized account in Judges. H. H. Rowley (*From Joseph to Joshua*) argues that Judg. 1:1-2:5 is an account of an earlier invasion of Canaan from the south by a group that never went into Egypt. The attack on Hormah described in Num. 21:1-3 and the battle referred to in Judg. 1:17 would be the same event, according to this way of thinking, and both the Numbers and the Judges accounts would be misplaced fragments from a southern tradition which antedates the Exodus.

Even if the Judg. 1:1-2:5 account is taken to be reliable, its claim that Jerusalem was taken (1:8) is probably not to be accepted; it is denied in 1:21, and the later account of its being taken by King David (II Sam. 5:6-9) presupposes that it had never been in Israelite hands before. Similarly the claim in 1:18 that Judah took Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron is probably an exaggeration; these cities were firmly held by the Philistines.

Deuteronomic Theology

In 2:11 a phrase appears which will occur repeatedly throughout the rest of the D narrative: "Then the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and worshiped the Baals. . . ." The next few verses give in summary form the Deuteronomic view of history. When the people "did what was evil in the sight of the LORD," then "the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, . . . sold them into the power of their enemies. . . . The hand of the LORD was against them to bring misfortune . . . and they were in great distress" (vv. 14-15). Then "the LORD raised up judges, who delivered them out of the power of those who plundered them" (v. 16). "Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD would be moved to pity by their groaning. . . . but whenever the judge died, they would relapse and behave worse than their ancestors. . . ." (vv. 18-19).

These verses present us with a fourfold pattern: sin > punishment > repentance > deliverance (> sin >--the pattern is actually circular). The sin, as the Deuteronomist sees it, is apostasy (ah-PAH-stah-see, meaning "turning aside") or abandoning YHWH. Israel abandons YHWH and the covenant and worships the

agricultural gods, the Baals, of Canaan. This apostasy hits at the very foundations of Israel's life, cuts her off from the power and blessing of YHWH, and results in disaster—this is YHWH's punishment of Israel. When the misery of the people becomes so great that they cry out to YHWH in penitence, YHWH raises up a judge through whom is restored Israel to peace and blessing. Then, when the judge dies, the cycle begins again.

This fourfold theological pattern provides the editorial framework for the main body of the Book of Judges. Where the material from the D writer's sources does not fit this scheme, D often includes the discordant material without reshaping it. It is this faithfulness to the material of the traditions on which D draws that allows us several illuminating glimpses of life in ancient Israel.

In Judg. 3:1-6, the second part of the D introduction, the writer explains from a theological point of view why Israel's conquest of the land was not complete. The nations (Philistines and Semitic inhabitants of Canaan) were left "to test . . . all in Israel who had no experience of any war in Canaan" (v. 1), "to teach those who had no experience of it before" (v. 2), and also "for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the LORD" (v. 4). As D saw it, the Israelites failed the second testing, for as Israel dwelt among the nations, "they took their daughters as wives for themselves, and their own daughters they gave to their sons; and they worshiped their gods" (v. 6). Thus the Deuteronomist not only accounts for the failure of Israel to conquer the land in its entirety, but also states his theology and sets the stage for the series of stories which are to follow.

The Judges

After these two introductions—the first an addition to the text (1:2-5) and the second an essential preface to the main body of the book (2:6-3:6)—the editor arranges some ancient folk stories about heroes of the people. D tells the stories as though the heroes were national rather than regional: it is all Israel that sins, and all Israel that is delivered through the persons YHWH raises up. D also sets a chronology for these events: Israel has peace for forty (or sometimes eighty) years after the victory by which she is delivered from her distress. The chronology is obviously artificial. Most of these events probably took place during the same time period as that covered in the Book of Joshua, and they were of local rather than national significance.

The last chapters of Judges, 17-21, were almost certainly not a part of the original form of the book. They are quite different in content from the rest. There are no stories of heroes nor is there the usual Deuteronomic framework. They describe the migration of the tribe of Dan from its original site in the southwest to a new location in the north, and tell a story of terrible sin in the tribe of Benjamin. We examine these chapters later.

Judges 3:7-16:31
The Confederacy

At the time of the judges Israel was not yet a nation. She was a group of tribes, held together in a loose confederation by a common allegiance to YHWH. If we assume that in the covenant renewal ceremonies described in Joshua 23-24 the Exodus/Sinai experience was narrated for the first time to tribes who had not gone into Egypt, the bond uniting these tribes would not have been of long standing.

We have used the word "amphictyony" to refer to this confederation of tribes. It was used by certain Greek city-states to refer to the leagues they formed for the upkeep of central shrines. When applied by modern commentators to refer to Israel in the period immediately after the settlement of Canaan and before the establishment of the monarchy, the term describes the tribes as linked together primarily by religious bonds. The word "confederacy," drawn from a more purely political background, stresses the ties which bound the tribes together as a common ethnic group. The two words do not refer to two different groupings, and since the religious and the political were ultimately inseparable in Hebrew thought, they can be used practically

interchangeably.

The Israelite confederacy was ideally characterized by the kind of tribal leadership which prevailed among nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples. The father, whether in a biological sense or in the sense of the leader of the clan, held a powerful position, but he was not an absolute monarch. He was governed by the traditions of the tribe, and, in the case of Israel, by the Law of God. Under the terms of the covenant, YHWH was the true ruler.

Once the Israelites were settled in Canaan and encountered the necessity of adjusting to a totally new agricultural way of life, the ancient patterns of leadership lost much of their hold. In the absence of a strong central authority, scattered local groups of Israelites could hardly have been expected to resist the temptation to conform to the types of social structure presented by the Canaanites. Their "cities"—actually small towns—in which commerce could take place and to which farmers from the outlying regions could flee in time of danger, were a necessary feature of settled life. The Canaanite agricultural deities could easily be brought within Israel's religious outlook. In the absence of a fully developed monotheism, it was not unreasonable to think of YHWH as Israel's supreme deity and still to ascribe to the Baals, the "lords" of fertility, a role in economic life. Such syncretism (the blending together of different beliefs) was so common to ancient religious life that it should come as no surprise to see that it was practiced by Israel in Canaan.

The exclusive claims of the Exodus/Sinai event, however, could not tolerate such a mixture of Yahwism and Baalism. Even if many of the specific passages in the legal codes which stress the "jealousy" of YHWH and demand that Israel shall have no other God but YHWH are seen as relatively late additions, they are true to the spirit of the relationship spelled out in the covenant from the beginning. The faithfulness of YHWH to the people, as shown in delivering them from bondage in Egypt, demanded a corresponding faithfulness on their part. The imagery of marriage was not actually used until the prophet Hosea, but the virtues of constancy, faithfulness, and steadfast love which are contained in the word chesed are common both to marriage and to the covenant between YHWH and Israel.

Settled agricultural life, including urban centers, could be expected to produce an Israelite society similar to that of the Canaanites. Within the pattern of this life, however, occasionally a person would become infused with the spirit of YHWH and arise as the leader of the people. His or her claim to authority did not rest upon any political or military power, but on being possessed by the spirit of YHWH. Such a "charismatic" leader (charisma —pronounced kah-RIZ-mah—is a Greek word meaning "spiritual gift") was thought to be YHWH's own messenger, and his or her leadership could challenge that of any established order. Even in the time of the monarchy, the prophets—who were charismatic people—could challenge the actions of kings.

The "judges" were such charismatic leaders. The Hebrew word translated "judge" actually comes closer to meaning "ruler" or "leader." One of the judge's functions was to rule in disputes between people, but leadership in battle and general governance were also important parts of his or her role. Actually, the word "judge" is not much used in all of the stories of "the judges," although the related verb is. Often the charismatic person is termed a "deliverer," a word which more fully describes the judge's function.

Judges 3:7-11
Othniel

It is impossible to determine the locale of this brief story. The "king of Mesopotamia" (RSV) is almost certainly not a correct identification of the enemy: if "Mesopotamia" simply refers to an eastern people, it is too vague to be useful, while if it refers to one of the great powers which from time to time were located there, it is anachronistic. The name of the king, Cushan-rishathaim, could well be fictitious. Cushan was the name of a Canaanite tribe in the southern area, and *rishathaim* means "double sinner." Judges 1:11-13

suggests that the story may refer to the battles waged in the southern area at the time of the invasion.

The story has been placed within a time of apostasy and may be seen as a deliverance of Israel. Othniel himself may well provide the model for what it means to be a judge. At the time of his people's need, YHWH's "spirit" comes upon him. As Robert G. Boling points out, this spirit should be confused with neither the "Holy Spirit" of later Christian formulations nor the spirit of God that moves over the face of the waters in Gen. 1. "In the Book of Judges the expression stands for an impersonal power or force which can be absorbed or can so envelop a man that he becomes capable of extraordinary deeds" (*Judges*, p. 81). To call the force impersonal is not to call it independent, however, for it belongs to YHWH. With this spirit upon him, Othniel "judges" Israel. This seems to mean here that he mobilizes the people for war on behalf of YHWH. He may have gathered them together for some kind of ritual of loyalty, perhaps a reaffirmation of the covenant, in the process. Elsewhere the term seems to have other meanings, and there is much debate over the best interpretation. Finally, Othniel rules over a time of peace, in this case "forty years."

Judges 3:12-30
Ehud

The story of Ehud begins with the defeat of Israel at the hands of the king of Moab and his allies, the Ammonites and the Amalekites. Moab and Ammon are on the east bank of the Jordan River; the Amalekites were a tribe from the southern desert area. Certainly there could have been no conquest of all Israel by these forces. Apparently

some Trans-Jordan forces—Moabites or Ammonites—have crossed the river and taken the area around Jericho (the "city of palms"). They have, according to this story, made subjects of the Israelites in that region, demanding payment of tribute and probably other forms of service. Ehud is raised up by YHWH to deliver the people from this oppression after they "cried out to" God (3:15). Note that Ehud is not referred to as a judge; he never ruled over Israel, or any part of it. Note, too, that there is no mention of the spirit of YHWH in connection with him.

Ehud is left-handed. This may have been a characteristic of the tribe of Benjamin (cf. Judg. 20); at any rate left-handed Benjaminite warriors were noted for their fighting skill. Moreover, the fact of Ehud's left-handedness is significant to the story, since the trickery by which he will be able to kill the Moabite king, Eglon, depends on his strapping a sword to his right thigh, where it would be covered by clothing, and drawing it with his left hand.

The story of Ehud's plot is direct and earthy, one might even say crude. The description of the slaying of Eglon—the details of his fatness and the extent of the plunge of the sword thrust, the pouring out of the feces from Eglon's intestines, and the assumption on the part of his servants that the locked door (and perhaps the odor coming from behind it as well) means that he is relieving himself—shows a skill commented upon by Robert Alter in *The Art of Biblical Narrative*: "What emerges is not simply a circumstantial account of the Moabite king's destruction but a satiric vision of it, at once shrewd and jubilant" (p. 39). Ehud's trickery and deceit can be applauded because they result in victory, for after all, Israel is Jacob the schemer. Only one element of the satire can be examined here. The king apparently takes Ehud ~~as~~for a collaborator, for he dismisses his attendants when Ehud announces that he has "a secret message" for him (v. 19b; v. 19a is almost certainly an intrusion into the text). It is then that Ehud announces that the message is "from God" (v. 20). This statement is a rather obvious but nevertheless effective piece of dramatic irony: the secret thing—the Hebrew term *davar* can mean "word," "message," or "thing"—hidden beneath Ehud's garment is in fact the word of God that the divinely 'raised' Benjaminite champion is about to bring home implacably to the corpulent king. Hearing that the promised political secret is actually an oracle, Eglon rises, perhaps in sheer eagerness to know the revelation, perhaps as an act of accepted decorum for receiving an oracular

communication, and now Ehud can cut him down (Alter, p. 40).

Eglon's assassination prefigures the subsequent Moabite defeat. "An enemy's obtuseness is always an inviting target for satire in time of war, but here the exposure of Moabite stupidity [shows particularly] the blundering helplessness of the pagan oppressor when faced with a liberator raised up by the all-knowing God of Israel" (Alter, p. 40). In fact, in the ensuing battle, the Moabite troops, though they are described as "strong and able-bodied," rush into ambush; all are killed, not one escapes.

The story ends with the typical formula. Moab is "subdued . . . under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for eighty [2 x 40] years" (v. 30).

Judges 4:1-5:31
Deborah

Shamgar is mentioned only in passing (3:31). A fragment of a story about him has been inserted here, possibly to account for the reference to him in the "song of Deborah" (5:6). The opening verse of the story about Deborah reads, "And the Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died" (4:1). The story of Deborah and the story of Ehud seem to have been originally joined together.

Chapters 4 and 5 give two versions of the Deborah story, a prose account and a poem or song. The song is by far the earlier version, perhaps composed by an eyewitness. It is the oldest complete narrative song in the Old Testament. The "song of Miriam" (Exod. 15:21) and the "song of the ark" (Num. 10:35-36) are also ancient, but they are not narratives.

The song that chapter 5 recites is about the victory of the Israelites against "the kings of Canaan" (5:19). Deborah and Barak are the main heroes of the battle, and Jael, a Kenite woman, is the one who eventually kills the enemy leader. The opening verse of the chapter—though not of the song—says that Deborah and Barak sang the song. The content shows clearly that it was sung about them.

The real hero, however, is God. God comes up from the Seir, the region of Edom (v. 4), for this is YHWH, the desert God of the wilderness days. According to the imagery here, God is still living in the desert region to the south of Canaan. So the God of Sinai marches into the land to declare sovereignty over Canaan, for in these "days of Shamgar, son of Anath" (v. 6) lawlessness has become so great that travelers are not safe and farming cannot be done (vv. 6-7). Then Deborah arises "as a mother in Israel" to be the deliverer of Israel from this plight.

The scene is the valley of Jezreel: Taanach, Megiddo, and the Kishon River (vv. 19, 21). In earlier battles the Israelites have kept to the hill country where the chariots of the Canaanites could not be used easily. But on the open plain of the valley chariots would be very effective in warfare. Still, the forces of Israel, under the leadership of Barak, sweep down the hillside to attack the chariot force of the Canaanites (vv. 12-14). And even the stars join in the battle on the side of Israel. (Compare the imagery with that of Josh. 10:12-13, the battle in which the sun stood still.) In the resulting rain the Kishon River, usually a dry bed, becomes a rushing torrent (vv. 21-22). As at the Sea of Reeds, the waters come in and mire the chariots so that the Canaanites have to fight on foot.

Conditions during the time of the confederacy can be seen in the rebuke of certain of the tribes for not joining the battle: Reuben, Gilead, Dan, and Asher are chided (vv. 15-17). Meroz, an otherwise unknown people, are cursed for not participating. (The text may be broken here, as it is in many places in this ancient song.) The southern tribes of Judah and Simeon are not even mentioned. Either it was accepted that they were too far away to respond, or the song may stem from a purely northern tradition which expected no southern aid

because there were at the time no relations with the southern tribes.

Jael (JAY-el), the wife of Heber the Kenite, kills Sisera, the commander of the Canaanite forces. Treating him first as a lordly guest (v. 25), she strikes him on the head and he falls at her feet, his flight "cut short by one woman's exception to a whole clan's desertion" (Boling, p. 100). You will remember that Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, was a Kenite. We have remarked that many scholars believe that the Kenites were at an earlier time Yahwists. That may be no longer true, if they have signed a treaty with Jabin of Hazor. But "Jael [remains] a covenant loyalist, which explains why she is 'most blessed' in 5:24" (Boling, p. 100). In the parallelism common to Hebrew poetry, a "tent peg" and a "mallet" are both mentioned. But the parallelism is *synonymous*, the reference to only one weapon—a tent peg wielded like a mallet. The later prose version literalizes the poem and describes a tent peg *driven* in by a hammer.

Sisera's mother is portrayed waiting for her son to return victorious from the battle (vv. 28-30). Perhaps this song was composed by a woman; certainly the poet shows a keen sensitivity to a mother's anxiety over her son's delay. She comforts herself with the thought that he is detained by the task of dividing the spoils. But whatever sympathy may be aroused for her is dispelled immediately by the last verse of the song (v. 31) —"So perish all your enemies, O LORD!"

Chapter 4, the prose version of the story, is much later in composition than the poem. It places the event of the battle in the context of an attempt on the part of the tribes in the area of Galilee to shake off Canaanite domination. Here the Israelite tribes seem to be in a status of dependence on the more advanced and dominant Canaanites.

In the poem, the reason given for battle is that lawlessness in the area has made it impossible for travelers to go along the main route and has forced farmers to quit their fields (5:6-7). In chapter 4 the reason is stated in the Deuteronomist's characteristic formulae: "And the Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD . . . and the LORD sold them into the hand of King Jabin, of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. . . . Then the Israelites cried to the LORD for help" (4:3). This leads us to the introduction of Deborah, the one whom YHWH will raise up.

"King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor" (4:2) is referred to in Joshua 11. According to that account, he and his neighboring allies were defeated by Joshua at the time of the conquest. Once again we see a different tradition in Judges from that in Joshua. In Judges it is not Joshua but Deborah and Barak who fight and defeat this northern Canaanite alliance. Sisera, a king in the poem, is Jabin's commanding general in the prose account. It would seem that an earlier poem about local heroes involved in a specific battle has been combined with an account of a defeat of a northern confederation of Canaanites under Jabin.

"At that time Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel" (4:4). Deborah is a charismatic leader, as were all the judges. But she is more than a judge: she is a prophetess. The judge was inspired by the spirit of YHWH to rule and to lead into battle when necessary. A prophet or prophetess was inspired also, but with special power to speak the word of YHWH to the people. Deborah, as

prophetess, acts in a way similar to that which we see in the story of Samuel: she commissions Barak to lead the army against the enemy; moreover she does so in the name of YHWH. Samuel, in later times, will commission Saul to be king over Israel. In much of the history of the northern tribes, during the time of the confederacy and later under the northern monarchy, prophets were to act in such a way. In the face of the existing government a prophet would announce that someone else was YHWH's anointed leader, and civil

war would often result. This feature of northern political life contributed greatly to the eventual ruin of the northern kingdom.

Barak is commissioned to engage in "war of YHWH" against the enemies of Israel, with YHWH's promise that he will be victorious in spite of the military superiority of Sisera's chariot force (4:6-7). Barak refuses to accept the role unless Deborah, the charismatic messenger of YHWH, goes with him (4:8). She agrees, but, in a comment that shows the outcome of the story, says that it will not be Barak who slays Sisera, but a woman. This should not be interpreted as a glorification of the role of women; Sisera's defeat at the hands of a woman is intended to show the complete humiliation that YHWH inflicts upon him. Barak summons the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali to provide him with an army (4:10). As one who acts on the command and by the power of YHWH, he expects that these Israelites will respond to his summons, and they do.

Verse 11 establishes the presence of Heber the Kenite in the area, although a location this far to the north would be unlikely for a Kenite family. The poem agrees, however, that it was a Kenite woman who killed Sisera.

Barak assembles his forces on Mt. Tabor, where the chariots could not be deployed. Sisera, hearing that the Israelites are there, brings his forces from Harosheth-ha-goiim (the last part of this name, added by the Hebrew storyteller, means "of the gentiles," indicating a predominantly Canaanite population there) to the river Kishon. This would place his troops east of the river so that their line of retreat would be cut off by the river when the Israelites, sweeping down from the mountain, begin to take the initiative in the battle. By the power of YHWH the Israelite forces are victorious. Sisera flees on foot, and the rest of the Canaanite army is destroyed. Note that this account differs from that of the poem: there the chariots were bogged down in a flash flood in the normally dry river bed. The earlier version is more naturalistic, though the credit for the flood is given to YHWH; the later version has YHWH miraculously provide a military victory against a superior force.

Jael cleverly allows Sisera to believe she has offered him hospitality, but the words are all wrong. Jael lulls him into a false sense of security so that he goes to sleep, weary from the battle. While he is asleep she drives a tent peg through his temple with a hammer. Centuries of commentaries have wondered how a woman could be praised so highly after having violated the most basic aspects of hospitality. Once we realize that the strict hospitality relationship has never been entered into, that difficulty evaporates. Jael is praised not only for killing the enemy, but for doing so in a way which shows him to be so "uncultured" that he does not even know the proper way to request hospitality. The winners have a "last laugh" over the losers.

Verses 23-24 provide an uncertain ending to the story. Verse 23 says that Jabin was defeated on that day; v. 24 implies that a more gradual campaign finally defeated him. The story is a separated piece of tradition, perhaps related to the Joshua 11 account of the defeat of Hazor or perhaps recounting a totally different battle.

Judges 6:1-8:35
Gideon

The Midianites, nomadic peoples to the east and southeast of Palestine—earlier identified as the group of peoples among whom were the Kenites—have come sweeping into the relatively fertile land of Palestine. It is now generally believed that camels were not domesticated earlier than about 1100 BCE. If this is true, the Midianite camel force would have represented a completely new and terrifying threat to the Israelites. The speed and endurance of the camel would have given the Midianites a range and maneuverability which the Israelites could not hope to match.

The picture presented in 6:3-6 is precise in its details. The Midianites plan their raids to come directly after the planting of the crops. The fresh sprouts will then furnish food for the camels (v. 3). The Midianites can graze their "cattle"—a general word for domesticated animals—until there is no fodder left, laying the land waste so that the Israelites cannot use it (vv. 4-5). This is but one instance of the many occasions on which nomadic herders must have pressed in on settled agricultural areas; remember the description of this kind of social conflict as it was reflected in the story of Cain and Abel. This time the nomads are superior because of their camels, and the settled peoples have to flee to caves (v. 2).

True to pattern, the Deuteronomist describes Israel as crying to YHWH for help in distress, and YHWH replying with deliverance. The story of the deliverance, however, is complicated by the interweaving of more than one source. In vv. 7-10, a prophet is sent to remind the people of their allegiance to YHWH, who delivered them from the Egyptians—an allegiance which they have broken. The prophet does not appear again in the story, and the rest of the account proceeds as if he never had appeared.

Verses 11-24 present the call of Gideon to be the deliverer of the people. In it a favorite theme of many Israelite storytellers is struck again: YHWH chooses one of the weakest in Israel to confound the mighty oppressor (vv. 15-16). An angel—or it is really YHWH?—appears and Gideon tests him for a sign. A kid and unleavened bread—leavened bread was never offered in sacrifice—are put on a rock, and the angel causes fire to consume them (vv. 19-21). By this sign Gideon knows that it has been YHWH. The switch back and forth between YHWH and an angel reminds us of the visitors to Abraham in Genesis 18. Once again the writer is trying to describe what is beyond ordinary human experience and language. Gideon laments that he has seen God "face to face," and is reassured that he will not die from this encounter with holiness. The story ends with an etiological note concerning an altar which "still stands" at Ophrah (v. 24). This whole section sounds like a separate etiological story of an appearance of God at Ophrah, now amended to include a call to Gideon and inserted into the larger account.

It is worth noting how much the call to Gideon resembles the call to Moses, described in Exodus 3. Not only does Gideon show the same reluctance to serve God as Moses did; God also speaks to Gideon under the same name by which he revealed himself to Moses. The NRSV translation does not show that, unfortunately, though we can see from it that v. 16 cites Exod. 3:12. The verse is best translated, "The LORD said to him, 'But I will be with you, and you shall strike down the Midianites, every one of them."' (cf. Exod. 3:14; Exod. 3:12 should read, "But I AM is with you . . . .") It is this affirmation that turns Gideon around, though he does—also like Moses (cf. Exod. 4:1ff.)—ask for a sign. That is a consistent part of Gideon's character throughout the story: he resorts regularly to divination (e.g., 6:36-40). Incidentally, YHWH will turn the tables on Gideon in chapter 7, where YHWH chooses Gideon's army by a similar method. Also consistent in Gideon's character is the tendency to overdo. In v. 19, he prepares an *ephah's* worth of unleavened cakes, a disproportionate amount (an *ephah* is more than a basket). Later he will gather 22,000 soldiers to fight the Midianites. The *ephod* that he makes (8:27) would have weighed close to forty-five pounds, a tremendous amount, especially if it is some kind of priestly garment—perhaps used for divination—as some scholars think.

Verses 25-32 present an entirely different tradition. YHWH orders Gideon to tear down the Baalite altar and to offer sacrifice to YHWH on the traditionally crude stone altar of Yahwism. To make the fire for the sacrifice, Gideon is to burn the Asherah, a wooden pole symbolic of the female counterpart of Baal. Gideon does as YHWH tells him, but, rightly fearing that there will be repercussions, he does it at night. The "men of the town" are angry at the act of desecration and demand that Gideon be killed, but his father, Joash, taunts them by saying that if Baal were truly a god he would have defended himself against such an act. For this act Gideon is given the name Jerubbaal, which is interpreted as meaning "let Baal contend against him" (v. 32). This was probably not the original significance of the name. Names ending with "baal" were common among Israelites during the time of the confederacy, and they almost always meant that their holder was a worshiper

of Baal. Later editors sometimes changed the “baal” ending of such names to “bosheth” or “besheth,” meaning “shame,” to indicate the distaste with which later ages regarded such syncretism. But here the name is understood as earned on the day that Baal’s altar came down. It is for this editor a sign of God’s accomplishment through Gideon. (The name “Gideon,” incidentally, means “slasher” or “hacker.”) This whole passage, vv. 25-32, has little to do with anything that precedes or follows it, though the name Jerubbaal is picked up in 7:1.

It appears that the original form of the story may have gone from 6:10 to 6:33. In v. 33ff., when the Midianites and their allies come again on a raid into Canaan, Gideon is raised up as a deliverer by the spirit of YHWH. Then Gideon issues a call not only to his own small clan of Abiezer but also to the rest of the tribe of Manasseh and to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. After he tests God once more with the sign of the fleece (vv. 36-40)—an act, which should not be necessary after the sign described in vv. 17-20—the combined force moves to meet the enemy (7:1).

The response from the three tribes is considerable—indeed, it is excessive. Lest the very size of the Israelite force encourage the people to think that it is their own power

that defeats the Midianites, YHWH orders a series of tests to weed out all but three hundred of the troops (7:3-8). The tests may seem to have no particular significance in themselves, but it has been suggested that the test described in vv. 4-8 is one of alertness; the men who lap the water scooped up with their hands, instead of lying down, “show themselves more watchful and ready to meet any sudden emergency, such as an attack from the rear. . . .” The story thus gives even greater credit to YHWH, who chose not only a smaller force, but [in those who drank lying down rather than kneeling] also those less suitable to a military enterprise (Boling, pp. 145-146; the quotation is from Theodore Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament*.)

Gideon goes to the enemy camp, as YHWH has instructed him, and overhears a Midianite, presumably a sentry, telling his friend of a dream in which a cake of barley bread smashed down a tent in the Midianite camp (7:13-14). As the footnote in the OAB points out, this is interpreted as meaning that the farmers (Israel) will defeat the tent-dwelling nomads (Midian). The apparently fainthearted Gideon is encouraged—notice again how many signs he needs—and he returns to the camp to lead the attack.

The strategy for the battle is somewhat difficult to follow because of the confusion in the telling of the story. It is clearly impossible for someone to carry a trumpet in one hand, a jar with a torch in it in the other hand, and still wield a sword. It is the middle of the night (7:19), and Gideon has divided his little group into three companies, thus surrounding the Midianites. The sight of the torches and the sound of the trumpets and smashing jars apparently causes the enemy to think that they are being attacked by an army of great size. In the confusion and panic, the Midianites set about killing each other (7:22). Gideon’s troops then pursue the fleeing Midianites and call on the tribe of Ephraim to cut off the enemy retreat at the Jordan. The Ephraimites have the honor of killing the two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb (7:24-25). Ephraim was a large tribe and was accustomed to being a leader. Here the tribe of Ephraim becomes jealous that the little clan of Abiezer has taken upon itself the task of routing the Midianites. This trait of the Ephraimites is mentioned again in chapter 12:1 when the tribe of Gilead goes to war without Ephraim. That situation is not handled as diplomatically as Gideon handles this one, and war between the two Israelite tribes results. Here Gideon resorts to flattery, and this pacifies Ephraim (8:1-3).

The account of the pursuit of the Midianites by Gideon, described in 8:14-21, is a second version of the defeat of Midian. The princes, still alive, are given different names. The cities of Succoth and Penuel are chastised for refusing to give aid. They are acting prudently, for the Midianites are in firm control of that territory, and it seems impossible for Gideon even to catch up with their swift camel force, let alone defeat

them. Gideon is able to do both, however, for YHWH gives them into his hand (8:7; cf. 7:15). It is worth noting again that it is YHWH, not Gideon, who is the victor in both accounts. The first "battle" is, at last, no contest—Gideon doesn't even fight. The second victory is by any human standard impossible, as the reservations of Succoth and Penuel indicate.

In addition to his campaign of "war of the LORD," Gideon is also set on blood revenge: the Midianites killed his brothers (8:18-19). As an insult to his captives, Gideon orders his young son, a mere boy, to kill them, but the lad is afraid to. Complimented by his captives as to his valor, Gideon dispatches them himself.

The ending of this story is ambiguous. Gideon refuses to accept the offer of a hereditary kingship (8:22-23). Such an office had not existed among the Israelites—YHWH alone was king of Israel—and this was to become a major issue later with the anointing of Saul as the first king. Two opinions are reflected in the accounts of the anointing of Saul: in one it is seen as a sign of Israel's defection, of her becoming like the other nations; the other represents it as God's own desire that Israel be united into one nation. In the Gideon story, the more conservative view is expressed.

Gideon, then, is virtuous in renouncing the temptations of kingship. Immediately thereafter he requests that the soldiers give him the earrings they had taken as spoils. From them he makes an "ephod." It is not known what the ephod was, but the context here seems to imply that it was an image of some sort, or perhaps a covering for an image. As indicated above, however, some scholars think it may have been a garment for priestly divination; as such it might have been worn by an image, but it might also have been worn by the priest. Whatever it was, by making it Gideon contributes to the ultimate defection of his family (8:24-27).

Finally, after the stage is set for the next story by the birth of Abimelech to Gideon's concubine, the death of Gideon is told, ending with the characteristic formula of the Deuteronomist; the people once again turn to the worship of the Baals and forget YHWH (8:29-35).

Judges 9
Abimelech, King of Shechem

Abimelech, the half-Israelite, half-Canaanite son of Gideon and his concubine, plots to become king. This story is from Israel's tradition that saw monarchy as a betrayal of YHWH's sovereignty (cf. I Sam. 8). Abimelech goes to Shechem to his mother's Canaanite kinfolk. The Israelites, under Gideon, have achieved a position of superiority and are effectively in control of the Canaanite population in the area around Shechem. Abimelech points out that it would be more in tune with Canaanite ideas of an aristocratic ruling class, if he who is part Canaanite—"your bone and your flesh" (9:2)—ruled over them rather than the Israelites, "the sons of Jerubbaal." So from the treasure of the shrine of Baal-berith ("lord of the covenant") the Canaanites give Abimelech money to hire a band of brigands with whom he kills all his half-brothers except the youngest, Jotham. At the site of the sacred oak at Shechem the Canaanites then make Abimelech king.

Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon (Jerubbaal), addresses the people of Shechem in a fable—one of the few in the Old Testament. (In a fable, animals or other non-human beings—in this case, trees—speak and act like humans.) The more noble trees refuse to accept kingship over the other trees, but a bramble—a bush that provides no shade—accepts, offering the other trees the protection of its shade. The acceptance is qualified: "If in good faith you are anointing me king over you . . ." (9:15), then the shelter is offered; if, however, it is not in good faith, then fire will "come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon." Jotham interprets: since the people

of Shechem have not acted in good faith, but have killed the sons of their deliverer Jerubbaal, then " . . . let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the lords of Shechem, and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the lords of Shechem, and from Beth-millo, and devour Abimelech" (9:20). And this is precisely what happens. At this point two stories are intertwined: vv. 23-25 begin an account which is continued in vv. 42-57. Into this story is inserted the account of the rebellion of Gaal against Abimelech (vv. 26-41). We look first at the story of Gaal's rebellion. Abimelech has been governing Shechem from the nearby town of Arumah. Since the support with which he gained the kingship is in Shechem, it seems to have been a mistake not to have made that city his seat of government. At any rate, Gaal, newly arrived in the city, stirs up discontent against the king. Pointing out that Abimelech previously served under Canaanites, he argues that the king is not truly an aristocrat. He challenges Abimelech to come and fight for his place as king. But through the assistance of Abimelech's puppet, Zebul, Gaal is defeated and driven away from Shechem.

We turn now to the story in vv. 22-25 and vv. 42-57. The people of Shechem, fearing the curse which Jotham has placed upon them, begin a campaign of harassment. They rob travelers on the route through the mountains. It is Abimelech's task as king to make the road safe—for a fee that the travelers pay him. Abimelech divides his army into three groups. Two of them ambush the Shechemites when they come out to till the fields, and the third cuts off their retreat into the city. The city is then razed, not to be rebuilt for a long time. But some Shechemites flee into the stronghold of the Tower of Shechem. It is not clear if this was a separate structure or a stronghold within the city's wall. Abimelech brings brushwood (brambles) and sets fire to it at the base of the tower, destroying the people. Thus fire has come from Abimelech to destroy the people of Shechem.

At the city of Thebez, Abimelech tries to do the same thing, but here a woman throws a millstone on him from the tower and crushes his head. To die at the hands of a woman, as Sisera had, is the ultimate insult, so Abimelech has an aide kill him with a sword. And so from the people whom he ruled comes Abimelech's own destruction; the fable of Jotham is fulfilled.

There is more to this story than its drama. The story not only gives "a vivid picture of the conflict between the Israelites and the resident Canaanite population during the period of the Conquest" (F.T. Schumacher in IDB, vol. I, p. 10), but also offers a statement of the theology that understood kingship to be a betrayal of YHWH. Here, those Israelites who accept Abimelech's rule as king also seem to accept Baal-berith, or the "Covenant Baal," as their God; they no longer understand themselves as belonging to YHWH. The difference between "King" Abimelech and King Josiah, who ruled at the time of the editor of Judges, is the difference between a king anointed by YHWH (Josiah) and one who became king on his own initiative, who indeed "assumed the prerogatives of God." And behind the story, too, may be a polemic against any notion of a continuing sanctuary at Shechem. The Deuteronomic editor would wish after all to devalue any possible competitors to a centralized temple at Jerusalem.top

Two minor judges are mentioned in 10:15, and then a rather full expression of the Deuteronomic theology of history is stated (10:6-16). For its rejection of YHWH, Israel is delivered into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites. The whole story that follows takes place in the land east of the Jordan, the land of the Ammonites; therefore, we must suppose that the mention of the Philistines is either detached from or intended to foreshadow the story of Samson which immediately follows.

The kingdom of Ammon was apparently attempting to expand to the northwest and take over the land of the tribe of Gilead. Seeking someone to lead them against Ammon, the Gileadites approach Jephthah. According to the text Jephthah has been cast out by his half-brothers because he is their father's son by a harlot. Note that the name of the father in this case, Gilead, is identical to the name of the entire tribe. This may mean that Jephthah is the son of a Gileadite father, name unknown, which, coupled with the fact that he is also the "son

of a harlot," would mean that he has no future in Gilead. The result is his formation of a guerilla band, to live by its wits and highway robbery (11:13). The occupation makes him and his men skillful at fighting, the only ones so trained among the farmers of Gilead. The result is that the Gileadites must come to the one they have rejected and humbly ask him to lead them. Although the initiative in obtaining a judge seems at this point in the hands of the elders of the people, it must finally be ratified by YHWH. This Jephthah himself asserts in v. 9: "If you bring me home again to fight with the Ammonites, and the LORD gives them over to me, I will be your head." The elders agree, "the LORD will be a witness between us" (v. 10). So Jephthah prepares to face the Ammonites. First he negotiates in an attempt to avoid war. Judges 11:12-28 describes the negotiations that take place between Jephthah and the Ammonites. The past history of the relations between the two peoples are rehearsed with the Ammonites seeing the past as a story of Israelite conquest of their land, and Jephthah seeing it as YHWH's initiative on behalf of his people. Why hasn't their God Chemosh done the same for them? (v. 24) "In this period, when success in warfare was everywhere acknowledged as a sign of divine favor . . . Jephthah believed an appeal to the Ammonite god's authority was important enough to risk YHWH's wrath for talking about another god. In addition to being the crowning argument for peace, it is also a bit of gratuitous religious instruction" (Boling, p. 205).

The plea for peace is ignored. In 11:29, YHWH does confirm Jephthah as leader for the people in a typical picture of the spirit coming upon the charismatic leader. Jephthah makes an oath to God that he will sacrifice the first thing he meets on his return home if God will give him the victory. The RSV translation of v. 31,"whoever comes out of the doors of my house," actually resolves an ambiguity in the story before it ought to be. The NEB translation "the first creature that comes out," is probably better. In fact Jephthah certainly has in mind the flocks and herds which he would normally encounter before going into his house, leaving it to YHWH to pick which one God wanted. The oath is nevertheless hasty and ill-considered, and instead of an animal, it is his daughter, an only child, whom he first meets. He cannot break his vow—at the center of the story is the irrevocability of a vow made to YHWH; the resulting tragedy is secondary. Jephthah cannot break his vow, nor

does his daughter expect him to. "My father, if you have opened your mouth to the LORD, do to me according to what has gone out from your mouth . . ." (v. 36); God has after all kept God's part of the agreement. "As often happens in early Israel's popular narration of history, the one who speaks wisely, when YHWH's rule is at stake, is a woman, e.g., Deborah and Jael. Cf. Manoah's wife in ch. 13, Hannah in I Sam. 1-2; Michal in II Sam. 6:20-23" (Boling, p. 209). Jephthah's daughter simply asks time to bewail the fact that she dies unfulfilled, still being a virgin. (The role of women as bearers of children was held in extremely high esteem.)

Once again the tribe of Ephraim is resentful because it was not included in the battle (12:1-8). This time there is no tactful response, and war is waged between Ephraim and Gilead. There may be more here than simple pride on the part of Ephraim: the tribes, such as Gilead, who inhabited the east bank of the Jordan were never fully trusted to maintain the ties of the confederacy. We have already noted a sign of this in the Book of Joshua (chapter 22). It is interesting to see the origin of the word "shibboleth," which has been preserved in English to indicate a meaningless slogan. It is used by the Gileadites to detect any Ephraimite who might try to slip across the Jordan to safety: the Ephraimites' inability to pronounce the "sh" sound reveals their land of origin.

Judges 13-16
Samson

Samson is not a judge or even a deliverer in the sense that others mentioned in the Book of Judges are. His are tales about a local hero told with no attempt to make them fit into the pattern of apostasy, punishment, repentance, and deliverance beyond the opening formula in 13:1 and the closing one in 16:31.

The Philistines, the adversaries in the story, came to the coastal plain of Palestine—a name which they bequeathed to the country—from about 1150 BCE to 1050 BCE. They were among the "sea peoples" who spread out to the south and east over the Mediterranean; when they came is not certain. The five cities of Gaza, Gath, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron were Philistine strongholds. The Philistines were much further advanced culturally and technologically than the Israelites of the time, and they were never completely brought under Israelite control.

In spite of the Deuteronomic statement in 13:1, at the time of the Samson stories, the Philistines do not seem to have seriously attempted to subdue the Canaanite and Israelite tribes in Palestine. Samson is free to walk throughout the lesser Philistine town of Timnah and the major city of Gaza. According to 14:4, the Philistines "had dominion over Israel," but historically this can refer only to the small towns on or near the coastal plain; there does not seem to have been a major Philistine conquest. The birth of Samson is accompanied by the supernatural events so often present in stories of heroic figures. The story is similar in many ways to that of Samuel (and his mother, Hannah [I Sam. 1]), as well as to the birth of John the Baptist to the elderly and childless Elizabeth. A childless woman of the tribe of Dan is given a son by the power of YHWH with the command that he be raised as a Nazirite. He is to drink no alcoholic beverage, eat nothing unclean, and is not to cut his hair. Nazirite vows were usually taken by a person in adulthood, but it is possible that at one time

children were dedicated for life by their parents, as Hannah dedicated Samuel to the temple. Here YHWH claims Samson: he shall be a Nazirite from birth, not by his own choice but by God's.

There follows a series of tales about a hero of the Paul Bunyan or John Henry type. These stories have little in common with the stories of the judges, but they do reflect something of the coarse style of life of the period. The first story, 14:1-15:17, is in two parts. The first tells of Samson's marriage to a Philistine woman, with its frustrating ending, and the second tells of his vengeance against the Philistines.

Samson's parents are opposed to his marriage to a Philistine. For the Deuteronomist, of course, such a marriage would have furthered the religious syncretism (mixing or blending) which, in D's eyes, was the cause of all the troubles of later times. It is highly possible, however, that even before the D writer voiced this judgment, parents would have opposed such intermarriage. But Samson, showing something of his character—promoted no doubt by his size and strength—simply demands that he have the woman (14:3). The comment in v. 4 that this behavior was from YHWH and an opportunity to kill the Philistines, is probably D's editorializing. The editor may well have felt it necessary to explain the hero's action—though contrary to basic standards, it is part of the divine plan.

On his way to get his bride—one should probably omit "with his father and mother" in v. 5—the spirit of YHWH comes upon Samson (v. 6). The coming of the spirit on Samson seems to cause frenzy and supernormal strength, and in this power Samson kills a lion. Note that his strength is understood here as a momentary gift of power from YHWH, not, as we later surmise, a by-product of his uncut hair. At the wedding feast, which is to last seven days (v. 17), Samson is provided with thirty young Philistine men from the town as his wedding party, since no friends of his own are present. He poses a riddle to them. The answer to the riddle depends on knowledge of the strange incident with the lion, in which bees have made a hive in the carcass and produced honey. The meaning of this incident—other than as a prelude to the riddle—is unclear. The riddle stakes are sufficiently high that the dire threats the men make to Samson's wife and the drastic measures Samson takes when he loses the bet are credible. After Samson's departure, the woman's family give her to Samson's (Philistine) best man in order to save face, for it would have been unendurable that the marriage not have been consummated after the feast had been held.

Chapter 15 tells of Samson's vengeance against the Philistines for giving away his wife. He responds by

tying torches to the tails of foxes and setting Philistine grain fields on fire. When they hear what has stirred Samson's anger, the Philistines regard the setting of the fire as vengeance. In turn they burn both the wife and her father (15:6). This adds still more to Samson's grievance, and he kills a great many Philistines, finally fleeing to a cave where he hides. Robert Alter has noted how often the figure of Samson is "quietly but effectively associated with . . . fire." This particular episode is filled with fire, beginning when "the thirty Philistine men threaten his

first wife with death by fire if she does not obtain for them the answer to Samson's riddle" (14:15). Then the Philistine fields are burned (15:4-5) and "the immediate reaction is to make [the] roaring bonfire out of the household of Samson's recent wife, with her and her father in the midst of the flames" (15:6). But there are still other mentions of fire in the Samson saga, particularly in 15:14, where the cords that fail to bind him are likened to flax dissolving in fire. "By the time we get to the captive Samson bringing down the temple of Dagon on himself and several thousand of his enemies, though there is no actual fire in this climactic scene, fire has become a metonymic image of Samson himself; [in a sense, Samson has become fire] a blind, uncontrolled force, leaving a terrible swath of destruction behind it, finally consuming itself together with whatever stands in its way" (*The Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 94-95).

The Philistine reprisal raid into Judah causes Samson's tribe to give him to the Philistines as a ransom for their safety. Allowing himself to be bound, Samson goes with the Philistines until he comes to the town of Lehi (which means "jawbone") (16:30). The Deuteronomist adds the customary formula at the end. D probably did not approve of these stories but decided they could not be omitted. There, filled with the spirit, he breaks his bonds, killing "a thousand men" with the fresh jawbone of an ass. The song in v. 16 is an ancient one.

After two more brief stories, one an etiological one about a well and the other a fragment of a story of one of Samson's exploits in Gaza, the story of Delilah begins (16:4-31). The whole point of the well-known story is the attempt on the part of the Philistines to discover the secret of Samson's strength. By the use of her wiles Delilah eventually wrings his secret from him. But the secret is not precisely what the earlier stories, including that of his birth, have indicated. The spirit of YHWH has come upon him from time to time in the past, giving him supernormal strength. This has been connected apparently with his Nazirite vow. Now it is the long hair, also connected with the vow, which gives him strength. Once it is cut, he is helpless. Only at the end (16:28ff., prepared for by 16:22, in which it is noted that his hair began to grow back) does the source of his strength once more come from YHWH.

Some scholars have seen this as a rededication to the vow. At any rate, Samson prays that YHWH will give him strength this one time more so that he may avenge himself, and in death he kills more than all those he killed during his life (16:30). Life during the time of the confederacy is graphically portrayed in the stories of the judges. For theological reasons the D writer has cast them as if they were national rather than local events. There were no central nor even hereditary local governments; sporadic charismatic leadership prevailed. The old patriarchal system was breaking down as Israel settled in an agricultural way of life, but no new system had emerged.

The Deuteronomist never looks from the standpoint of political theory. As far as D is concerned, YHWH ruled. If the people were faithful to YHWH, all went well. The ills and misfortunes that befell the people were caused by faithlessness to the covenant with YHWH. This was to be the point of view held by many of the

prophets, who sought to bring Israel and Judah back to YHWH during the times of their monarchies. Neither government nor forms of governments were the issue, but fidelity to YHWH.

End of Chapter

Circular[back]

More like a downward spiral, actually.

Charismaback

In modern usage, the term seems to have come down in the world. Charismatic politicians may well not get it from God.

Characteristically left-handed[back]

Well, the text doesn't quite go that far, though it's possible. Cousin-marriage is a powerful force.

The people relapse after Ehud died[back]

The text may not have described his appointment as a judge, but this is certainly the language for a what happened when a judge died.

Jaelback

Amy-Jill Levine, in her *Great Courses* Lecture on the Old Testament, recites the Hebrew text, emphasizing

the insidious sweetness of Jael's words of invitation.

Reason for battleback

Sound modern?

No relationship of hospitality[back]

This is legalistic and bloody-minded. She asked him in.

Midianite raids[back]

The moral of this story (which our own society hasn't quite assimilated) is that barbarians can be as sopisticated as anyone else. If they're on a similar technological level to you, watch out! The later Roman Empire found this out the hard way.

Even greater credit to YHWH[back]

So why not just send out one guy waving a sword and leaning on a crutch?

Shechemback

In case you've forgotten about Shechem, here's the Wiki.

A mistakeback

Machiavelli would have agreed.

Tower of Shechemback

Surely the latter.

I will be your head[back]

One LXX text says "head," another says "ruler."

Shibboleth[back]

In his 1978 alternate-history novel *SS-GB*, set in a Nazi-occupied Britain, Len Deighton has a member of the resistance challenging a suspected German by asking him about the football teams Woolwich Arsemal and Wolverhampton Wanderers. The suspect replies, "What varlet would want Wolves, when Woolwich are victorious?"

No attempt to fit[back]

Well in fairness, the pattern is actually defined by the EFM writers, not in the Bible. Amy-Jill Levine calls the Samson story farce.

Philistines[back]

So perhaps not originally middle-eastern people at all, though they became fully Caananized. We certainly think of them as Semitic, particularly so of their über-descendants, the Carthaginians.