

Judges 19-21, Diagnosis: Social Disintegration

Overview

We now consider the second part of the epilog, which reflects the first part of the prolog (Figure 1, chart). Though these two stories are at the end of Judges, they record events that happened toward the beginning of the period. Thus they offer a diagnosis of why the events in the book worked out the way they did.

The first story has numerous parallels with earlier episodes in Judges, and so does the second. In addition, both take us back to Gideon, the central hero: the first to his idolatry, the second story takes us back to the civil strife that marred his victory over Midian (Table 1, chart).¹ Together, these two stories in the epilog remind us that if we do not have peace with God, we cannot have peace with our fellow man.

Both stories repeat the refrain “In those days there was no king in Israel,” which probably refers, not to the lack of a human king, but to the neglect of Jehovah as the nation’s true king.² The refrain functions structurally in different ways in the two stories (Figure 2, chart). Two instances are internal to 17-18, dividing the first story into three sections. The remaining two instances form an inclusio around ch. 19-21, leaving the internal structure to other mechanisms.

The first and last instance of the refrain feature the addition, “Every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” This refrain recalls the clause that repeatedly marks the rebellion stage in the central cycles of the book, “The children of Israel did evil in the eyes of the Lord” (Judg. 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1).³

These two sets of phrases suggest a pattern: someone may do what is {evil, right} in the eyes of {man, the Lord} (Table 2). Judges attests the pairs (right, man) and (evil, the Lord), but that leads us to ask about the other two possible pairs, and the Table shows some texts that attest them as well.

Judges: Between Conquest and Kingdom	
1:1-3:6, Prolog	
1:1-2:5, Social Disintegration	
2:6-3:6, Spiritual Departure	
3:7-16:31, The Judges	
3:7-11, Othniel <i>good marriage</i>	
3:12-32, Ehud and Shamgar	
<i>messages, fords</i>	
4:1-5:31, Deborah and Barak	
<i>woman breaks skull of villain</i>	
6:1-8:32, Gideon	
8:33-10:5, Abimelech, Tola, Jair	
<i>woman breaks skull of villain</i>	
10:6-12:15, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon	
<i>messages, fords</i>	
13:1-16:31, Samson <i>bad marriages</i>	
17:1-21:25, Epilog and Diagnosis	
17:1-18:31, Spiritual Weakness—Micah’s Idol	
19:1-21:25, Social Strife—Civil War	

Figure 1: Overview of the Book of Judges

Prolog	A: Fighting	Israel Fights Enemies (1:1-2:5)
	B: Idolatry	Israel Faces Idolatry (2:6-3:6)
Center of Cycles	B: Idolatry	Gideon Faces Idolatry (6:1-32)
	A: Fighting	Gideon Fights Enemies (6:33-7:25)
	A: Fighting	Gideon Fights Israel (8:1-21)
	B: Idolatry	Gideon Forges Idolatry (8:22-32)
Epilog	B: Idolatry	Israel Forges Idolatry (17:1-18:31)
	A: Fighting	Israel Fights Israel (19:1-21:25)

Table 1: Gideon as link between prolog and epilog

Judges: Between Conquest and Kingdom	
1:1-3:6, Prolog	
1:1-2:5, Social Disintegration	
2:6-3:6, Spiritual Departure	
3:7-16:31, The Judges	
17:1-21:25, Epilog and Diagnosis	
17:1-18:31, Spiritual Weakness: Dan	
17:1-5, An Irregular Sanctuary	
17:6, Refrain: No King	
17:7-13, An Irregular Levite	
18:1a, Refrain: No King	
18:1b-32, An Irregular Tribe	
19:1-21:25, Social Strife: Benjamin	
19:1a, Refrain: No King	
19:2b-21:24, Reconciliation, Rape, Revenge	
21:25, Refrain: No King	

Figure 2: Structure of Judges 17-21

1 The chiasmic structure is due to Gooding, *Eretz Israel*, 16 (1982), 70*-79*; the links to prolog and epilog to Way, Greengus FS, Eisenbrauns, 2014, 247-260.

2 Wong

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In particular, Deuteronomy 12-13 repeatedly remind us of the need to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord, and not in our own eyes (chart):

Deut. 12:8 Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man **whatsoever is right in his own eyes**.

Deut. 12:25 Thou shalt not eat it; that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, when thou shalt do that which is **right in the sight of the LORD**.

Deut. 12:28 Observe and hear all these words which I command thee, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee for ever, when thou doest that which is **good and right in the sight of the LORD thy God**.

Deut. 13:18 When thou shalt hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep all his commandments which I command thee this day, to do that which is **right in the eyes of the LORD thy God**.

These chapters in Deuteronomy record laws that Israel violates in these two stories.

Deuteronomy 12 forbids local sanctuaries, but Judges 17-18 records the proliferation of these sanctuaries. Deuteronomy 13 regulates how the nation as a whole should take action against such offenses. In the first story, the Levite and the Danites fail to carry out this duty, and the second story shows abuses of this principle of joint action.⁴

This basic formula reminds us that morality is always a matter of opinion, and we must choose whose opinion we will follow, because often there are differences. It also reminds us that the Lord has an opinion in the matter, and there are consequences for following or abandoning his opinion. Thus the epilog continues the emphasis of the book on where we find our guidance for life. Doing what is right in our own eyes will inevitably lead to doing what is evil in the eyes of the Lord. Blessing can only come when we resolve to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord, which presumes that we will seek out his will and submit ourselves to it.

The structure of the second story is not as clearly marked as that of the first. Broadly, the action falls into three parts, corresponding roughly with the chapter divisions:

1. Chapter 19: A Levite's concubine abandons him. He goes to retrieve her, and on the way home passes the night in Gibeah of Benjamin, where she is raped and slain. He announces the crime to the rest of the nation.
2. Chapter 20: Acting in accordance with Deuteronomy 13, the tribes demand that Gibeah deliver up the murderers for punishment, but the town refuses, and the tribe of Benjamin arrays itself for battle. A civil war erupts. In the first two battles, Benjamin prevails, but in the third, they are defeated and almost wiped out.
3. Chapter 21: the nation recognizes that they have nearly exterminated an entire tribe, of which only 600 men survive, so they seek wives for them to rebuild the tribe.

But it is marked, by vocabulary. Three different phrases describe the nation:

Table 2: Behavior in someone's eyes; shaded references are in Judges.

	Right	Evil
Lord	Dt 12:25, 38; 13:8, ...	Judg. 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1, ...
Man	Dt 12:8; Jdg 17:6; 21:25	1 Sm 29:7

³ Abimelech's introduction is semantically parallel (8:33 the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim), but does not use the rubric "evil in the eyes of the Lord."

⁴ O'Connell

Judg. 20:11 So all **the men of Israel** (literally “man,” אִישׁ, H0376) were gathered against the city, knit together as one man. 12 And **the tribes of Israel** (שְׁבֵט, H7626) sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, What wickedness is this that is done among you? 13 Now therefore deliver us the men, the children of Belial, which are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel. But the children of Benjamin would not hearken to the voice of their brethren **the children of Israel** (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, H1121):

The distribution of these three terms is not even throughout the section (Figure 3, chart), and gives clues to the structure of the passage.⁵ The different terms also remind us that each of us has multiple roles in life, each with its own responsibilities. I am a child of God with responsibilities to him; a brother in the assembly of God’s people with responsibilities toward you; a husband to Anita; a father to our son Gene; an employee toward Parallax Advanced Research. So the people of Israel have different roles throughout this passage.

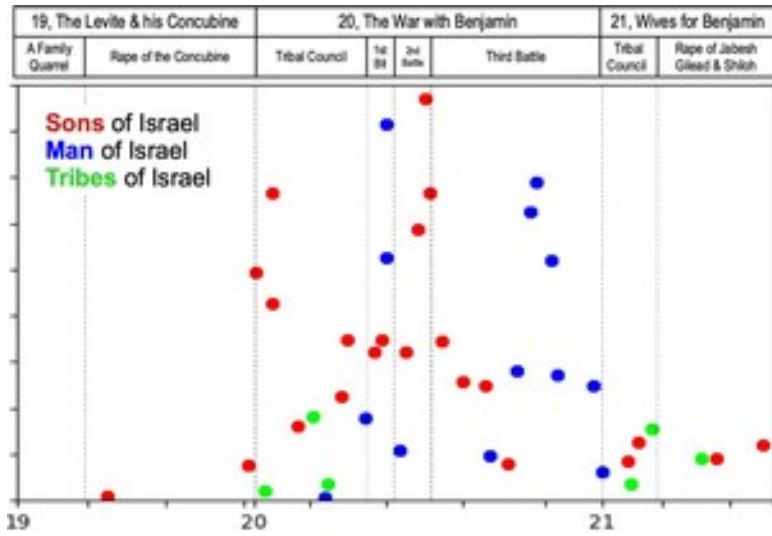


Figure 3: *Sons, Man, Tribes of Israel*

The most common, most generic term is “sons of Israel” בני ישראל (H1121, red, 22 times, 61 in the book). This expression simply indicates their family background. Yet its very frequency elsewhere sets ch. 19 apart by its absence. This chapter describes the incidents that lead to the war: the Levite and his concubine, her departure from him, his pursuit of her, their fatal night in Gibeah, and his return home. The term appears there only twice: once in v. 12, when the Levite refuses to lodge in “the city of a stranger, that is not of the children of Israel,” and then at the end, when he publicizes the murder of his concubine to his countrymen and they declare that they have not seen such things “from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt.” The lack of the term in this section not only marks it off, but emphasizes that at this point we are dealing with a private, family tragedy.

The least common of the three terms is “tribes of Israel” שְׁבֵטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (H7626, green, 6 times, 7 in the book). It marks the initial consultation among the tribes (Judg. 20:2, 10, 12), to emphasize the corporate nature of the decision to deal with the sin in Benjamin, and thus marks the start of the second section, describing the civil war. It recurs at the start of the third section, to describe the failure of Jabeshgilead to join the other tribes in the war (21:5, 8), and generically to describe the decimation of Benjamin and its impact on the nation (21:15). In addition to marking the starts of the second and third sections, the expression emphasizes the structure of the nation, and their responsibility as a nation as outlined in Deuteronomy 13.⁶

Similarly, when we gather as a church, we have certain responsibilities that we do not have individually. Recall Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians (chart):

5 See notes for discussion of a similar structural function of these terms in the history of Gideon.
 6 Though none of the three expressions appears in that chapter. בני ישראל appears elsewhere in Deuteronomy 21x, but the other two phrases only twice each, late in the book (אִישׁ: Deut. 27:14; 29:10; שְׁבֵט: Deut. 29:21; 33:5).

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1Cor. 5:3 For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, **as though I were present**, concerning him that hath so done this deed, 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **when ye are gathered together**, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

The situation in Corinth is similar to that in Judges 20, where the community is dealing with a moral lapse. There are other circumstances where it is important for the church to act together. One is in the sending out of missionaries. In the NT, missionaries do not go forth based on their individual “call,” but as the Lord instructs the church, as in Acts 13:

Acts 13:1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. 3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

And as we saw in our study of the sanctuary that God desires, when we come together, the living stones are assembled into a spiritual temple to offer up praise to God.

The third expression, “man of Israel” אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל (H0376, blue, 14 times, 19 in the book), uses a word for “man” that emphasizes vigor. Curiously, the Hebrew expression, not only here but through the OT, uses the singular אִישׁ, not the plural. Perhaps we are meant to envision the army as a single coherent hero, “the Man Israel,” an anticipation of Isaiah’s Servant of the Lord. This term describes the Israelite army at the beginning of the combat (up to 20:22, when the first battle is launched). But in spite of consulting the Lord, that battle and the second are disastrous for the nation, and during them the national army is described only as “sons of Israel.” They are not performing like men, much less like a single coherent man. The term returns from 20:33 on, describing them during the final, successful assault against Gibeah. In sum, when the nation is successful, it is described as “man of Israel,” but when they are being defeated, they are simply sons. Paul has this word in mind when he writes to the Corinthians,

1Co 16:13 Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, **quit you like men, be strong.**⁷

Recall his exhortation to Timothy to keep in mind his role as a good soldier of Jesus Christ:

2Ti 2:3 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a **good soldier** of Jesus Christ. 4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a **soldier**.

We are all children of God. Let us not shy away from our duty in the church as a congregation (like the tribes of Israel), or from our part in spiritual combat (like the man of Israel).

These stories are heavy with irony.⁸

- The tribes cannot unite to drive out the Canaanites, but they can unite to fight one of their own.
- The Levite refuses to stay in Jebus because it is not controlled by Israel, but in Gibeah, an Israelite town in Benjamin, he is offered hospitality only by a stranger from Ephraim, and his concubine is killed.

⁷ He is alluding to 1 Sam 4:9, the encouragement that the Philistines gave to one another in battle with Israel!

⁸ Chisholm p 511.

- The men of Gibeah slay one person; Israel wipes out an entire tribe, and the city of Jabeshgilead to boot.
- The men of Gibeah rape one woman; Israel encourages the surviving Benjamites to rape the virgins of Jabeshgilead and Shiloh.

The writer wants to shock us with these ironies, so that we will realize how hopeless it is to rely on what is right in our own eyes, and turn to trust in the Lord alone.

19:1-9, The Levite's Experience with Bethlehem⁹

This section is marked by the absence of any of the three terms describing the nation as a whole.

1-2, A Rebellious Concubine

19:1 **W** And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king¹⁰ in Israel, **W** that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of mount Ephraim, who took to him a concubine out of Bethlehemjudah.—A concubine is a wife who is a servant, not a free girl. The Hebrew expression here is “a wife, a concubine.” She was a legitimate wife, but there are questions about the Levite’s actions both before and after the events described in v. 2.

The first problem is that Bethlehem was not a Levitical city. While the Levites are not required to marry the daughters of other Levites, that would be the natural result if Levites grew up in levitical cities, and would ensure wives who supported the ministry of their husbands. But this Levite has no compunctions about taking a concubine who is not raised to understand the responsibility that the law assigns to him.

2 And his concubine played the whore against him, and went away from him unto her father’s house to Bethlehemjudah, and was there four whole months.—The second problem lies in her conduct. As an unfaithful wife, she should have been put to death (Deuteronomy 22). But she seeks refuge with her father, and he protects her.

The first story in the epilog focuses on spiritual weakness, tolerating idolatry. The second focuses on social weakness, starting with the sanctity of marriage.

3-9, A Welcoming Father-In-Law

3 And her husband arose, and went after her,—It is 20 miles along the ridge route from Bethel, the southern border of Ephraim, to Bethlehem, and the Levite lived “on the side of Mount Ephraim,” that is, in a remote corner of the tribal territory, so the distance would have been longer. A day’s journey in biblical times was 30-40 km, or about 17-25 miles, so this would probably be a two-day journey.¹¹ On the return he reached Gibeah, a distance of 10 miles. in an afternoon. 19:18 tells us that his return destination was “the house of the Lord,” in Shiloh, 10

9 I have added indicators for key syntactic markers: **H** (והנה), **W** (ויהי), **D** (disjunctive clause), **S** (subordinate clause), **R** (repeated subject; not complete). Other clauses are consecutives or direct discourse. Colors reflect the three titles in Figure 3.

10 מלך is moved to clause-initial position here, compared with the other three instances of this clause.

11 Klaus Geus, "A Day's Journey in Herodotus' Histories", in: Klaus Geus and Martin Thiering (Eds.), Common Sense Geography and Mental Modelling, Berlin: Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, 2012, 110–118, https://www.academia.edu/7718447/A_Day_s_Journey_in_Herodotus_Histories_Klaus_Geus.

miles beyond Bethel, or 30 miles from Bethlehem, which would certainly require two days. Figure 4 (chart) shows the geography.

The attention devoted by the writer to the days of the visit suggests that we build a calendar (Table 3, chart). If the Levite left on the first day of the week, he could be back by Sabbath.¹²

to speak friendly דבר על-לב unto her, and to bring her again, having his servant with him, and a couple of asses:—Instead of prosecuting her for her infidelity, the Levite wants to woo her back to himself.

“Speak friendly” is literally “speak to the heart,” a phrasing that will prove significant (chart). The expression appears numerous times in the OT, often in contexts of courtship.¹³ Thus Shechem woos Dinah:

Gen. 34:3 And his soul clave unto Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and **spake kindly** unto the damsel.



Figure 4: Geography of Judges 19-21

Day	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Weds	Thursday	Friday	Saturday Sabbath
Activity	Travel	Travel First Day	Second Day	3rd Day v.4	4th Day v.5	5th Day v.8 Travel	Travel
Location	Mt. Ephraim	Bethlehem	Bethlehem	Bethlehem	Bethlehem	Bethlehem, Gibeah	Gibeah, Mt Ephraim

Table 3: Calendar of the Levite's Travels

Thus Ruth describes how Boaz has treated her:

Ruth 2:13 Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast **spoken friendly** unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens.

The Lord uses the expression to describe how he seeks to recall wayward Israel:

Is. 40:2 **Speak ye comfortably** to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.

Hos. 2:14 Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and **speak comfortably** unto her.

and she brought him into her father's house:—Apparently the girl, secure in her father's home, is happy to see her husband. We are reminded of Rachel introducing Jacob to her father in Genesis 29, a parallel that the writer will develop.

12 Cassel offers an alternative scheme: the Levite arrives in Bethlehem on a Friday and the reconciliation takes place on a Sabbath, with three full days in Bethlehem, still motivated by return by the next Sabbath (p. 243).

13 Gen. 34:3; 50:21; Judg. 19:3; 1 Sam. 1:13; 2 Sam. 19:7; Is. 40:2; Hos. 2:14; Ruth 2:13; 2 Chr. 32:6

and when the father of the damsel saw him, he rejoiced to meet him.—The father is also very receptive. Perhaps he is widowed, and happy to have company.

4 And his father in law, the damsel’s father, retained הִיק him;—Literally, “prevailed over him.” Apparently the Levite sought to return immediately, but the father would not let him.

and he abode with him three days: so they did eat and drink, and lodged there.—Hebrew chronology counts a part of a day as a day. If he arrived on Monday after a two-day trip, three days would bring us to Weds.

5 ו And it came to pass on the fourth day,—This would then be Thursday.

when they arose early in the morning, that he rose up to depart:—The Levite appears to be constrained by the calendar. Two days would suffice for him to reach Shiloh before the Sabbath.

and the damsel’s father said unto his son in law, Comfort thine heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way.—The father wants to prolong the visit. “Comfort thine heart” סעד לב is what Abraham said to his visitors (Gen 18:5). The verb means to strengthen or support, and the idea seems to be, “Have a good breakfast so you have strength for the journey.” Both here and in Genesis, the invitation is followed with the reference to the ongoing journey:

Gen. 18:5 And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; **after that ye shall pass on:** for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said.

6 And they sat down, and did eat and drink both of them together: for the damsel’s father had said unto the man, Be content, I pray thee, and tarry all night, and let thine heart be merry יטב לבך.—This activity does not prepare for coming labor, but rests at its end:

Rth 3:7 And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and **his heart was merry**, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn:

1Ki 21:7 And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and **let thine heart be merry:** I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.

There is nothing wrong with such activity in the appropriate setting, as Boaz shows. But the Levite is on his way to the tabernacle in Shiloh (19:18), perhaps to help in Sabbath activities. A necessary breakfast turns into a day-long party that threatens his responsibilities.

Perhaps more important, the Levite’s attention has shifted from his original objective (v. 3 to “speak to the heart” of his concubine, wooing her back) to satisfying his own heart (Webb). The woman is completely marginalized, even in her father’s house. We hear nothing more of her until the Levite leaves to return to Ephraim (v. 9). Perhaps one reason that the woman was unfaithful to her husband is that he is too easily distracted from her to satisfying his own heart.

7 And when the man rose up to depart, his father in law urged פצר him: therefore he lodged there again.—Thursday ends, and the father in law prevails on the Levite to stay another night.

8 And he arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart:—It is now Friday. If the Levite wants to keep the Sabbath, he must get home with a long day’s journey.

and the damsel’s father said, Comfort thine heart, I pray thee.—Again, the day starts with an invitation to have a good breakfast to gain strength for the day.

And they tarried until afternoon, and they did eat both of them. 9 And when the man rose up to depart, he, and his concubine, and his servant, his father in law, the damsel’s father,

said unto him, Behold, now the day draweth toward evening, I pray you tarry all night: behold, the day groweth to an end, lodge here, that thine heart may be merry; and to morrow get you early on your way, that thou mayest go home.—But again, the father stretches out the meal, hoping for yet another day of feasting and making merry (the same expression as in v. 6). If our calendar is correct, the father obviously has no compunctions about constraining his son in law to travel on the Sabbath day.

Three features of this diary deserve attention: two kinds of eating, the repeated references to the heart, and the father’s insistence on detaining his son-in-law.

On both Thursday and Friday, the day starts with taking necessary nourishment (“comfort thine heart”), but the father extends the meal “that thine heart may be merry.” Food is necessary, and a good meal is a provision of the Lord, but when eating and drinking become an end in themselves, we have succumbed to gluttony. Recall the words of the Preacher (chart),

Eccl. 10:17 Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!

It should be enough to “eat for strength.” The father’s insistence on a good time seems excessive.

Consider next the emphasis on the heart. Note the repetition of the word “heart.” The Levite had come to “speak to the heart” of his wife, to woo her back to himself, but the father detains the Levite by appealing to the Levite’s heart, and the woman’s feelings are forgotten.

There are two major concentrations of the word “heart” in the book (Figure 5).¹⁴ The other prominent concentration is in the description of how Samson gives up his secret to Delilah. She complained that Samson’s “heart is not with me” (16:15), and “he told her all his heart” (16:17, 18). Following his heart led to his downfall. Similarly, the Levite’s susceptibility to the father’s encouragement to care for his own heart led to the disaster in Gibeah.

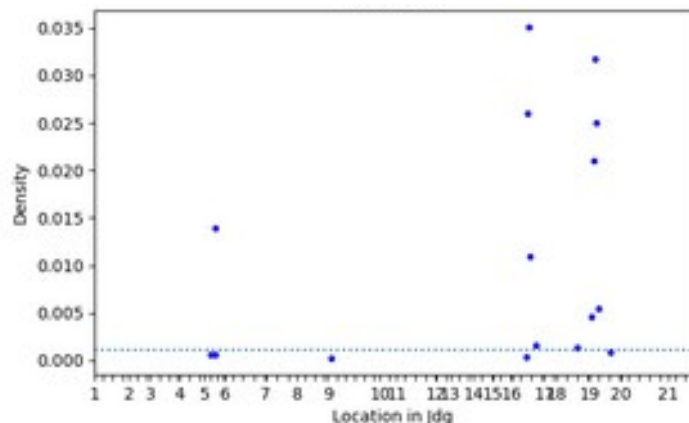


Figure 5: "Heart" ܐܠܗ H3824, ܐܠܗܗ H3820 in Judges

We need to be careful not to be led astray by our hearts:

Pro 4:23 Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

We keep our hearts by observing the Lord’s fundamental command,

Deut. 6:5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God **with all thine heart**, and with all thy soul, and with all thy **might** abundance.

If our heart is focused entirely on him, we will not be led astray, either by a deceitful woman (as was Samson) or by inappropriate feasting (as was the Levite).

Finally, consider the father’s desire to retain his son in law with the family (chart). We have already noticed that the Levite’s arrival bears some resemblance to Jacob’s arrival in Haran.

¹⁴ The earlier peak in ch. 5, in the song of Deborah, emphasizes the “thoughts of heart” of Reuben debating whether to participate in the war.

Once Jacob was there, Laban conspired to keep him there as long as possible. He profited from Jacob's seven years of service for Rachel, so he plotted to retain him for another seven years, by giving him Leah instead of Rachel (chart).

Gen 29:26 And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. 27 Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years.

Then, when Jacob finally asked leave to depart, Laban schemed to keep him further:

Gen 30:25 And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country. 26 Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served thee, and let me go: for thou knowest my service which I have done thee. 27 And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the LORD hath blessed me for thy sake.

Laban wanted to keep Jacob because Jacob was a profitable manager of his flocks. Why would the man of Bethlehem want to keep the Levite? Is his motive similar to that of Micah?

Jdg 17:13 Then said Micah, Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest.

Perhaps he, like Micah in ch. 17, thinks having a Levite in the house will bring him good fortune. In both cases, what looks like hospitality is actually self-serving. The father does not share the Levite's sense of urgency of getting to Shiloh by the Sabbath day. In seeking to do kindness to others, we must be sure that we really consider what they desire.

Whatever his motive, Bethlehem is presented as a town that shows effusive, even overbearing, hospitality.

19:10-29, The Levite's Experience with Gibeah

In this section, the terms for Israel as a group appear only twice, in vv. 12 and 30, as an inclusio.

10 DR But the man would not tarry that night,—The verb indicates intent: he was not willing.

but he rose up and departed, and came over against Jebus, which is Jerusalem; and there were with him two asses saddled, his concubine also was with him.—We last heard of Jebus in chapter 1. It was a city on the border between Judah and Benjamin (Josh 18:16), assigned to Benjamin (Josh 18:28) (chart).

Jos 18:28 And Zelah, Eleph, and **Jebusi, which is Jerusalem**, Gibeath, and Kirjath; fourteen cities with their villages. This is the inheritance of the children of **Benjamin** according to their families.

Judah initially subdued it:

Jdg 1:8 Now the children of Judah had fought against **Jerusalem**, and had taken it, and smitten it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire.

But the children of Benjamin were unable to maintain control of it.

Jdg 1:21 And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the **Jebusites** that inhabited **Jerusalem**; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day.

11 **D** **And when they were by Jebus, the day was far spent; and the servant said unto his master, Come, I pray thee, and let us turn in into this city of the Jebusites, and lodge in it.**—The servant recognizes the need to find refuge for the night from wild beasts and bandits.

12 **And his master said unto him, We will not turn aside hither into the city of a stranger, that is not of the children of Israel; we will pass over to Gibeah.**—The Levite, mindful of the city’s resistance to Israelite control, wants to stay in a city that is in Israelite hands. Perhaps he is also hoping that the city will observe the Sabbath.

This instance of a description of the entire nation, with the one in v. 30, are the only two in this chapter (Figure 3, chart). They bracket the events in Gibeah, emphasizing that it is supposed to be part of Israel.

13 **And he said unto his servant, Come, and let us draw near to one of these places to lodge all night, in Gibeah, or in Ramah.**—Ramah is a bit more than two miles beyond Gibeah.

14 **And they passed on and went their way; and the sun went down upon them when they were by Gibeah, which belongeth to Benjamin.**—Having been told that the first part of the story was in Bethlehem of Judah, we now learn that the second is in Gibeah of Benjamin. Judg 18:30 suggests that the book reached its present form after Assyria took the northern tribes captive. Readers at that time would recognize the home towns of David and Saul, as well as the contrast between the two parts of the divided kingdom.

Perhaps the most important lesson from the unhappy events in Gibeah comes from observing the close similarity between them and the history of Lot and his visitors in Sodom 400 years earlier. Recall that the Lord, accompanied by two angels, visits Abraham at Mamre in Genesis 18. At the end of the meal with Abraham, we read (chart),

Gen. 18:20 And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; 21 **I will go down now, and see whether they have done** altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know. 22 And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the LORD.

The Lord’s purpose in Genesis 18 is to assess Sodom’s reputation for sinfulness. “The men” are the two angels, who now proceed to Sodom to examine the condition of the city.

The result of the evaluation is well known. Sodom is revealed to be characterized by impurity, violence, and inhospitality. In spite of Abraham’s intercession, God is unable to identify even ten righteous people, and after the angels deliver Lot and his daughters, they destroy the city. In later years, Sodom becomes a symbol of the ultimate corrupt society (chart). Isaiah describes the corruption of Israel by calling its rulers “rulers of Sodom”:

Isa 1:10 Hear the word of the LORD, **ye rulers of Sodom**; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.

A century later, Jeremiah condemns Jerusalem:

Jer 23:14 I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: **they are all of them unto me as Sodom**, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah.

And Ezekiel complains that Jerusalem is even worse than Sodom:

Judges 19-21

Eze 16:46 And thine elder sister is Samaria, she and her daughters that dwell at thy left hand: and thy younger sister, that dwelleth at thy right hand, is **Sodom** and her daughters. 47 Yet hast thou not walked after their ways, nor done after their abominations: but, as if that were a very little thing, thou wast corrupted more than they in all thy ways. 48 As I live, saith the Lord GOD, **Sodom thy sister** hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters.

In the New Testament, the Lord condemns the unbelief of Capernaum by comparing it with Sodom:

Mat 11:23 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in **Sodom**, it would have remained until this day. 24 But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of **Sodom** in the day of judgment, than for thee.

And in the days of the Antichrist, Jerusalem is condemned by being called Sodom:

Rev 11:8 And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called **Sodom** and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

This chapter conveys this same verdict upon Gibeah. The experience of the Levite in Gibeah is strikingly parallel to the experience of the angels in Sodom. The Levite's visit to Gibeah, like the angels' to Sodom, exposes the sin of the city. "Gibeah, which belongeth to Benjamin," and that is "of the children of Israel," is no better than Sodom. The Levite thinks he has a choice, but in fact the two are the same (chart). Consider the similarities (Table 5, chart).¹⁵

Table 5: Parallels between Gibeah and Sodom

	Genesis 19	Judges 19
Travelers arrive at evening	1 And there came two angels to Sodom at even ;	14 And they passed on and went their way; and the sun went down upon them when they were by Gibeah, which belongeth to Benjamin. 15 And they turned aside thither, to go in and to lodge in Gibeah: and when he went in, he sat him down in a street of the city: for there was no man that took them into his house to lodging.
A resident alien ...	and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom:	16 And, behold, there came an old man from his work out of the field at even, which was also of mount Ephraim; and he sojourned in Gibeah : but the men of the place were Benjamites.
... meets the travelers ...	and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; 2 And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet , and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways.	17 And when he had lifted up his eyes, he saw a wayfaring man in the street of the city: and the old man said, Whither goest thou? and whence comest thou?

¹⁵ Block, WTJ 1990. Lasine, JSOT 29 (1984) 37-59 is particularly helpful.

Judges 19-21

	Genesis 19	Judges 19
... and persuades them not to lodge in the street.	And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night לין ברחוב H3885 H7339. 3 And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house;	18 ... there is no man that receiveth me to house. ... 20 And the old man said, Peace be with thee; howsoever let all thy wants lie upon me; only lodge not in the street לין ברחוב H3885 H7339.
He entertains them.	and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat .	21 So he brought him into his house, and gave provender unto the asses: and they washed their feet, and did eat and drink .
Citizens seek to abuse the guest.	4 But before they lay down, the men of the city , even the men of Sodom, compassed סבב H5437 the house round , both old and young, all the people from every quarter: 5 And they called unto Lot , and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them .	22 Now as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city , certain sons of Belial, beset סבב H5437 the house round about , and beat at the door, and spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him .
The host engages them ...	6 And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, 7 And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly .	23 And the man, the master of the house, went out unto them, and said unto them, Nay, my brethren, nay, I pray you, do not so wickedly ; seeing that this man is come into mine house, do not this folly.
... and offers two women.	8 Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes : only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof.	24 Behold, here is my daughter a maiden, and his concubine; them I will bring out now, and humble ye them, and do with them what seemeth good unto you [what is good in your eyes] : but unto this man do not so vile a thing.
The citizens reject the offer.	9 And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door.	25 But the men would not hearken to him:
Deliverance vs. surrender	10 But the men put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door.	so the man took his concubine, and brought her forth unto them; and they knew her, and abused her all the night until the morning: and when the day began to spring, they let her go.
Confusion at the door of the house	11 And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door.	26 Then came the woman in the dawning of the day, and fell down at the door of the man's house where her lord was, till it was light.

15 And they turned aside thither, to go in and to lodge in Gibeah: and when he went in, he sat him down in a street of the city: for there was no man that took them into his house to lodging.—In Gentile cities such as Jericho or Gaza, a prostitute might offer a variety of

hospitality services to travelers (as in Joshua 2, and Judg 16:1-3). But that profession was discouraged in Israel:

Deut. 23:18 Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the LORD thy God for any vow: for even both these are abomination unto the LORD thy God.

One could only find shelter if a local resident invited a traveler in. Doing so was a sign of virtue, one that Job mentions in defending his innocence to his friends:

Job 31:32 The stranger did not lodge in the street: but I opened my doors to the traveller.

But Gibeah has no hospitable citizen like Job or like Lot.

16 H And, behold, there came an old man from his work out of the field at even, which was also of mount Ephraim; and he sojourned in Gibeah: but the men of the place were Benjamites.—Finally there arrives a resident who comes from Ephraim, not Benjamin. Like Lot, he is a sojourner, not a permanent resident in the city. The author is at pains to emphasize to us that the people of Benjamin show no hospitality to the traveler at all. Only one who is a visitor among them cares for people from Ephraim.

17 And when he had lifted up his eyes, he saw a wayfaring man in the street of the city: and the old man said, Whither goest thou? and whence comest thou?—Like Lot, he notices the visitor standing in the street, and enquires about him.

18 And he said unto him, We are passing from Bethlehemjudah toward the side of mount Ephraim; from thence am I: and I went to Bethlehemjudah, but I am now going to the house of the LORD;—(Chart) The Levite reports his journey, and adds that his immediate destination is Shiloh, the tabernacle.

and there is no man that receiveth me to house.—Yet he has not found a house to receive him.

19 Yet there is both straw and provender for our asses; and there is bread and wine also for me, and for thy handmaid, and for the young man which is with thy servants: there is no want of any thing.—He insists that they will not be a burden to any host.

20 And the old man said, Peace be with thee; howsoever let all thy wants lie upon me; only lodge not in the street.—The traveling group, like the angels in Gen 19:2, are preparing to sleep in the street. The old man, knowing the character of the residents, urges them to stay with him.

21 So he brought him into his house, and gave provender unto the asses: and they washed their feet, and did eat and drink.—Like Lot, the old man does the duty of a gracious host.

22 D Now as they were making their hearts merry,—The expression is the same as vv. 6, 9, appropriate to resting at the end of the day's labor.

behold, the men of the city, certain sons of Belial, beset the house round about, and beat at the door, and spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him.—The verbal parallels between the two episodes become more emphatic. In both cases the attackers are “the men of the city,” not just a few, but the general population. “Beset . . . round about” סבב H5437 is the same expression as Gen 19:4 “compassed the house round,” and their wicked demand is the same.

In Genesis, “the men of the city” is explained as “the men of Sodom.” Here, the phrase is explained as “sons of Belial,” worthless people. The point is that Gibeah is no better than Sodom.

23 And the man, the master of the house, went out unto them, and said unto them, Nay, my brethren, nay, I pray you, do not so wickedly אֶל־אֶחָי אֶל־תִּרְעוּ נָא; seeing that this man is come into mine house, do not this folly.—The host’s plea echoes that of Lot to the men of Sodom,

Gen. 19:7 And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. אֶל־נָא אֶחָי תִּרְעוּ

Both men address the attackers as “my brothers,” and entreat them with the same words. It is shocking that both men have assimilated so far into the society that they consider these scoundrels their brothers.

24 Behold, here is my daughter a maiden, and his concubine; them I will bring out now,— (Chart) The man of Ephraim, like Lot, seeks to appease the attackers with two women. It almost seems as though he is trying to follow the example of Lot, perhaps hoping that his Levitical visitor will show the same powers as the angels who visited Lot.

and humble ye them,—The surrounding words echo Lot, but the old man adds this verb, which means to rape or ravish, as Shechem did to Dinah (Gen. 34.2) and Amnon to Tamar (2 Sam. 13.12,14), a callous suggestion that suggests his tacit approval of what they are doing.

and do with them what seemeth good unto you: but unto this man do not so vile a thing.—“What seemeth good unto you” is the same expression as Gen 19:8, “what is right in your eyes.” We are appalled at this surrender to self-satisfaction, until we recall the refrain that characterizes the epilog (17:5; 21:25): “Every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” The nation as a whole is no better than the wicked men of Gibeah and Sodom.

25 *D* But the men would not hearken to him: so the man took his concubine, and brought her¹⁶ forth וַיֵּצֵא אֶל־יָהֵם unto them;—The wording echoes the actions of Lot, but a subtle change in sound marks the great difference: of Lot we read, וַיֵּצֵא אֶל־הֶם, he went forth. Lot boldly confronted the attackers; the cowardly Levite thrusts his wife out to them.

and they knew her, and abused her all the night until the morning: and when the day began to spring, they let her go.—The story diverges even more from Genesis. The angels defend Lot, but the Levite surrenders his concubine to the mob. As in Bethlehem, he shows no compassion toward her. She is a servant-wife, and more a servant than a wife. We hear nothing of the host’s virgin daughter; perhaps he perceives that this sacrifice would not add anything to the situation.

26 Then came the woman in the dawning of the day, and fell down at the door of the man’s house where her lord was, till it was light.—Both stories end with someone seeking the door of the house. The men of Sodom seek for it unsuccessfully, because the angels have blinded them, but the abused concubine manages to reach it and collapses of exhaustion.

She left him at the beginning of the chapter to seek satisfaction from other men. Now that she has been exposed to the worst of human lust, she is eager to return to her husband. We recall Hosea’s prediction of Israel’s behavior, comparing her to a faithless wife:

Hos 2:7 And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now.

Readers at the time the book is written can hardly miss the contrast in the kind of hospitality associated with the two locations in ch. 19, Bethlehem (the home of David) and Gibeah (the home of Saul).

16 The word should be italicized; it is not part of the Hebrew text.

27 And her lord rose up in the morning, and opened the doors of the house, and went out to go his way:—His thoughtlessness toward his concubine continues. We do not read that he went out to seek her, but simply that he went out to go his way. He appears to have abandoned her.

H and, behold, the woman his concubine was fallen down at the door of the house, and her hands were upon the threshold. **28 And he said unto her, Up, and let us be going.**—Even when he finds her at the door, he is curt with her, not tender.

D But none answered.—This description is vague. Is the woman dead? Or just unconscious?

Then the man¹⁷ took her up upon an ass,—The Hebrew verb לקח H3947 implies that he transported her on the ass like a sack of grain. Compare Abigail’s preparations to appease David, on his way to slaughter Nabal (chart):

1Sam. 25:18 Then Abigail made haste, and **took** two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them **on asses**.

If you help someone to ride on a donkey, the verb is the Hiphil of רכב H7392, “cause to ride”:

Ex. 4:20 And Moses took his wife and his sons, and **set them upon an ass**, and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the rod of God in his hand.

If the woman is not already dead, she soon expires after this rough handling.

R and the man¹⁸ rose up, and gat him unto his place. **29 And when he was come into his house, he took a knife, and laid hold on his concubine, and divided her, together with her bones, into twelve pieces,**—One for each tribe.

and sent her into all the coasts of Israel.—What are we to make of this gruesome action? The closest parallel elsewhere in the Bible is when Saul summons the tribes to help rescue Jabeshgilead from the Philistines (chart):

1Sa 11:7 And he took a yoke of oxen, and hewed them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen. And the fear of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out with one consent.

But it’s hard to explain Judges 19 from 1 Samuel 11, for several reasons.

1. Saul cuts up an animal, not a human being.¹⁹
2. The symbolism of Saul’s action is the judgment that will fall on tribes who do not support the deliverance of Jabeshgilead. The Levite is in no position to threaten such retaliation. He seems to be seeking simply to shock the people.
3. The Levite’s action happens early in the period of the judges, say 1300 BC. The battle for Jabeshgilead follows Saul’s anointing as king in 1 Samuel 10, about 1050.²⁰ The Levite is not inspired by the actions of Saul. If anything, Saul may be motivated by the actions of the Levite.

17 Implicit subject

18 Repeated subject, marking break

19 Saul’s action is closer to the sacrificial ceremony described by Lucian (ca. AD 130) in Toxaris, line 48 (<https://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/luc/wl3/wl305.htm>), which involved killing an ox, but in the latter case there was no distribution of the parts of the animal.

20 L. McFall, The Chronology of Saul and David, JETS 53/3 (September 2010) 475-533.

It is more likely that the Levite is following a recognized custom among Israel's pagan neighbors. Around 1800 BC, a powerful city-state was centered at Mari, on the Euphrates about 270 miles north of Baghdad. Discovered in 1933 and excavated by the French since then, Mari has yielded a rich archive of clay tablets, written in Akkadian cuneiform, documenting many aspects of ancient life. In one of these (ARM 2.48), a local governor is responding to the king, who has directed him to gather troops for a battle. Having little success, he writes,²¹

Now, if I had my way, a prisoner in jail should be killed, his body dismembered, and transported to the area between the villages as far as Hudnim and Appan in order that the people would fear and gather quickly.

He seeks to stimulate the people to fear, and the next verse shows that he succeeds.

It is helpful to compare the Levite's handling of the case to two principles of conflict resolution from Proverbs 25:²²

1. Proceed **deliberately**, not hastily:

Prov. 25:8 Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame.

2. Start **locally** and escalate slowly:

Prov. 25:9 Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another:
10 Lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away.

The previous chapter gives a third: judgment is to be **appropriate** to the offense.

Pro 24:11 If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; 12 If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man **according to his works**?

Our Lord emphasized the need for appropriate judgment, distinguishing situations meriting many stripes from those meriting few stripes:

Luk 12:47 And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with **many stripes**. 48 But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with **few stripes**. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

The Levite observes the first principle, proceeding deliberately with the tribal council. But when we consider his accusation in ch. 20, we will see that he has not observed the second or the third.

30 ¶ And it was so, that all that saw it said, There was no such deed done nor seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt unto this day:—The episode closes as it began, with a reference to “the children of Israel.”

consider of it, take advice, and speak your minds.—The Levite's action has the effect of stirring up the people, leading to a popular call to come together and deliberate.

21 Block's translation, following the German of G. Wallis, “Eine Parallele zu Richter 19 29ff. und 1 Sam. 11 51ff. aus dem Briefarchiv von Mari,” ZAW 64 (1952): 57–61, who first noted the parallel.

22 Suggested by Dave Nelson

20:1-48, The War with Benjamin

The chapter has five scenes, marked by shifts in the participants (between 1-10 and the rest of the chapter) and the terms used to describe the nation as a whole (Figure 6, chart). Each of the three battles is preceded by an inquiry to the Lord. Though the Lord appears to encourage the attacks, the united tribes suffer defeat the first two times, a circumstance that we will want to consider.

Judges 20, War with Benjamin	
1-10, Council of Tribes (tribes)	
11-17, Ultimatum to Benjamin (tribes, men)	
18-48, Three Questions & Three Battles	
18 Who shall go first? (children)	19-21 Defeat (men)
22-23 Shall I go? (men)	24-25 Defeat (children)
26-28 Shall I stop? (children)	29-48 Victory (men)

Figure 6: The Structure of Judges 20

1-10, The Council of Tribes

20:1 Then all **the children of Israel** went out, and the congregation **עדה** H5712 was gathered together **הלך** N H6950 as one man, from Dan even to Beersheba, with the land of Gilead, unto the LORD in Mizpeh.—This is the first time that the limits of the land are described as “from Dan to Beersheba,” reminding us that Dan’s migration of ch. 18 has already occurred.

2 And the chief of all the people, even of all **the tribes of Israel**, presented themselves in the assembly **הלך** H6951 of the people of God, four hundred thousand footmen that drew sword.—The popular concern stirred up by the Levite’s gruesome message leads to a spontaneous assembly.²³

3 (Now the children of Benjamin heard that **the children of Israel** were gone up to Mizpeh.)—It is curious that “they heard” after the fact. Didn’t they receive one of the twelve pieces of the concubine? Or had the popular rush to judgment already condemned the entire tribe?

Then said **the children of Israel**, Tell us, how was this wickedness?—They ask the Levite to recount what happened.

4 And the Levite, the husband of the woman that was slain, answered and said, I came into Gibeah that belongeth to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to lodge. **5** And the men **בעלי** of Gibeah rose against me, and beset the house round about upon me by night, and thought to have slain me:—That was not their intent! Homosexual behavior was also a capital crime (Lev 20:13), but perhaps he thinks a direct charge of attempted murder would be more compelling, given the compromised state of the nation. Also, he accuses the “lords” of Gibeah.

and my concubine have they forced, that she is dead.—Literally, “and she died.” He does not say that they killed her, but clearly wants his hearers to draw that conclusion. But we cannot escape the suspicion that she may finally have died under his hand.

Ironically, if he had dealt with her adultery openly in the first place, she would also be dead, but he would not be in the guilty position that he is.

6 And I took my concubine, and cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel: for they have committed lewdness and folly in Israel.—Lewdness emphasizes the sexual nature of the sin, but does not in itself communicate any consequences. But to “commit folly (in Israel)” is a set phrase indicating that punitive action is appropriate,²⁴ e.g.,

²³ See notes for survey of other instances when the people gather together, often at popular initiative.

²⁴ Thus TDNT *nbl*.

Deut. 22:21 Then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die: **because she hath wrought folly in Israel**, to play the whore in her father's house: so shalt thou put evil away from among you.

Josh. 7:15 And it shall be, that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath: because he hath transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and **because he hath wrought folly in Israel**.

7 Behold, ye are all children of Israel; give here your advice and counsel **לְדַבֵּר וְעֲצָה**.—These are what everyone gathered to offer, according to 19:30, **עָצוּ וְדַבְּרוּ**.

8 And all the people arose as one man, saying, We will not any of us go to his tent, neither will we any of us turn into his house. 9 But now this shall be the thing which we will do to Gibeah; we will go up by lot against it; 10 And we will take ten men of an hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and an hundred of a thousand, and a thousand out of ten thousand, to fetch victual for the people, that they may do, when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, according to all the folly that they have wrought in Israel.—The excuse for one tribe to go against others is Deuteronomy 13. This chapter, along with Deuteronomy 12, appears to be in the writer's mind, with its emphasis on what is right in the eyes of the Lord (chart):

Deut. 13:18 When thou shalt hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep all his commandments which I command thee this day, to do that which is **right in the eyes of the LORD thy God**.

We have seen that the Levite's actions are deliberate. But are they appropriate to the crime? Deuteronomy 13 considers three cases under which the nation should take action:

Deu 13:1 If there arise among you **a prophet**, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, 2 And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, **Let us go after other gods**, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them, ...

Deu 13:6 If **thy brother**, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, **Let us go and serve other gods**, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers;

Deu 13:12 If thou shalt hear say in one of thy cities, which the LORD thy God hath given thee to dwell there, saying, 13 Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, **Let us go and serve other gods**, which ye have not known;

Each case involves the inducement, "Let us go and serve other gods." A prophet, or close relative, or city that is promoting the worship of other gods should be dealt with.

We have an example of this principle in Joshua 22. After the conquest, Joshua sent Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh back to their inheritance. Joshua 22 records:

Josh 22:10 And when they came unto the borders of Jordan, that are in the land of Canaan, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by Jordan, a great altar to see to. 11 And the children of Israel heard say, Behold, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh have built an altar over against the land of Canaan, in the borders of Jordan, at the passage of the children of Israel.

Judges 19-21

This action gives every appearance of violating Deuteronomy 13, and the nation responds, using the same verb that describes their actions in Judg 20:1:

Josh 22:12 And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation **עדה** H5712 of the children of Israel **gathered themselves together** **קהל** N H6950 at Shiloh, to go up to war against them.

This encounter ended peacefully. The tribes met together, all agreed that no idolatry was involved, and violence was averted.

Deuteronomy 13 would have been applicable to Judges 17-18, when first Micah in Ephraim, and then the tribe of Dan, engage in idolatrous worship. But it says nothing about rape or murder. The law makes other provisions for these crimes, provisions that are local, not national.

Deut 22:13-30 governs various forms of fornication. In particular (chart),

Deu 22:22 If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel.

Elsewhere, this chapter prescribes that “the men of her city shall stone her with stones” (22:21). The appropriate punishment is upon the woman and the man, and it is executed locally.

Similarly, murder is dealt with locally. If the murderer is unknown, the city nearest to the crime is responsible to swear to their innocence and make an offering.

Deut 21:1 If one be found slain in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it, lying in the field, and it be not known who hath slain him: 2 Then thy elders and thy judges shall come forth, and they shall measure unto the cities which are round about him that is slain: 3 And it shall be, that **the city which is next unto the slain man**, even the elders of that city shall take an heifer, which hath not been wrought with, and which hath not drawn in the yoke; ... 6 And all the elders of that city, that are next unto the slain man, shall wash their hands over the heifer that is beheaded in the valley: 7 And they shall answer and say, Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it. ...

Figure 7 (chart) shows the cities in the vicinity. In the present case, this would require the elders of Gibeah to swear this oath and make the offering. If they wanted to bring in the nearest cities, those would be Ramah, Alemeth, and Anathoth, all Levitical cities, ideally qualified to oversee the process.

If the guilty person could be identified, it was the responsibility of a near kinsman, the avenger of blood, to pursue the murderer and execute judgment, unless that

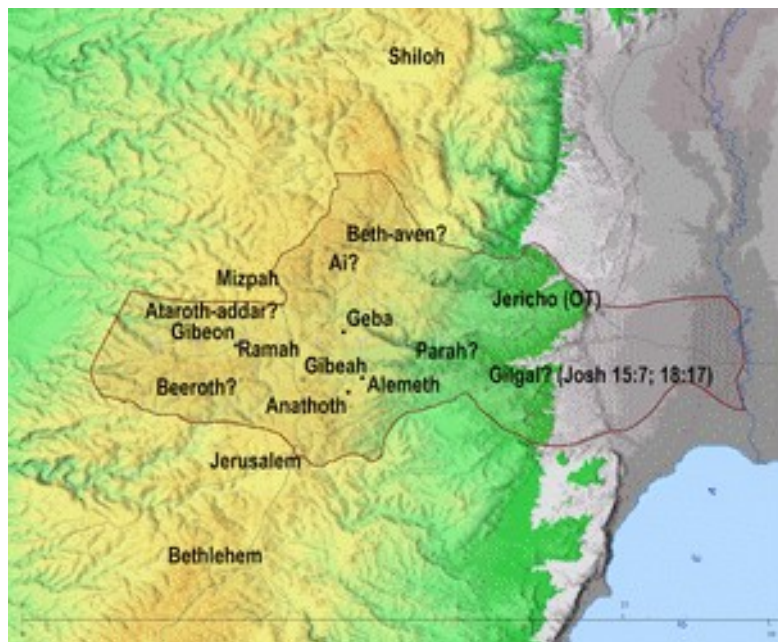


Figure 7: Cities near Gibeah. Black dots are Levitical cities. (Prepared with BibleMapper)

individual could reach a city of refuge first (Num 35; Josh 20) (Figure 8, chart).

Num 34:9 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 10 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come over Jordan into the land of Canaan; 11 Then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you; that the slayer may flee thither, which killeth any person at unawares. 12 And they shall be unto you cities for refuge from the avenger; that the manslayer die not, until he stand before the congregation in judgment. ... 19 **The revenger of blood** himself shall slay the murderer: when he meeteth him, he shall slay him. ... 24 Then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and **the revenger of blood** according to these judgments: 25 And the congregation shall deliver the slayer out of the hand of **the revenger of blood**, and the congregation shall restore him to the city of his refuge, whither he was fled: and he shall abide in it unto the death of the high priest, which was anointed with the holy oil. ...

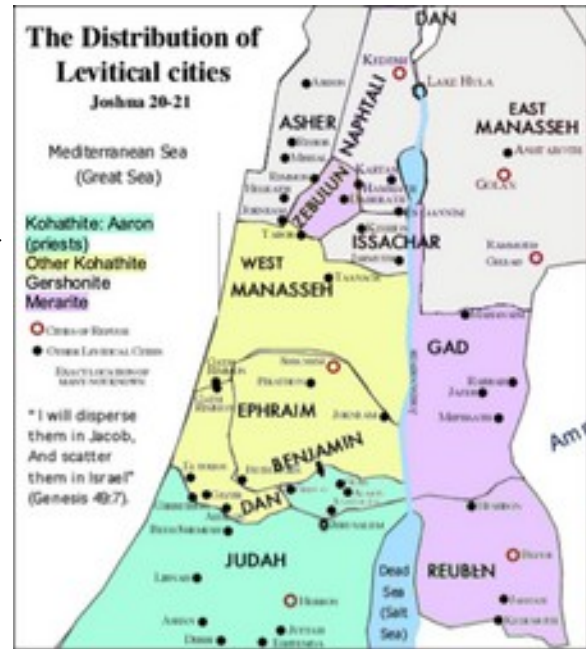


Figure 8: Levitical cities and (red) cities of refuge. Original image from <http://dailytruthbase.blogspot.com/2011/10/numbers-32-36-do-tothers-or-god-will.html>, modified

The nearest such cities to Gibeah were Hebron, Shechem, and Bezer, all Levitical cities (chart), so again the case would be judged by Levites. The Levite, or the girl's father, should have served as avenger of blood to prosecute the murderers. Instead, the Levite pushes it off onto others.

This tendency to avoid unpleasant personal responsibilities by promoting them to the society as a whole is epidemic in our society today. How many times do we see people legislating morality, when in fact they should be leading by individual example. It's much easier to pass a law to care for the poor, than for me to dig deep into my own pockets and exercise discerning charity. There must have been many in Israel who would like to avoid the messy duty of the avenger of blood by having the state step in. But if we would honor the principle of solving problems as locally as possible, we must step up courageously as individuals and not hide behind institutions.

The bottom line is that the whole undertaking violates the principles of local judgment and appropriate punishment. Holy war within Israel was only authorized for idolatry. The Levite, unwilling to do his duty as an individual, is stirring up the larger community to do it for him.

11-17, The Ultimatum to Benjamin

11 So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, knit together as one man.—For the third time the nation appears “as one man” (20:1, 8). The expression appears only nine times in all in the OT, and no more than once in any other book. What is the point of the repetition?

If we consider the other instances in biblical order, an interesting contrast emerges. The first two instances describe a large company being as vulnerable as a single person.²⁵ Moses pleads with God after the people refuse to enter the land (chart),

²⁵ Thus DCH 777, vol 1 p 180.

Num. 14:15 Now if thou shalt kill all this people **as one man**, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying,

And the Lord encourages Gideon in commissioning him to go against the Midianites, who “came as grasshoppers for multitude, ... without number” (6:5),

Judg. 6:16 And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites **as one man**.

So the expression can indicate the vulnerability of an apparently large multitude. But the later instances reflect strength rather than weakness, the agreement of a large company around a common purpose:

1Sam. 11:7 And [Saul] took a yoke of oxen, and hewed them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen. And the fear of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out **with one consent**.

2Sam. 19:14 And [David] bowed the heart of all the men of Judah, even **as the heart of one man**; so that they sent this word unto the king, Return thou, and all thy servants.

Ezra 3:1 And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together **as one man** to Jerusalem. *to dedicate the altar*

Neh. 8:1 And all the people gathered themselves together **as one man** into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel. *also the seventh month, after the completion of the wall, to read the law*

By the time Judges was written, after the captivity of the northern kingdom, both uses were known. So which one does the writer have in mind here, and which is he emphasizing by repeating the expression so often? Perhaps he is playing with the word. Certainly, the tribes were of one mind. But in the coming verses we will read how 400,000 men of Israel were defeated twice by 26,000 men of Benjamin. In spite of their great numbers and unity of mind, they were as weak as a single man before their adversary.

Moses had already warned the people about the danger of blindly following the majority in a criminal case (chart):

Exo 23:2 Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after [agree with] many to wrest judgment:

It is a wonderful thing when God’s Spirit leads his people to be of one accord (cf. ὁμοθυμαδόν G3661, especially in Acts). But agreement that comes from the fleshly desire to be accepted by the group leads to a false sense of security, and a multitude that acts “as one man” can be as vulnerable “as one man.”

12 And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe²⁶ of Benjamin, saying, What wickedness is this that is done among you?—This is the only reference in Judges to “the tribe שבט H7626 of Benjamin.” The use of this term on both sides emphasizes the official nature of the confrontation.

26 Hebrew is plural: either the expression is frozen, or the suffix reflects an archaic genitive suffix. See commentaries.

13 Now therefore deliver us the men אִישׁ, the children of Belial, which are in Gibeah, —“Men” אִישׁ H0376²⁷ occurs 2198x. The word the Levite used in v. 5, בעל H1167, occurs 161x in the sense “master, husband,” including divine titles. The Israelites soften the accusation.

that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel.—The expression “put away evil” appears elsewhere only in Deuteronomy. We have suggested that Deuteronomy 13 lies behind the actions taken by the tribes, and their use of this expression here to justify executing the offenders reinforces the notion that they have been consulting that book. Eight times Deuteronomy does justify the death penalty in order to “put away evil,” but murder is not among the offenses for which it is prescribed (see note). As with their application of Deuteronomy 13, the judgment they seek is not appropriate.

D But the children of Benjamin would not hearken [לֹא-אָזְנוּ לְשֹׁמֵעַ, as in 19:25] to the voice of their brethren the children of Israel:—But Benjamin is not innocent. “Would not hearken” was the response of the attackers in Gibeah to the old man when he tried to persuade them not to rape his guest (19:25). “They were not willing to listen.” If they had listened, they might have reasoned with the other Israelites and agreed to deal with the offenders locally.

14 But the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together out of the cities unto Gibeah, to go out to battle against the children of Israel.—Instead of seeking a peaceful resolution, they assemble their forces to face the other tribes. Now the writer surveys for us the “order of battle,” the relative size and skills of the two forces.

15 And the children of Benjamin were numbered at that time out of the cities twenty and six thousand men that drew sword, beside the inhabitants of Gibeah, which were numbered seven hundred chosen men. 16 D Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men lefthanded; every one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss. 17 D And the men of Israel, beside Benjamin, were numbered four hundred thousand men that drew sword: all these were men of war.—It is interesting to note the change in these numbers from those reported at the end of the wilderness wandering, when Israel was about to enter the land (Table 6, chart):²⁸

Num. 26:41 These are the sons of Benjamin after their families: and they that were numbered of them were forty and five thousand and six hundred.

Num. 26:51 These were the numbered of the children of Israel, six hundred thousand and a thousand seven hundred and thirty.

Table 6: Israel's Shrinking Strength

	Benjamin	Israel - Benjamin
Numbers 26	45,600	556,130
Judges 21	26,700	400,000
Change	-41%	-28%

This outcome is consistent with what Moses predicted in Deuteronomy 28:

Deu 28:15 But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: ... 29 And thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and no man shall save thee.

²⁷ The plural is the suppletive form from אָנוּ H0582.

²⁸ “Despite the victories under Joshua, Israel has not prospered since its arrival in Canaan” (Webb p. 481).

In each of the three battle scenes, the Lord allows them to be defeated, even though each time they consult the Lord in prayer and he appears to encourage their actions. James warns us,

James 4:1 From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? 2 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. 3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

James might well have the war with Benjamin in mind as he discusses “wars and fightings,” coming from their “lusts”:

- the lust of the flesh of the men of Gibeah;
- the lust of the flesh of the Levite, tarrying too long in Bethlehem;
- his pride of life, a haughty spirit that leads to his initial alienation from his concubine;
- and the pride of life of the other tribes against Benjamin.

He urges us to think about how we might “ask amiss,” leading to unanswered prayer. As we work through these three episodes, we will see that Israel has to correct two errors before the Lord grants what they desire. We will also see that when he does grant their prayer, the answer takes the form of directing their attention toward a spiritual example that they can follow.

18-21, The First Battle

18 And the children of Israel arose, and went up to the house of God Bethel,—The reference is probably not to the tabernacle, which is always בית האלהים, but to the city on the border of Ephraim and Benjamin, and so in vv. 26, 31, 21:2, 19 (2x). When the Levite describes the tabernacle in 19:18, he calls it “the house of the Lord (Jehovah).” They do not take the trouble to go more than 16 miles to the north of Gibeah to make their plea, but instead gather on the border of Benjamin, just seven miles from Gibeah, ready to go to war (Figure 4).

and asked counsel of God וישאלו באלהים,—They ask “God,” not “LORD” (i.e., Jehovah). They want divine approval of their action, but do not appeal to the Lord as their covenant God.

and said, Which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin?—They have already decided what they are going to do. They only ask who should go first.

And the LORD said, Judah shall go up first.—v. 9 says that they would cast lots; perhaps the Lord spoke by way of the sacred lot, the Urim and Thummim. These objects were stored in the High Priest’s breastplate (Ex 28:30; Lev 8:8) and used to answer “yes-no” questions. They may have been differently colored stones, and the one drawn from the pouch on the breastplate would indicate the answer (Figure 9, chart).²⁹ The process is illustrated by the case of Achan after the loss at Ai (chart).



Josh 7:16 So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken: 17 And he brought the family of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarahites: and he brought the

29 G.F. Moore, Encyclopaedia Biblica, V, 5235-5237 (<http://etana.org/sites/default/files/coretexts/14870.pdf>). He notes that תמים is from תם complete or innocent, suggesting that אורים may come from ארר to curse (though the lack of gemination in the ך is puzzling). In this case the black stone would be אורים and the white תמים. The plurals would suggest multiple stone of each color.

family of the Zarhites man by man; and Zabdi was taken: 18 And he brought his household man by man; and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

That is, each entity is presented before the Lord, and the lot is cast to say “yes” or “no.” The book of Samuel offers another example:

1Sam. 14:40 Then said he unto all Israel, Be ye on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side. And the people said unto Saul, Do what seemeth good unto thee. 41 Therefore Saul said unto the LORD God of Israel, Give a perfect lot. And Saul and Jonathan were taken: but the people escaped. 42 And Saul said, Cast lots between me and Jonathan my son. And Jonathan was taken.

The method constrains the answer. There is no question about whether they should attack, only who should lead. The Lord answers the question they asked.

19 And the children of Israel rose up in the morning, and encamped against Gibeah. 20 And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin; and the men of Israel put themselves in array to fight against them at Gibeah.—The term “men of Israel” is introduced to emphasize their military confidence. They are going forth as heroes, as mighty men.

21 And the children of Benjamin came forth out of Gibeah, and destroyed down to the ground of the Israelites that day twenty and two thousand men.—In spite of Israel’s overwhelming advantage, the outcome is a devastating loss, more than 5% of Israel’s total force. If the tables had been turned and Benjamin had lost 22,000 men, the war would have been over.

Why does the Lord encourage Israel to go into a losing battle (chart)? Their loss ought to call their attention to two errors in their prayer: a wrong *motive*, and the wrong *grounds*.

The first error is their *motive*. They are willful: they seek, not guidance, but only confirmation of what they have already decided. They have already made up their minds to enter battle. The only question is, who should lead the charge, and the likely method they use to ask the question (casting lots, according to v. 9) forces the answer to fit their assumption. They ignore the principle that our Lord articulated in John 7:

John 7:17 If any man will do his will [wishes to do his will], **he shall know** of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.

In the condition “will do his will,” the first “will” is not the future tense, but the same verb as the second, referring to the exercise of the will in deliberate choice. God grants revelation to those who choose to obey him. His offer is not, “I’ll tell you what to do, and you decide whether to obey.” Rather, it is, “Accept me as your Lord. Submit yourself unconditionally to obey whatever I tell you. Then I’ll tell you what you want to know.” When asking the Lord for guidance, we must be sure that we are willing to follow the direction he gives.

The second error is the *grounds* of their request: they approach him only as “God” (v. 18), not Jehovah, neglecting their covenant relation. (That relation might have given them pause about attacking another tribe in the covenant). They think of God as only one more logistical prerequisite for them to achieve their predetermined goal:

- Have we got the required weapons? Check.
- Do we have enough food? Check.
- Have we prayed about it? Check.

But throughout Scripture, biblical prayers are grounded in the promises that God has made to his people.³⁰ They are often described as “calling on the name of the LORD” (never “calling on the name of God”), that is, invoking his covenant relation to them.

This principle lies at the heart of the promise our Lord made six times in the upper room:

Joh 14:13 And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, **that will I do**, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If ye shall ask any thing in my name, **I will do it**. (Also 15:16; 16:23, 24, 26)

Prayer “in the name of the Lord Jesus” is not simply attaching a phrase to the end of our prayer. It is framing our prayer according to what our Lord would desire. We have a concrete example in the story of Naboth’s vineyard in 1 Kings 21, where Jezebel “wrote letters in Ahab’s name, and signed them with his seal.” She asked the elders of Jezreel to do what Ahab wanted done.

In fact, when we think about it, what right do we have to ask the Lord for anything, except that he invites us to? Far from claiming that their request is according to God’s covenant with them, they do not even acknowledge the Lord as their covenant God.

22-25, The Second Battle

22 And the people the men of Israel encouraged themselves, and set their battle again in array in the place where they put themselves in array the first day.—Again we read of the “men of Israel.” In spite of their defeat on the first day, the people are confident that they are doing the right thing—so confident that the first thing they do is organize their troops for battle.

23 (And the children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until even,—Then, after organizing for battle, they consult the Lord.³¹ Their tears are intended to show their sincerity, but their actions in v. 22 show their true heart.

We identified two problems with their initial prayer: their motive (willfully deciding in advance what to do), and their grounds (neglect of their covenant relation with God, the only basis on which they could expect him to answer their prayer). Their second request shows some progress.

and asked counsel of the LORD וישאלו ביהוה,—Note the change from “God” (v. 18) to “the LORD.” The first correction to their attitude is to recognize God as their covenant God.

saying, Shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother?—Their question differs in two important ways from that in v. 18,

Which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin?

First, they now describe Benjamin as “my brother.” This characterization goes along with calling on the Lord rather than simply on God. They are now thinking in terms of the covenant, that binds them first to the Lord and then to each other.

Second, they ask the question they should have asked at first: not “Who should go up first?” but “Should we go up?” But by organizing for battle before asking counsel, they betray their continued willfulness: in reality, they are again asking the Lord to rubber-stamp their decision.

And the LORD said, Go up against him.)—Again, the answer is one that could be delivered by Urim and Thummin, a yes-no question.

³⁰ See in particular Gary Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord* (IVP Academic, 2016).

³¹ The waw consecutive at the start of v. 23 indicates normal narrative sequence after the events of v. 22.

24 And the children of Israel came near against the children of Benjamin the second day.—In the first battle, it was the men of Israel who engaged the battle, full of confidence. Now it is only the children of Israel. They are humbled and not at all confident.

25 And Benjamin went forth against them out of Gibeah the second day, and destroyed down to the ground of the children of Israel again eighteen thousand men; all these drew the sword.—For the second day, Israel suffers a massive defeat. They have now lost 40,000 men, ten percent of their entire force.

26-48, The Third Battle

26 Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God Bethel, and wept, and sat there before the LORD, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.—In the second prayer, they got the grounds right. Now they face their motive. The second defeat shows them that something is seriously wrong with their relation to the Lord, and they humble themselves in repentance (chart).

“All the people” would include the men of war. They do not leave them mustered, ready for battle as soon as prayers are ended, but they too fast and weaken themselves before the Lord. So they appear finally to have overcome the problem of willfulness.

27 And the children of Israel enquired of the LORD,—The expression is the same as in v. 23, using the covenant name of God. Together with “Benjamin my brother” in v. 28, this verse suggests that they have laid hold once more on their covenant relation with the Lord.

D for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days,—The explanation that “the ark ... was there [in Bethel]” is particularly appropriate if בית־אל refers to the city and not to the tabernacle at Shiloh, as we have suggested. Phinehas is operating out of a local shrine. Did he bring it from Shiloh to support the troops, as the sons of Eli do later in 1 Samuel 4?

28 D And Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days,—The reference to Phinehas helps us date this episode. But it also suggests that they may be consulting with him about their defeat, rather than simply asking him to cast the sacred lot.

saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease?—For the first time, the question includes the option to stop, confirming that they are finally ready to listen to the Lord.

And the LORD said, Go up; for to morrow I will deliver them into thine hand.—For the first time, the answer goes beyond a “yes-no.” This time the Lord promises deliverance, perhaps revealing his message through Phinehas.

Given all the mistakes that have been made, why does the Lord finally sanction Israel’s attack? Gibeah’s sin is grievous, and he will judge it. But Israel has also been punished for their sin.

Not only do the Israelites consult the priest, but they are thinking about past history. Their strategy reflects that of Joshua against Ai, after the disobedience of Achan, as recorded in Joshua 8.³² Here is a third lesson for prayer: the Lord’s answer often comes from previous Scripture.³³ They recognize a parallel between their situation and that of Israel at Ai:

32 Wong 57-70 identifies many parallels showing intentional imitation.

33 Compare Peter’s exhortation from Ps 69 in Acts 1:16-21, as a result of corporate prayer in 1:14.

- In both cases the nation has suffered a previous humiliating defeat.
- In both cases the defeat was the result of sin that has now been addressed.

Both accounts show an interesting characteristic of Hebrew narrative:³⁴ the use of flashback to reinforce key sections. Once we see this pattern, the two narratives show a common sequence of seven stages (Table 7, chart).³⁵ Joshua has four parallel threads, and Judges has five.

Section	Ai, Joshua 8				Gibeah, Judges 20			
	Plan	Execution						
1 Ambush set	3-4	9	12		29			
2 Main army approaches	5a	10-11	13		30			
3 Enemy lured out	5b		14		31			
4 Israel feigns retreat	5c-6		15-17		32-33a	36	39	
5 Attack from ambush	7		18-19a		33b-34	37		
6 City burned; smoke	8		19b-20a	21	38	40-41		
7 Final victory			20b	21b-22	35	42-44	45-46	47-48

Table 7: Repetitive Structure of Joshua 8 and Judges 20

29 And Israel set liers in wait round about

Gibeah.—The first stage in both campaigns is the setting of an ambush. Joshua records (chart), Josh. 8:12 And he took about five thousand men, and set them to lie in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city.

30 And the children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and put themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times.—The second stage in the strategy is the approach of the main army against the city. So did Joshua:

Josh 8:10 And Joshua rose up early in the morning, and numbered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. 11 And all the people, even the people of war that were with him, went up, and drew nigh, and came before the city, and pitched on the north side of Ai:

31 And the children of Benjamin went out against the people, and were drawn away from the city; and they began to smite of the people, and kill, as at other times, in the highways, of which one goeth up to the house of God Bethel, and the other to Gibeah in the field, about thirty men of Israel.—In the third stage, the enemy is lured out of their city to fight them, confident in their previous victories. The men of Ai did the same:

Josh 8:14 And it came to pass, when the king of Ai saw it, that they hastened and rose up early, and the men of the city went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at a time appointed, before the plain; but he wist not that there were liers in ambush against him behind the city.

32 And the children of Benjamin said, They are smitten down before us, as at the first. D But the children of Israel said, Let us flee, and draw them from the city unto the highways.

33 D And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place, and put themselves in array at Baaltamar:—In the fourth stage, the Israelites retreat, pretending to fear defeat. They withdraw and set up a defense at Baaltamar (location unknown). So did Joshua at Ai:

34 Revell, VT 35 (1985) 417-433
 35 See notes for full text expansion

Josh 8:15 And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. 16 And all the people that were in Ai were called together to pursue after them: and they pursued after Joshua, and were drawn away from the city. 17 And there was not a man left in Ai or Bethel, that went not out after Israel: and they left the city open, and pursued after Israel.

D and the liers in wait of Israel came forth out of their places, even out of the meadows of Gibeah. 34 And there came against Gibeah ten thousand chosen men out of all Israel, **D** and the battle was sore: but they knew not that evil was near them.—Fifth, the men waiting in ambush arise and enter the unprotected city, again following Joshua’s example:

Josh 8:18 And the LORD said unto Joshua, Stretch out the spear that is in thy hand toward Ai; for I will give it into thine hand. And Joshua stretched out the spear that he had in his hand toward the city. 19 And the ambush arose quickly out of their place, and they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand:

35 And the LORD smote Benjamin before Israel: and the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjamites that day twenty and five thousand and an hundred men: all these drew the sword.—In the first iteration, Judges 20 skips the sixth stage, the smoke of the burning city, and gives a summary of the final victory, a summary that will be amplified three times. So Joshua’s history ends with victory (chart):

Josh 8:21 then they turned again, and slew the men of Ai. 22 And the other issued out of the city against them; so they were in the midst of Israel, some on this side, and some on that side: and they smote them, so that they let none of them remain or escape.

36 So the children of Benjamin saw that they [the Israelites] were smitten: for the men of Israel gave place to the Benjamites, because they trusted unto the liers in wait which they had set beside Gibeah.—Now the narrator takes us back to stage four, the feigned retreat.

37 D And the liers in wait hasted, and rushed upon Gibeah; and the liers in wait drew themselves along, and smote all the city with the edge of the sword.—Once again, we hear of the fifth stage, the attack by the ambushers of the now unprotected city.

38 D Now there was an appointed sign between the men of Israel and the liers in wait, that they should make a great flame with smoke rise up out of the city.—Judges skips the sixth stage the first time through, but now reports it. The burning of the city and its smoke was also a prominent feature of the Ai history, also an appointed sign, serving to alert the main force that the city was under Israelite control:

Josh 8:8 And it shall be, when ye have taken the city, that ye shall set the city on fire: according to the commandment of the LORD shall ye do. See, I have commanded you. . . . 21 And when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city, and that the smoke of the city ascended, then they turned again . . .

39 And when the men of Israel retired in the battle, D Benjamin began to smite and kill of the men of Israel about thirty persons: for they said, Surely they are smitten down before us, as in the first battle.—Instead of pushing on to the final victory, the narrator extends the suspense by returning once more to stage four, the feigned retreat.

40 D But when the flame began to arise up out of the city with a pillar of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them, and, behold, the flame of the city ascended up to heaven.

41 D And when the men of Israel turned again, the men of Benjamin were amazed: for they

saw that evil was come upon them.—Stage four is followed by skipping to a repetition of six, the smoke ascending from the city.

After building the suspense, the narrator is finally ready to develop the final victory, first reported in v. 35, in three cycles. Each cycle is marked by three features: a notice that Benjamin “turned,” a reference to the “wilderness” to which they fled, and a partial accounting for the Benjamite losses on the third day, already summarized in verse 35.

At this point, the city of Gibeah has been dealt with. The sin against the Levite and his concubine has been punished. The tribes have accomplished the objectives they set out in vv. 9, 10:

Judg. 20:9 But now this shall be the thing which we will do **to Gibeah**; we will go up by lot against it; 10 And we will take ten men of an hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and an hundred of a thousand, and a thousand out of ten thousand, to fetch victual for the people, that they may do, when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, according to all the folly that they have wrought in Israel.

But like Gideon pursuing Zeba and Zalmunnah in Judges 8 after he had expelled the Midianites from the land, the Israelite army allows its rage to drive it beyond the objective that justified its action in the first place. The willfulness they showed at the start of the war emerges again at its end. Even Joshua stopped after destroying the men of Ai. What follows exceeds the mission that the Lord authorized in 20:28. Perhaps we are intended to see a contrast in the first summary of the final victory in v. 35,

Judg 20:35 And the LORD smote Benjamin before Israel: and the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjamites that day twenty and five thousand and an hundred men: all these drew the sword.

The Lord smote Benjamin, but the children of Israel went on to destroy 25,100 people.

42 Therefore they turned their backs before the men of Israel unto the way of the wilderness; D but the battle overtook them; D and them which came out of the cities they destroyed in the midst of them. 43 D Thus they inclosed the Benjamites round about, and D chased them, and D trode them down with ease over against Gibeah toward the sunrising. 44 And there fell of Benjamin eighteen thousand men; all these were men of valour.—In the immediate vicinity of Gibeah, 18,000 men fell.

45 And they turned and fled toward the wilderness unto the rock of Rimmon:—The survivors make their way toward a refuge, perhaps a defensible cave that has been identified in the Wadi es-Swenit two km east of Gibeah.

and they gleaned of them in the highways five thousand men;—Five thousand fell along the road.

and pursued hard after them unto Gidom, and slew two thousand men of them.—Two thousand more fell near Gidom, an unknown location.

46 W So that all which fell that day of Benjamin were twenty and five thousand men that drew the sword; all these were men of valour.—This number is 100 shy of the day’s total Benjamite casualties (v. 35). Perhaps the other 100 were slain by the ambushers when they first entered the city.

47 But six hundred men turned and fled to the wilderness unto the rock Rimmon, and abode in the rock Rimmon four months.—Only six hundred Benjamites reach their refuge.

If pursuing Benjamin after Gibeah had fallen was excessive, how much more is the further destruction of other cities of Benjamin in the final verse:

48 D And the men of Israel turned again upon the children of Benjamin, and smote them with the edge of the sword, as well the men of every city, as the beast, and all that came to hand: also they set on fire all the cities that they came to.—They are treating the tribe as they should have treated the Canaanites. Israel’s failure to possess the land is not for lack of power, but because of disobedience to the Lord.

Let’s review the numbers in this account, summarized in Table 8. Two details invite our attention.

1. We have already discussed the discrepancy between the total casualties on the third day (25,100, v. 35) and the sum of the individual breakdown (25,000). Perhaps the 100 were slain when the ambushers first entered the city, or perhaps the writer is working only in round thousands in 42-45.
2. The total accounting on day 3 (vv. 35-47, 25,700) is 1000 less than the total Benjamite army in v. 15 (26,700). The difference may be due to Benjamite losses on the first two days.³⁶ (v. 35 expressly says that the 25,100 is “on that day.”)

Verse	Number	Notes
15	26,700	Total Benjamin
35	25,100	Total Casualties
42-44	18,000	Around Gibeah
45a	5,000	In the highway
45b	2,000	At Gidom
46	25,000	Total
47	600	Rock Rimmon

Table 8: Accounting for the Benjamite Army

Some Lessons

Before we leave the account of the war, consider two spiritual lessons that it suggests.

1. Benjamin learned that past victories can make us vulnerable to future defeats. The strategy used both by Joshua and by the tribes in Judges 20, a feigned retreat to build false confidence in the enemy, is one that the adversary can use against us. We need to be on guard against it.
2. Israel learned that past defeats can lead to future victories. Israel’s willfulness and neglect of their covenant were wrong, and led to their initial defeat. But that very defeat enabled ultimate victory, because it humbled them and taught them to look to Scripture for their guidance.

Peter is an example of both of these, in his interchange with the Lord in the upper room. After instituting the memorials of his coming sacrifice, the Lord exhorts Peter:

Luk 22:31 And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: 32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. 33 And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. 34 And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.

Past Victories can lead to Future Defeats

The men of Ai and Gibeah are emboldened by their earlier victories over Israel, and when Israel returns to attack once more, these cities are confident in their continued victory, but in both cases they are taken by ambush. Satan sometimes applies this strategy against God’s people.

In the upper room, consider Peter’s declaration of his loyalty in 33 and the Lord’s warning in 34.

³⁶ Suggested by Keil and Delitzsch

Lk 22:33 And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. 34 And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.

During the Lord's earthly ministry, Peter had great experiences of the Lord's victorious power.

- Along with the Twelve, he saw the Lord heal, cast out demons, and feed multitudes.
- Sent out with the other eleven, he himself had cast out devils and healed the sick (Mark 6:13)
- He walked with the Lord on the water.
- He was one of the small group of three privileged to see our Lord's transfiguration.
- To him the Father revealed the great truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt 16:16), the rock on which the church is built.

Three times in the previous chapters the Lord has predicted his coming passion, and now he illustrates it with vivid symbols. Based on the past victories in which he has shared, Peter feels confident of his loyalty, and boldly goes with John to the house of the high priest. Yet within a few hours, Satan sneaks up on him in the person of a little maid, and Peter denies his Lord.

Similarly, David's sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11) follows God's gracious promise to him in ch. 7, and his great international victories in ch. 8-10.

Satan attempted the same tactic with our Lord. At his baptism, John the Baptist introduced him to Israel as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and the Father declared him to be the Son of God. It was immediately after this great victory that Satan tempts him in the wilderness. He is indeed tempted in all points like as we are (Heb 4:15), including at a time of victory when he would be off his guard, but he is without sin.

Paul recognized his vulnerability to such an attack, and described how God defended him:

2Cor. 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

He recognized that the greatness of the revelations entrusted to him made him vulnerable to the sin of pride. When we enjoy a great spiritual victory, we need to be especially on our guard. Satan may well have an ambush laid for us, and trip us up.

Past Defeats lead to Future Victories

The second principle, from both Ai and Gibeah, is that an earlier defeat can prepare us for future victories. In both cases, Israel is sorely defeated because of their sin, but ultimately wins a great victory. Peter's upper room conversation also illustrates this principle.

Luk 22:31 And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: 32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

We have already considered how Peter's experiences of spiritual victory during the Lord's earthly ministry made him vulnerable to his sin of denying the Lord. Here the Lord predicts that sin, but also shows how, under his care, it will lead to later triumphs. In fact, throughout Acts, the same Peter who was afraid to confess his loyalty to Christ to a servant girl, boldly proclaims our Lord to the multitudes at Pentecost, to the Sanhedrin, and to Cornelius, the Roman centurion.

Such reversals are not automatic. Judas experienced many of the same spiritual triumphs that Peter did, and Judas, like Peter, sinned grievously. But unlike Peter, he perished in his sin. One important difference is the Lord’s intercession for Peter, and not for Judas. We should not be casual about our sin, thinking that we can always repent later. Such a subsequent victory is only possible by God’s grace and through his enabling.

Again, the life of Paul illustrates the principle that past defeats can lead to future victories:

2Co 1:3 Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; 4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

He experienced great tribulation, but the Lord not only delivered him, but used those sufferings to equip him to minister to others and lead them to spiritual victory.

21:1-25, Rebuilding Benjamin

1-5, The Tribal Assembly

21:1 **D** Now **the men of Israel** had sworn in Mizpeh,—This section begins and ends with two oaths made at the meeting in 20:1. The first one is described here, and the second one in v. 5.

We will consider these oaths and their consequences, but at the outset we should anticipate that both of them are ill-advised. It is tempting to compare them with Jephthah’s vow in Judges 11, but the difference in vocabulary reflects a fundamental difference between two kinds of actions.

An oath is very different from a vow (see notes and chart). Compare two examples (chart). Here is a vow, the one that Jephthah probably had in mind in making his vow:

Num. 21:2 And Israel **vowed H5087 a vow H5088** unto the LORD, and said, If thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities.

And here is an oath. This example doesn’t use the characteristic terms *to swear* H7650 and *oath* H7621, but it shows the complete structure. Many oaths leave the divine penalty unstated.

1Kings 19:2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time.

Table 9 summarizes the differences.

- A vow is a promise to God. An oath is a promise to other people.
- A vow promises to give God an offering if he gives some blessing. God’s action comes first, then the human action.

	Vow	Oath
<i>A promise to:</i>	God	Man
<i>Human action:</i>	Promised if God acts	Promised to keep God from acting
<i>Divine action:</i>	Condition for human action	Penalty for human non-action (often understood and not stated)

Table 9: Vows and Oaths

- An oath invites God to curse the person promising if they do not keep the promise. The human action comes first, then (if it does not happen) God acts.

Jephthah's *vow* was motivated by Israel's example in Numbers 21, responding to the attack from the king of Arad. There is no scriptural justification for these *oaths* that Israel swore in their conflict with Benjamin. And in fact, the Lord Jesus warns against oaths:

Mat 5:34 But I say unto you, **Swear not at all**; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: 35 Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. 36 Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. 37 But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. [or, the Evil One]

saying, There shall not any of us give his daughter unto Benjamin to wife.—Recall Moses' charge to the nation concerning marriage (chart):

Deut 7:1 When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, ... 3 ... **thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.**

Israel is treating Benjamin as they should have treated the Canaanites. If only they had shown the same zeal toward the Canaanites that they did toward Benjamin! This may be the major lesson of this epilog: Israel failed in conquest, not through lack of strength, zeal, or organization, but through a misdirected focus. The next verse emphasizes this.

2 And the people came to the house of God Bethel,—Why not go to Shiloh, now that the battle is over?

and abode there till even before God,—Why not “before YHWH”? This, and the gathering at Bethel rather than Shiloh, show that they are still unclear about their covenant condition.

and lifted up their voices, and wept sore;—This phrase appears in Judges elsewhere only in

Jdg 2:4 And it came to pass, when the angel of the LORD spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people **lifted up their voice, and wept.**

Both cases result from an earlier oracle (1:1; 21:18 and repetitions). Both are at or near Bethel (cf. Gen 35:8 Allon Bacuth, Oak of Weeping). In the first place they failed to do what they should; in this they have succeeded, but then gone on too far in their own strength.³⁷

3 And said, O LORD God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be to day one tribe lacking in Israel?—Note repetition of the name “Israel.” They imply that because the Lord is the God of Israel, this is his problem.³⁸

Here is a common temptation when we fail the Lord. We try to blame him for the failure. But he will not be drawn in. In ch. 20, when they wept before him, he answered them. Here, when they are implying that he is to blame, he does not respond, but leaves them to their own devices.

4 W And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people rose early, and built there an altar, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.—The fact that they must build the altar shows that the tabernacle is not there. They are still operating on a wartime basis, in the field.

5 R And the children of Israel said, Who is there among all the tribes of Israel that came not up with the congregation unto the LORD? S For they had made a great oath concerning him that came not up to the LORD to Mizpeh, saying, He shall surely be put to

37 Wong 40-41

38 Webb

death.—Now we learn of the second oath that the tribes swore at Mizpeh. No such standard was invoked by Deborah in marshaling the tribes against Sisera. We see here runaway anger.

One fundamental characteristic of our God is that he is slow to anger. This trait lies at the heart of his description of himself to Moses on Sinai, a description that is echoed repeatedly throughout the OT:

Ex. 34:6 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, **longsuffering (slow to anger)**, and abundant in goodness and truth,

Proverbs repeatedly exhorts us to be slow to anger:

Prov. 14:29 He that is **slow to wrath** is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.

Prov. 15:18 A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is **slow to anger** appeaseth strife.

Prov. 16:32 He that is **slow to anger** is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.

Prov. 19:11 The discretion of a man **deferreth his anger**; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.

The NT repeats this emphasis. The fruit of the Spirit in us replicates God's longsuffering (chart):

Gal. 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, **longsuffering**,³⁹ gentleness, goodness, faith, 23 Meekness, temperance:

And the apostles consistently condemn wrath and anger:

James 1:19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, **slow to wrath**.⁴⁰ 20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

Eph. 4:31 Let all bitterness, and **wrath**, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: 32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Col. 3:8 But now ye also put off all these; **anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy**, filthy communication out of your mouth.

The "works of the flesh" in Gal 5:19-21 fall into four categories, of which the longest deals with wrath and its manifestations:

Gal. 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these;

Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, *violations of "thou shalt not commit adultery"*

20 Idolatry, witchcraft, *violations of "no other gods"*

hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, 21 Envyings, murders, *violations of "thou shalt not kill"*

drunkenness, revellings, and such like: *violations of "thou shalt not covet"*

of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

39 μακροθυμία G3115, the noun whose adjectival form, μακρόθυμος (not in NT) translates אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם in Exod 34:6 and elsewhere in the OT.

40 James does not use a cognate of √μακροθυμ-, which in the NT often has the weaker sense "patient," but gives a word-for-word translation of the Hebrew, using a word βραδύς G1021 "slow" that does not appear in the LXX.

But the tribes of Israel have failed on precisely this point. Their wrath against the men who abused the Levite's concubine is understandable. It is right for them to hold the city accountable and understandable that they condemn Benjamin's attempt to defend Gibeah. But they have so completely lost control of themselves that they are ready to lash out at any Israelite who does not join them in their civil war.

The next two sections have the same structure, and each begins with the nation repenting for Benjamin.⁴¹

6-14 The Rape of Jabeshgilead

Now their two oaths come into play. First we see the consequence of the first oath

6 And the children of Israel repented them for Benjamin their brother, and said, There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day.—Their use of the passive “is ... cut off” is disingenuous. They do not want to face the fact that their own wrath is responsible. They have wiped out, not only most of the men of Benjamin, but their cities, including their wives and children, as well.

7 How shall we do for wives for them that remain, seeing we have sworn by the LORD that we will not give them of our daughters to wives?—The first oath forbids them to intermarry with them. Or does it?

Remember that while vows are promises to God, oaths (as here) are usually promises to men. They have committed to one another not to give wives to Benjamin. They could certainly release each other from this oath. We see an example of this in Abraham's commission to his servant to find a wife for Isaac (chart).

Gen 24:2 And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: 3 And I will make thee **swear** by the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: 4 But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac. ... 8 And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then **thou shalt be clear from this my oath**: only bring not my son thither again.

The person to whom the oath is sworn has the authority to release it. The Israelites could release one another from this oath. Why did they not do this? I can think of two possible reasons.

1. They conceive of the oath, not as a promise, but as a magical charm that absolves them of personal responsibility.
2. Deep down, they are still prejudiced against Benjamin. They hide their prejudice under the pretense that they must abide by an oath that they should never have sworn in the first place.

8 And they said, What one is there of the tribes of Israel that came not up to Mizpeh to the LORD?—Now they invoke the second oath, the one condemning to death any group in Israel that did not support the war against Benjamin.

H And, behold, there came none to the camp from Jabeshgilead to the assembly. 9 For the people were numbered, H and, behold, there were none of the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead there.—This is the first reference in the Bible to this Israelite city, located east of the Jordan and

41 Block

north of the Jabbok, the territory of Manasseh (Figure 4). It is far from Gibeah, and no doubt felt no immediate need to intervene in events there.

The attack on Jabeshgilead echoes two battles fought by Israel under Moses before entering the land: one on Midian to punish them for seducing Israel in the plains of Moab (Numbers 31), and the other on Og king of Bashan (battle recorded in Numbers 21), who opposed them (chart).

10 And the congregation sent thither twelve thousand men of the valiantest,—This was the size of the force that Moses sent against Midian:

Num. 31:4 Of every tribe a thousand, throughout all the tribes of Israel, shall ye send to the war. 5 So there were delivered out of the thousands of Israel, a thousand of every tribe, twelve thousand armed for war.

and commanded them, saying, Go and smite the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the children.—This detail recalls Israel's attack on Og king of Bashan on the east of Jordan, before entering the land:

Deu 3:6 And we utterly destroyed them, as we did unto Sihon king of Heshbon, utterly destroying the men, women, and children, of every city.

11 And this is the thing that ye shall do, Ye shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman that hath lain by man.—With Midian, Moses' army initially spared the women and children, but Moses commanded:

Num. 31:17 Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him. 18 But all the women children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves.

Leaders in Judges often take inspiration from the nation's earlier history.

- Gideon's offering to the angel copies Abraham's offering to his guests in Genesis 18.
- Jephthah's vow is inspired by Israel's war with Arad in Numbers 21.
- Samson's foray into Gaza is an imitation of Joshua's spies in Jericho in Joshua 2.

So it is not surprising that the nation here would draw inspiration from Scripture. But they completely misapply it! Jabeshgilead is a peaceful Israelite city with no record of wrongdoing. They copy judgments that Moses commanded against two enemies of Israel. The only feature they have in common is that in all cases the enemy is east of the Jordan.

How different was Moses' approach to events in Egypt.

Act 7:23 And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. 24 And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: 25 For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not. 26 And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?

Moses could discern between Egyptians and Israelites, and treat each appropriately. If only Israel had shown the same discretion! Both their adoption of Canaanite religion (Judges 17-18) and their conflict with one another (Judges 19-21) show that they cannot keep them distinct.

12 And they found among the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead four hundred young virgins, that had known no man by lying with any male: and they brought them unto the camp to

Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.—For the first time we find the tribes at Shiloh, rather than a field sanctuary. But it is remarkable that the writer tells us that Shiloh is “in the land of Canaan,” rather than in the land of Israel. This description of Shiloh appears elsewhere only two times, in Joshua 21:2 and 22:9, after the conquest was finished but before the individual tribes took possession of their inheritances. The recurrence of the phrase here reminds us of the epoch at which the epilog takes place, after the united conquest of the land but before the individual tribes take possession of their territory. The land is still Canaan, controlled by the people whom Israel was to dispossess, and the conduct of the nation shows that far from conquering the Canaanites and bringing the land under the law of God, the Canaanites have conquered them and led them to abandon the law of God.

13 And the whole congregation sent some to speak to the children of Benjamin that were in the rock Rimmon, and to call peaceably unto them. 14 And Benjamin came again at that time; and they gave them wives which they had saved alive of the women of Jabeshgilead: D and yet so they sufficed them not.—Contemplate the sad irony of the situation. The tribes took up the Levite’s cause because of the rape and murder of one woman. Now they have not only wiped out most of Benjamin, but they proceed to destroy Jabeshgilead and force the single women into marriages with Benjamin, whether they like it or not. And more rape is yet to come.

15-24, The Rape of Shiloh

This section is strongly parallel to the previous one (Table 10, chart). They do not seek the Lord for his guidance, but just repeat the same method:

- Evade personal responsibility and blame the Lord for the problem
- Identify a vulnerable source of young virgins
- Take them by force to provide wives for Benjamin.

15 D And the people repented them for Benjamin,—As in 21:6a, they regret their action.

S because that ꝓ that the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.—Does the narrator really blame the Lord for the breach resulting from Israel’s angry rage? The Hebrew particle translated “because” can also express indirect discourse, “that,” as in 1 Sam 15:35, “the LORD repented **that** he had made Saul king over Israel.” There is no parallel to this statement in 21:6-14, but in 21:3, they also imply that the Lord is to blame.

16 Then the elders of the congregation said, How shall we do for wives for them that remain,—They use the same expression as in 21:7a.

seeing the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?—Once again, as in 21:6b they try to evade their responsibility for the disaster with the passive verb.

17 And they said, There must be an inheritance for them that be escaped of Benjamin, that a tribe be not destroyed out of Israel.—Echoing 21:6b, they are concerned about the possible loss of an entire tribe.

18 Howbeit we may not give them wives of our daughters: for the children of Israel have sworn, saying, Cursed be he that giveth a wife to Benjamin.—As in 21:7b, they claim that their hands are tied, when in fact, they could have released one another from the oath.

19 Then they said, Behold, there is a feast of the LORD in Shiloh yearly in a place which is on the north side of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Bethel to

6-14, The Rape of Jabeshgilead	15-24, Subverting the Feast of the Lord
6a And the children of Israel repented them for Benjamin their brother,	15a And the people repented them for Benjamin ,
21:3 ... O LORD God of Israel , why is this come to pass in Israel , that there should be to day one tribe lacking in Israel ?	15b because that the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.
6b and said, There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day.	17 And they said, There must be an inheritance for them that be escaped of Benjamin, that a tribe be not destroyed out of Israel .
7 How shall we do for wives for them that remain ,	16 Then the elders of the congregation said, How shall we do for wives for them that remain , ...
seeing we have sworn by the LORD that we will not give them of our daughters to wives ?	18 Howbeit we may not give them wives of our daughters : for the children of Israel have sworn , saying, Cursed be he that giveth a wife to Benjamin.
8 And they said, What one is there of the tribes of Israel that came not up to Mizpeh to the LORD? And, behold , there came none to the camp from Jabeshgilead to the assembly.	19 Then they said, Behold , there is a feast of the LORD in Shiloh yearly in a place which is on the north side of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south of Lebonah.
10 And the congregation sent thither twelve thousand men of the valiantest, and commanded them, saying, Go and smite the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the children. ...	20 Therefore they commanded the children of Benjamin, saying, Go and lie in wait in the vineyards; 21a And see, and, behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in dances, then come ye out of the vineyards,
12a And they found among the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead four hundred young virgins, that had known no man by lying with any male:	21b and catch you every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh,
12b and they brought them unto the camp to Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.	21c and go to the land of Benjamin.
14 And Benjamin came again at that time; and they gave them wives which they had saved alive of the women of Jabeshgilead: ...	23 And the children of Benjamin did so, and took them wives, according to their number, of them that danced, whom they caught: ...

Table 10: Parallelism between the wives from Jabeshgilead and from Shiloh

Shechem, and on the south of Lebonah.—As in v. 8 (chart), the solution is marked with “Behold.” The tribes were to gather three times a year at the sanctuary: Unleavened bread around Passover in the spring, Weeks (Firstfruits, Pentecost) seven weeks later, and Tabernacles, the great harvest feast, in the fall (chart):

Deut. 16:16 Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the **feast** of unleavened bread, and in the **feast** of weeks, and in the **feast** of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty: 17 Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee.

The last of these feasts was the most prominent, and in fact marked the beginning of the civil new year. It was at Tabernacles that Solomon dedicated the temple (1 Ki 8:2), Ezra dedicated the

altar upon the return from captivity (Ezr 3:4), and Ezra and Nehemiah summoned the people to read the law (Neh 8:14, 18). When Jeroboam wanted to keep the people in the northern kingdom from going to Jerusalem, this was the feast he duplicated at Bethel (1 Ki 12:32). When the Lord Jesus returns, it is the one feast obligatory on the Gentiles (Zech 14:16). The work of the summer was past, and it was a great time of thanksgiving.

20 Therefore they commanded the children of Benjamin, saying, Go and lie in wait in the vineyards;—The idiom used to send the Benjamites to capture wives at Shiloh⁴² is the same used to send the raiding force to Jabeshgilead in 21:10 (chart).

Israel has expressed concern for the loss of a tribe from the nation. If they were sincere in this concern, they would have encouraged Benjamin to obey the Lord's instructions and gather with the rest of the nation at the tabernacle to give thanks. Instead, they encourage them to lie in wait, absenting themselves from the worship. They should have encouraged them to offer gifts to the Lord. Instead, they encourage them to take wives forcefully.

21 And see, and, behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in dances, then come ye out of the vineyards, and catch you every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin.—As in 21:12a, the brides are taken by force, not willingly, and taken away from their homes as in 21:12b.

Who are “the daughters of Shiloh”? When we studied Jephthah's vow, we learned that there was a corps of women who served the tabernacle, whom Jephthah's daughter joined. They are mentioned twice elsewhere in the OT (chart):

Ex. 38:8 And he made the laver of brass, and the foot of it of brass, of the lookingglasses of the **women assembling צבא**, which **assembled צבא** at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

1Sam. 2:22 Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that **assembled צבא** at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

The verb translated “assembling” (צבא H6633) elsewhere describes the Levites who are on duty at the tabernacle.

Num. 4:22 Take also the sum of the sons of Gershon, throughout the houses of their fathers, by their families; 23 From thirty years old and upward until fifty years old shalt thou number them; all that enter in **to perform the service צבא לצבא**, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation.

These women are not just worshippers who happen to be there, but people dedicated to the service of the house of God.

The tribes identifies these virgins as an additional source of brides for Benjamin. In 21:6-14, they stole women from Jabeshgilead. Here, they are stealing women from the Lord's tabernacle.

22 ¶ And it shall be, when their fathers or their brethren come unto us to complain, that we will say unto them, Be favourable unto them for our sakes: because we reserved not to each man his wife in the war: for ye did not give unto them at this time, that ye should be

42 הִלֵךְ imperative followed by perfect with *waw* consecutive, as in 21:10, a construction that appears 15x in the OT, including three times in Judges (these two, and 4:6). הִלֵךְ impv is followed by simple *waw* and another imperative 8x, once in Judges (10:14).

guilty.—These women come from tribes who joined in the oath not to give their daughters to Benjamin, and the originators of this scheme anticipate that their families may object that this action would constitute violation of their oath and thus expose them to divine sanctions.

The tribes agree on a legalistic distinction: since the families have not deliberately given their daughters to Benjamin, they cannot be held responsible for the resulting marriages. Note their hypocrisy. By telling Benjamin to kidnap the girls and by tacitly agreeing not to defend the daughters of Shiloh, they are agreeing to give the girls to Benjamin, in violation of their oath. Yet because no one individual agrees to give his individual daughter to an individual Benjamite, they persuade themselves that the action does not violate the letter of their agreement.

This kind of legalistic manipulation of a promise to avoid its broader implications is dangerous, particularly when applied to the Scriptures. Our Savior warned against it (chart).

Matt 15:3 But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? 4 For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. 5 But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; 6 And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. 7 Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, 8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. 9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

Matt 23:16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! ... 18 And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. ... 23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. ... 25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

Language is one of God's most precious gifts to us. He is so truthful that if what he says does not match reality, the reality changes. That is how he created the world. We should emulate him in our speech, speaking the truth and keeping our promises. And when we handle his word to us, we must do so with trembling (Isa 66:2), not twisting (2 Pet 3:16).

Isa 66:2 but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and **trembleth at my word.**

2Pe 3:16 they that are unlearned and unstable **wrest (twist)** [Paul's epistles], as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

Their attitude exposes the hypocrisy of the whole arrangement. If the tribes have the authority to twist the oath around in this way, why don't they just release it entirely? The whole episode emphasizes the wisdom of the Lord's teaching, "Swear not at all" (Matt 5:34).

23 And the children of Benjamin did so, and took them wives, according to their number, of them that danced, whom they caught: and they went and returned unto their inheritance, and repaired the cities, and dwelt in them.—In the final parallel (chart, with 21:14), the women are distributed among the Benjamites, who can now go home and rebuild their cities.

Consider once more the irony of this episode. A campaign to punish the rape and murder of one woman has turned into the loss of 26,100 Benjamites, 40,000 men in Israel's army, and the entire male and adult population of Jabeshgilead, in addition to women and children in Jabeshgilead and the Benjamite cities, and forcing 600 Israelite virgins, 400 from Jabeshgilead and 200 who had devoted themselves to the service of the tabernacle, into marriages against their will.

24 And the children of Israel departed thence at that time, every man to his tribe and to his family, and they went out from thence every man to his inheritance.—Compare (chart)

Josh. 24:28 So Joshua let the people depart, **every man unto his inheritance**.

Judg. 2:6 And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went **every man unto his inheritance** to possess the land.

This expression reflects the point at which the joint conquest ends and the tribes begin their individual possession. Like the references to Jonathan (18:30), Phinehas (20:28), the migration of Dan (ch. 18, cf. 1:34; Josh 19:47), and Shiloh “in the land of Canaan” (21:12), it dates these events early in the period. These sad events explain the nation's condition back in chapter 2:

Judg 2:1 I said, I will never break my covenant with you. 2 And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?

In particular they give the background for the spiritual apostasy (ch. 17-18) and civil disunity (ch. 19-21) that marks those cycles.

The Epilog as Anti-Conquest

The tribes were supposed to occupy and subdue the land that God gave them. The epilog depicts an “anti-conquest,” directly opposing what they should have been doing (chart):

Moses commanded Israel to destroy the worship of Canaan:

Deu 7:5 But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves [Asherah images], and burn their graven images with fire.

But in Judges 17, Micah perpetuates and sponsors an idolatrous sanctuary.

Under the Lord's direction, Joshua and the elders assigned each tribe its territory:

Jos 13:1 Now Joshua was old and stricken in years; and the LORD said unto him, Thou art old and stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed. ... 7 Now therefore divide this land for an inheritance unto the nine tribes, and the half tribe of Manasseh,

But in Judges 18, Dan retreats before the Philistines in the territory assigned to it, and goes to conquer a peaceful city in the far north, beyond the boundaries of the land.

When Israel offered a city peace, that city was to be tributary to Israel, and keep its laws:

Deu 20:10 When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. 11 And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee.

But in Judges 19, an Israelite city behaves like Sodom, legendary for breaking the law of God.

Israel was to utterly destroy the cities of the pagan nations:

Deu 20:16 But of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: 17 But thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee:

But in Judges 20, they destroy Gibeah, and in 21:6-14, Jabeshgilead, Israelite cities.

Above all, they were not to intermarry with these nations:

Deu 7:3 Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.

But in Judg 21:1-5, they apply this standard to their fellow Israelites.

25, Final Conclusion

25 In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.—The additional clause in the refrain, as in the first instance 17:6, recalls Deuteronomy 12-13. There also we find an antecedent of this clause,

Deut. 13:18 [MT 19] When thou shalt hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep all his commandments which I command thee this day, **to do that which is right in the eyes of the LORD thy God.**

Instead of doing what is *right* in the eyes of the Lord, the children of Israel repeatedly do *evil* in the sight of the Lord (2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). Israel has abandoned the Lord to follow their own lusts. “There was no king in Israel” refers primarily, not to a human king, but to the Lord, who throughout the books of Moses claims to be their king:

Ex. 15:18 **The LORD shall reign** [as king] מלך H4427 for ever and ever.

Num. 23:21 He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: **the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them.**

Deut. 33:5 **And he [the Lord] was king in Jeshurun** [or: there was a king in Jeshurun], when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel were gathered together.

Summary of ch. 17-21

The central section of Judges (Figure 10, chart), describing eight major local leaders and six lesser ones, is marked by seven partial or complete cycles of Rebellion,

Judges: Between Conquest and Kingdom		
	1:1-2-5, Social Disintegration	2:6-3:6, Spiritual Departure
Death of Joshua	1:1a	2:6-10
Experience	1:1b-36	2:11-19
Warning from God	2:1-3	2:20-23
National Response	2:4-5	3:1-6
3:7-16:31, The Judges: Seven Cycles		
17:1-21:25, Epilog and Diagnosis		
17:1-18:31, Spiritual Weakness: Dan (Deuteronomy 12) 17:1-5, An Irregular Sanctuary 17:6, Refrain: No King; Right in own eyes 17:7-13, An Irregular Levite 18:1a, Refrain: No King 18:1b-32, An Irregular Tribe		
19:1-21:25, Social Strife: Benjamin (Deuteronomy 13) 19:1a, Refrain: No King 19 The Rape of the Levite's Concubine 20 War with Benjamin 21 The Rape of Jabeshgilead and Shiloh 21:25, Refrain: No King; Right in own eyes		

Figure 10: The Structure of the Prolog and Epilog

Retribution, Repentance, Rebuke, and Restoration. This clear alternation sets off the introductory chapters that precede it, and the five chapters of the epilog, which are closely related to each other. Let's compare them.

Review of the Epilog

Though the epilog is at the end of the book, its events probably happened during the prolog.

1. Jonathan the grandson of Moses (18:30) and Phinehas the grandson of Aaron (20:28) are still alive and active.
2. It describes the migration of Dan (ch. 18), which is already mentioned in Joshua 19:17.
3. 21:12 puts Shiloh "in the land of Canaan," a description used elsewhere only in Josh 21:2; 22:9, after the overall conquest but before the work of the individual tribes.
4. 21:24 echoes Josh 24:28 and Judg 2:6, when the people set out to occupy their individual territories, at the start of the period of the judges

This dating would certainly fit the state of affairs described by the angel of the Lord in chapter 2,

Judg 2:1 I said, I will never break my covenant with you. 2 And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?

The events described in the epilog need not take more than a few months, and so would easily fit into the period described in 1:1-36 and 2:11-19.

The refrain integrates the two stories in the epilog, setting off the second as an *inclusio* and dividing the first into three parts. Each of these stories emphasizes a different weakness in the nation that leads to the need for the judges. By repeating the phrase "do what is right in his own eyes," both sections remind us of Deuteronomy 12 and 13. See notes for concentration.

Deuteronomy 13 tells how the nation is to punish a household or city that falls into idolatry, and concludes,

Deut. 13:18 When thou shalt hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep all his commandments which I command thee this day, **to do that which is right in the eyes of the LORD thy God.**

The story we have just finished reminds us of the *social* fragmentation in the nation that takes the form of applying such sanctions without justification. The tribes unite against Benjamin, Jabeshgilead, and even the women who had devoted their lives to serving the tabernacle in Shiloh. The Levite expresses what should have been the preference of every Israelite:

Judg. 19:11 And when they were by Jebus, the day was far spent; and the servant said unto his master, Come, I pray thee, and let us turn in into this city of the Jebusites, and lodge in it. 12 And his master said unto him, We will not turn aside hither into the city of a stranger, that is not of the children of Israel; we will pass over to Gibeah.

But in fact, Gibeah is indistinguishable from Sodom, the archetype of pagan corruption, and the war, stimulated by the Levite, treats other Israelites as they should have treated the Canaanites.

The first story focuses on the *spiritual* departure of the nation. This time, the refrain marks the divisions.

Judges 19-21

The first division, 17:1-6, describes Micah's irregular sanctuary, in violation of the instructions of Deuteronomy 12 to gather at the central sanctuary. Again, this seed chapter emphasizes the refrain:

Deut. 12:8 Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is **right in his own eyes**.

Deut. 12:25 that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, when thou shalt do that which is **right in the sight of the LORD**.

Deut. 12:28 that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee for ever, when thou doest that which is good and **right in the sight of the LORD thy God**.

Abandoning the Lord's sanctuary at Shiloh, in violation of Deuteronomy 12, Micah has his own "house of gods" (17:4-5):

Judg. 17:4 Yet he restored the money unto his mother; and his mother took two hundred shekels of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof **a graven image and a molten image**: and they were in the house of Micah. 5 And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an **ephod**, and **teraphim**,

The graven image and molten image are probably representations of Baal and Asherah/Ashtoreth, as already described in the prolog and the start of the first cycle:

Judg 2:13 they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth

Judg 3:7 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves [Asherahs].

Micah's mother dedicates them to the LORD, which suggests she has identified the LORD with Baal, a practice attested archaeologically. The private sanctuary also includes teraphim (family gods, probably representing deceased ancestors⁴³ to whom reverence is paid) and a priestly garment (the ephod).

The second division of chapters 17-18, 17:7-13, describes an irregular Levite. Instead of living in the city assigned to his family, tending his fields and flocks, teaching Israel, and serving periodically at Shiloh, he has developed a practice as a private priest. He comes from Bethlehem (17:7), not a Levitical city, but probably the location of his previous engagement. (Thus Bethlehem does not come off as much better than Gibeah—even the concubine's father in ch. 19 is more interested in partying with his son in law than in helping mend their marriage, and shows no sensitivity to the son in law's desire to get to Shiloh for his duties.) Though not a descendant of Aaron and thus not qualified to be a priest, he contracts to serve as family priest to Micah.

The third division, chapter 18, describes an irregular tribe. Dan, having failed to subdue the Canaanites in the territory assigned to them, seeks out a peaceful city far to the north, probably beyond the territory of Israel, and conquers it. In the course of their migration, they steal Micah's sanctuary and offer his priest a promotion.

Taken together, the two stories emphasize that abandoning the Lord (chapters 17-18) leads to a breakdown in civil order (chapters 19-21).

43 TDOT, תרפים, pp. 780-782 gives several lines of evidence that the Teraphim represented ancestors.

Review of the Prolog

The prolog, like the epilog, falls into two parts (Figure 10), marked by an alternation, ABCD-abcd.

- A) Both begin (1:1; 2:6-10) by recalling the death of Joshua.
- B) Next (1:1-36; 2:11-19) we have a historical summary of the nation's conduct.
- C) In both cases (2:1-3, 20-23), God rebukes the nation for their sin and failure. The rebuke in 2:2 fits very well the conduct described in the epilog.
- D) Finally (2:4-5; 3:1-6), the writer reports the nation's response

Recognizing this repetition is critical to understanding the chronology. The events of 2:11-19 (including the pursuit of Baal and Ashtoreth in 2:13) does not follow the repentance of 2:4-5, but are part of the conduct leading up to it. We can see this chronological backtracking by comparing 2:7 with 2:2. 2:7 reports that the nation was faithful to the Lord as long as Joshua and his contemporaries lived:

Jdg 2:7 And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel.

But six verses earlier, we read,

Jdg 2:1 I said, I will never break my covenant with you. 2 And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?

Why is the prolog organized in this parallel fashion? One reason may be to highlight the two different kinds of national activity that took place during these early years.

The first panel reports efforts to dispossess the Canaanites after the death of Joshua. At first, Judah partners with Simeon (1:3-4), with some success. But throughout the rest of the chapter, the only teaming is between Judah and the Kenites, the Gentile tribe of Moses' wife (1:16), anticipating the role of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite in the destruction of Sisera (4:17-22). A recurring theme throughout the chapter is the failure of the nation to subdue the Canaanites (1:21, 27-35). In particular, the migration of Dan occurs in this period (1:34). Judah succeeds when it teams with Simeon, and the other tribes fail when they act alone. The chapter shows the consequences of disunity among the tribes, anticipating chapters 19-21, the Benjamite war.

After God rebukes the nation (2:1-3), they respond with weeping and sacrifice, just as they will later do when they realize that they have almost obliterated Benjamin:

Jdg. 2:4 And it came to pass, when the angel of the LORD spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people **lifted up their voice, and wept**.

Jdg. 21:2 And the people came to the house of God, and abode there till even before God, and **lifted up their voices, and wept** sore;

But as in chapter 21, they sorrow for the consequences of their action, not its offense to God.

The second panel repeats the report of the death of Joshua. The main body of the panel hits on four of the six main parts of the cycle that will dominate the rest of the book (Table 11, chart),⁴⁴

⁴⁴ In earlier versions of this chart, I included 2:1-3 as the rebuke, but the panel structure shows that this belongs to the previous panel, and these verses are also in the wrong order. 2:20-23 does belong to this panel and certainly

Judges 19-21

but note how the Rebellion theme is not concentrated at the start, but pervades the section. The theme of this panel, as of the first story in the epilog, is the nation's spiritual decline. The references to "Baal and Ashtaroth" (2:13) reminds us of the two idols that Micah's mother dedicated to "the LORD" (17:3), which describes events going on during this period, immediately after the death of Joshua and his contemporaries.

	Prolog	Seven Cycles						
Rebellion: <i>Did Evil</i> <i>Forsook, turned, served, whoring</i>	2:11 :12, 13, 17, 19	3:7 :7	3:12	4:1	6:1	8:29-35	10:6 :6	13:1
Retribution: <i>Lord angry</i>	:12, 14	:8					:7	
<i>Spoilers</i>	:14-15	:8 Mesopotamia 8	:12-14 Moab 18	:2 Canaan 20	:1-6 Midian 7	9:23-24 Men of Shechem	:7-9 Philistines, Ammon 18	:1 Philistines 40
<i>Years</i>								
Repentance	:15, 18	:9	:15	:3	:6		:10	
Rebuke	(:20-22)				:7-10	9:7-20	:11-16	
Restoration: <i>Judge</i>	:16, 18	:9-11 Othniel	:15-30 Ehud	4:4-5:31 Deborah, Barak 4:23	6:11-8:28 Gideon 8:28	9:1-57 Abimelech	10:17-12:7 Jephthah 11:33	13:2-16:31 Samson
<i>Victory</i>		:10	:30					
Land had Rest <i>Years</i> <i>He judged Isr. Years</i>		:11 40	:30 80	5:31 40	:28 40	9:22 3	:7 6	15:20, 16:31 20
Minor judges			:32 Shamgar		8:29-32	10:1, 2 Tola, 23 10:3-5 Jair, 22	12:8-10 Ibzan, 7 :11-12 Elon, 10 :13-15 Abdon, 8	

Table 11: The Cycles of Judges

The order of sections in the epilog emphasizes that spiritual departure leads to civil strife. The order in the prolog teaches a complementary truth: that failure to maintain close fellowship with our brothers and sisters can lead to spiritual departure. Our accountability to one another in the church is a critical tool that the Spirit of God uses to keep us faithful to him.

The principle that Judges illustrates negatively, we see in positive form in 1 John.

1 John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; 2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) 3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

John wants his readers to know how to live with the Father, based on his experience of the Son's earthly life with the Father. The objective, in v. 3, is that as each of us draws nearer to the Father, we naturally come closer to each other.

is a rebuke, but again comes in the wrong order to be the Rebuke of the cycle, and again is better understood as marking the panel structure.

Notes

Men vs. Man of Israel

The expression is plural only 9x in the OT, all in Samuel: 1 Sam. 7:11; 8:22; 11:15; 17:52; 31:1, 7; 2 Sam. 2:17; 15:6. The other 50 instances are all singular, sometimes even taking a plural verb (Jdg 8:22; 9:55), though sometimes singular (7:23). The expression is most common in Judges (1.23/1000 words), followed by 2 Sam (0.76) and 1 Sam (0.67). Samuel uses the singular form 18x. Sometimes we have כל-איש ישראל, Deut. 27:14; 29:9; Josh. 10:24; Judg. 7:8; 20:11, 33; 1 Sam. 11:15; 14:22; 17:19, 24; 2 Sam. 16:18; 17:14, 24; 19:42; 20:2; 1 Kings 8:2; 1 Chr. 10:7; 16:3; 2 Chr. 5:3, כל-אנשי ישראל only in 1 Sam 11:15.

Samuel clearly merits special study, because of its use of all four forms: singular, singular with כל, plural, plural with כל. The plural in 1S 17:52 may be due to two bodies involved, אנשי ישראל ויהודה (anachronistic, since the nation is not yet divided). 2 Sam 2:17 also uses the plural with ישראל referring only to part of the nation.

איש is also singular before בנימן, Jdg 20:41; 1 Sam 4:12; the plural does not occur in construct with this name. Also Ephraimites: Jg 7.24 8.1 12.1, again no plurals. But DCH lists numerous plurals in construct, e.g., אנשי מונה "shepherds" Gn 46.32, 34. איש מלחמה is a single person; for more than one, BH uses the plural or כל.

בני בנימן איש appears only 1x in Judges, 20:41, in parallel with איש ישראל. The expression בני בנימן occurs 19x, once in 1:21 and the rest in this story. Similarly, שבט ישראל is only once, at 20:12, again in parallel with the corresponding expression about Israel.

Common collectives do appear with ישראל. Examples: מקנה in Ex 9:4; עדה in Ex 12:3, 6, 19, 47, etc.; מהנה in Ex 14:19, 20; בית in Ex 16:31; etc. But one does not usually think of איש as a collective noun. In fact, in the abstract sense "each, one," it is the quintessential non-collective (DCH 1c) "distributively, each, of groups, objects, tribes, Nm 26.54 35.8; gods, 2 K 18.33||Is 36.18; cherubim, Ezk 1.9.11.11.12.23.23 10.22; faces of cherubim, Ex 25:20||37:9 =11QT 7.12(Yadin) ([אי]ש); scales of behemoth, Jb 41.9; engravings on stones of breastpiece, Ex 28.21||39.14; islands, Zp 2.11; supports, surfaces of stands, 1 K 7.30.36."

TWOT: "The word 'iš connotes primarily the concept of man as an individual and thus differs in that regard from the more general concepts inherent in the words 'ēnôš and 'ādām ("mankind")."⁴⁵ He does not discuss the collective use!

Table 12 shows the distribution of constructions. The singulars include some cases where only one person is in view. In the singular with כל, Joshua has one and Judg 19-21 (20:11, 33) has two. Without כל, Joshua has 2 and Judges 19-21 has eight.

See notes on Rom 5:12-21 for expansion.

One motive for preferring the singular may be that the expected plural of איש is אישים, very rare in the OT

	With כל	Without כל	Total
Singular	18	32	50
Plural	1	8	9
Total	19	40	59

Table 12: Forms of איש ישראל in the Hebrew Bible

45 Mccomiskey, T. E. (1999). 83 איש. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr., & B. K. Waltke (Eds.), Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (electronic ed., p. 38). Chicago: Moody Press.

(only Isa 53:3 and Prov 8:4, and a variant reading in Ps 141:4, though the usual form in Phoenician and Punic), and usually undergoes stem suppletion from אָנַשׁ with the overtones of weakness. If this is true, the cases where the plural is used in the idiom ought to show signs of weakness. In some cases, this is appropriate:

1Sam. 31:1 Now the Philistines fought against Israel: and the **men of Israel** fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa.

1Sam. 31:7 And when the men of Israel that were on the other side of the valley, and they that were on the other side Jordan, saw that the **men of Israel** fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities, and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them.

2Sam. 2:17 And there was a very sore battle that day; and Abner was beaten, and the **men of Israel**, before the servants of David.

But in others, it is not so clear. However, throughout, the term usually reflects military activity.

1Sam. 7:11 And the **men of Israel** went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Bethcar.

1Sam. 8:22 And the LORD said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the **men of Israel**, Go ye every man unto his city.

1Sam. 11:15 And all the people went to Gilgal; and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal; and there they sacrificed sacrifices of peace offerings before the LORD; and there Saul and all the **men of Israel** rejoiced greatly.

1Sam. 17:52 And the **men of Israel** and of Judah arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines, until thou come to the valley, and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell down by the way to Shaaraim, even unto Gath, and unto Ekron.

2Sam. 15:6 And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the **men of Israel**.

Sons vs. Men of Israel

The complementary distribution of these terms in ch. 19-21 highlights the flow of the war with Benjamin. A similar effect is seen in ch. 6-8, the history of Gideon. בני ישראל is densely concentrated at the beginning and end of the episode (6:1, 2, 6, 7, 8; 8:28, 33, 34). Actually, apart from 8:28, these are the openings of two cycles; the term is also common at the start of the other cycles. But it is lacking in the description of Gideon's victorious exploits, where instead the term איש ישראל is concentrated (Judg. 7:8, 14, 23; 8:22).

Messianic Application of the Guest-Host Type Scene

We considered the parallel stories of Sodom (Genesis 19) and Gibeah (Judges 19). These stories share several features:

	Hostile City	Travelers	Alien Host	Refuge	Deliverance	Departure
Gen 19	Sodom	Angels	Lot	House	by Angels	led by angels
Jdg 19	Gibeah	Levite & co.	Ephraimite	House	none	own power
John	the World	Believers	Lord Jesus	Church	Daily	His Return

John 14:30 suggests that our Lord fits into a surprising example of the same pattern. Consider what our Lord said the evening before his great sacrifice:

John 14:30 Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. 31 But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.

The **hostile city** is identified by the expression “the prince of this world.”⁴⁶ A “prince” is a political ruler. Every ruler is raised up by God:

Dan 4:17, 25, 32 the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.

There is no reason to doubt Satan’s words to our Lord at the temptation,

Luke 4:5 And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6 And the devil said unto him, All this power [εξουσια authority] will I give thee, and the glory of them: **for that is delivered unto me;** and to whomsoever I will I give it.

For the present, God has seen fit to place Satan over this world. We as God’s children are the **travelers** in this hostile territory.

The **alien host** is our Lord. He made it clear to his contemporaries that he was not of this world:

Joh 8:23 And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; **I am not of this world.**

Like Lot in Sodom, like the Ephraimite in Gibeah, he came into this world as a resident alien. But the world’s prince “hath nothing in me.” The man of Ephraim, and even Lot, were contaminated by the culture and sin of the cities in which they lived. Our Savior, living in the world, retains his full allegiance to the Father (v. 31). To defend his guests from the sinful wrath of the world, “as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do,” taking our sin on himself and dying for us.

What is the **house** where we take refuge? At the start of John’s gospel, he invites his disciples to dwell *with* him:

John 1:37 And the two disciples [Andrew and John] heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. 38 Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? 39 He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and **abode with μνω παρα him** that day: for it was about the tenth hour.

But as he approaches the cross, he promises even better lodging:

John 15:4 **Abide in μνω εν me**, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. 5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. 6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

46 Elsewhere in Greek Bible only in 12:31; 16:11.

We are now members of his body. The church is our refuge from the hostile world around us. As long as we shelter there, in fellowship with God's people, we are **delivered** from its corruption:

2Pe 1:2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, 3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: 4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped **the corruption that is in the world** through lust.

And we are promised a **departure** from it when the Lord returns:

Mat 24:31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Gatherings of Israel (20:1)

Consider other instances of קהל N

Ref	Subject	Purpose	Convener	Rebellion	Military	Liturgical
Ex. 32:1 And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.	העם	Ask Aaron for other gods	Popular	X		
Lev. 8:4 And Moses did as the LORD commanded him; and the assembly was gathered together unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.	העדה	Ordain the priests	Moses			X
Num. 16:3 And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?	נשיאי עדה	Rebel against Moses and Aaron	Korah	2		
Num. 16:42 And it came to pass, when the congregation was gathered against Moses and against Aaron, that they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation: and, behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared.	העדה					
Num. 20:2 And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron.	העדה	Complain about lack of water	Popular	X		
Josh. 18:1 And the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there. And the land was subdued before them.	כל-עדה	Move tabernacle to Shiloh				X
Josh. 22:12 And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go up to war against them.	כל-עדה	Deal with altar	Popular		X	

Judges 19-21

Ref	Subject	Purpose	Convener	Rebellion	Military	Liturgical
Judg. 20:1 Then all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was gathered together as one man, from Dan even to Beersheba, with the land of Gilead, unto the LORD in Mizpeh.	העדה	Punish Gibeah	Levite		X	
2Sam. 20:14 And he went through all the tribes of Israel unto Abel, and to Bethmaachah, and all the Berites: and they were gathered together, and went also after him.	כל־שבטי ישראל	Pursue Sheba	Joab		X	
1Kings 8:2 And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto king Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month.	כל־איש ישראל	Bring ark to temple	Solomon			X
Jer. 26:9 Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant? And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.	כל־העם	Attack Jeremiah	Priests and prophets	X		
Ezek. 38:7 Be thou prepared, and prepare for thyself, thou, and all thy company that are assembled unto thee, and be thou a guard unto them.	כל־קהלך (Gog)	For the Lord to gather	Gog		X	
Esth. 8:11 Wherein the king granted the Jews which were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey,	היהודים	For defense	King Ahasuerus		5	
Esth. 9:2 The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt: and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people.						
Esth. 9:15 For the Jews that were in Shushan gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar, and slew three hundred men at Shushan; but on the prey they laid not their hand.						
Esth. 9:16 But the other Jews that were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew of their foes seventy and five thousand, but they laid not their hands on the prey,						
Esth. 9:18 But the Jews that were at Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth day thereof, and on the fourteenth thereof; and on the fifteenth day of the same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness.						
2Chr. 5:3 Wherefore all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto the king in the feast which was in the seventh month.	כל־איש ישראל	Bring ark to temple	Solomon			X
2Chr. 20:26 And on the fourth day they assembled themselves in the valley of Berachah; for there they blessed the LORD: therefore the name of the same place was called, The valley of Berachah, unto this day.	Jehoshaphat's army	Bless the Lord	Popular			X
Total vv: 19				5	9	5

Effects of Sin in the OT

The tribes appeal to Benjamin on the basis that they want to “put away בער H1197 sin from Israel.” This motive justifies capital punishment in the following cases: promoting worship of other gods: (Dt 13:6; 17:7), rejecting the decision of the judge in a judicial matter: (Dt 17:12), rebellious son (Dt 21:21), sexual sin (Dt 22:21, 22, 24), and manstealing (Dt 24:7). In addition, the phrase is applied to bringing false witness (Deut 19:19), where the penalty is whatever it would have been to the victim. Note that all of these are in Deuteronomy. Jdg 20:13 is the only instance in another book, suggesting that the tribes are focused on that book.

Notably, murder is not one of these! That indeed incurred the death penalty, at the hand of the avenger of blood, but it is not said to “put away evil from Israel.” Its effects are described with another expression: it “defiles the land,” which can use diverse verbs: הלל H2490, הנהיג H2610, טמא H2930.

With טמא, the expression applies to murder (Num 35:30-34), homosexuality (Lev 18:25-28), exposure of a dead body (Deut 21:23), adultery (Deut 24:4), unspecified (Jer 2:7), unspecified under image of sexual uncleanness (Ezek 36:17).

With הלל, it applies to idols under the image of exposed carcasses (Jer 16:18).

With הנהיג, it applies to murder (Num 35:33), general disobedience to the Lord (Isa 24:5), idolatry under the figure of adultery (Jer 3:1, 2, 9), and infant sacrifice (Psa 106:38).

The Battles of Ai and Gibeah

Both histories are marked by internal flashbacks and repetitions, sometimes reflecting the alternative perspectives of the Israelites and their adversaries, but the broad sequence is the same. Here is a full expansion of Table 7.

	Ai, Joshua 8				Gibeah, Judges 20
	The Plan	The Execution			
1 Placing an ambush	3 ... Joshua chose out thirty thousand mighty men of valour, and sent them away by night. 4 And he commanded them, saying, Behold, ye shall lie in wait against the city, even behind the city: go not very far from the city, but be ye all ready:	9 Joshua therefore sent them forth: and they went to lie in ambush, and abode between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai: but Joshua lodged that night among the people.	12 And he took about five thousand men, and set them to lie in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city.		29 And Israel set liers in wait round about Gibeah.
2 Main army approaches the city	5 And I, and all the people that are with me, will approach unto the city:	10 And Joshua rose up early in the morning, and numbered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. 11 And all the people, even the people of war that were with him, went up, and drew nigh, and came before the city, and pitched on the	13 And when they had set the people, even all the host that was on the north of the city, and their liers in wait on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley.		30 And the children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and put themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times.

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		north side of Ai: now there was a valley between them and Ai.			
3 Enemy comes out to battle	and it shall come to pass, when they come out against us, as at the first,		14 And it came to pass, when the king of Ai saw it, that they hastened and rose up early, and the men of the city went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at a time appointed, before the plain; but he wist not that there were liers in ambush against him behind the city.		31 And the children of Benjamin went out against the people, and were drawn away from the city; and they began to smite of the people, and kill, as at other times, in the highways, of which one goeth up to the house of God, and the other to Gibeah in the field, about thirty men of Israel.
4 Israel feigns retreat	that we will flee before them, 6 (For they will come out after us) till we have drawn them from the city; for they will say, They flee before us, as at the first: therefore we will flee before them.		15 And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. 16 And all the people that were in Ai were called together to pursue after them: and they pursued after Joshua, and were drawn away from the city. 17 And there was not a man left in Ai or Bethel, that went not out after Israel: and they left the city open, and pursued after Israel.		(Highly parallel—see separate analysis)
5 Attack from ambush	7 Then ye shall rise up from the ambush, and seize upon the city: for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand.		18 And the LORD said unto Joshua, Stretch out the spear that is in thy hand toward Ai; for I will give it into thine hand. And Joshua stretched out the spear that he had in his hand toward the city. 19 And the ambush arose quickly out of their place, and they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand:		
6 City burned; smoke Sign of smoke	8 And it shall be, when ye have taken the city, that ye shall set the city on fire: according to the commandment of the LORD shall ye do. See, I have commanded you.		and they entered into the city, and took it, and hastened and set the city on fire. 20 And when the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and, behold, the smoke of the city ascended up to heaven, and they had no power to flee this	21 And when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city, and that the smoke of the city ascended,	

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			way or that way:		
7 Final Victory			and the people that fled to the wilderness turned back upon the pursuers.	then they turned again, and slew the men of Ai. 22 And the other issued out of the city against them; so they were in the midst of Israel, some on this side, and some on that side: and they smote them, so that they let none of them remain or escape.	

Repetitions in 20:34-48

4 Feigned retreat	32 And the children of Benjamin said, They are smitten down before us , as at the first. But the children of Israel said, Let us flee, and draw them from the city unto the highways. 33 And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place, and put themselves in array at Baaltamar:	36 So the children of Benjamin saw that they were smitten : for the men of Israel gave place to the Benjamites, because they trusted unto the liers in wait which they had set beside Gibeah.	39 And when the men of Israel retired in the battle, Benjamin began to smite and kill of the men of Israel about thirty persons: for they said, Surely they are smitten down before us , as in the first battle.		
5 Attack from ambush	33b and the liers in wait of Israel came forth out of their places, even out of the meadows of Gibeah. 34 And there came against Gibeah ten thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and the battle was sore: but they knew not that evil was near them.	37 And the liers in wait hasted, and rushed upon Gibeah; and the liers in wait drew themselves along, and smote all the city with the edge of the sword.			
6 Smoke from city		38 Now there was an appointed sign between the men of Israel and the liers in wait, that they should make a great flame with smoke rise up out of the city.	40 But when the flame began to arise up out of the city with a pillar of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them, and, behold, the flame of the city ascended up to heaven. 41 And when the men of Israel turned again, the men of Benjamin were amazed: for they saw that evil was come upon them.		
7 Final victory	35 And the LORD smote Benjamin before Israel: and the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjamites that day		42 Therefore they turned their backs before the men of Israel unto the way of the wilderness ; but the battle overtook	45 And they turned and fled toward the wilderness unto the rock of Rimmon: and they gleaned of	47 But six hundred men turned and fled to the wilderness unto the rock

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	<p>twenty and five thousand and an hundred men: all these drew the sword.</p>		<p>them; and them which came out of the cities they destroyed in the midst of them. 43 Thus they inclosed the Benjamites round about, and chased them, and trode them down with ease over against Gibeah toward the sunrising. 44 And there fell of Benjamin eighteen thousand men; all these were men of valour.</p>	<p>them in the highways five thousand men; and pursued hard after them unto Gidom, and slew two thousand men of them. 46 So that all which fell that day of Benjamin were twenty and five thousand men that drew the sword; all these were men of valour.</p>	<p>Rimmon, and abode in the rock Rimmon four months. 48 And the men of Israel turned again upon the children of Benjamin, and smote them with the edge of the sword, as well the men of every city, as the beast, and all that came to hand: also they set on fire all the cities that they came to.</p>
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Deuteronomy 12 and 13, “Right in the Eyes”

Figure 11 shows that the phrase “in the eyes of xxx” is clearly concentrated in these chapters in Deuteronomy, substantiating O’Connell’s claim that these chapters lie behind these stories.

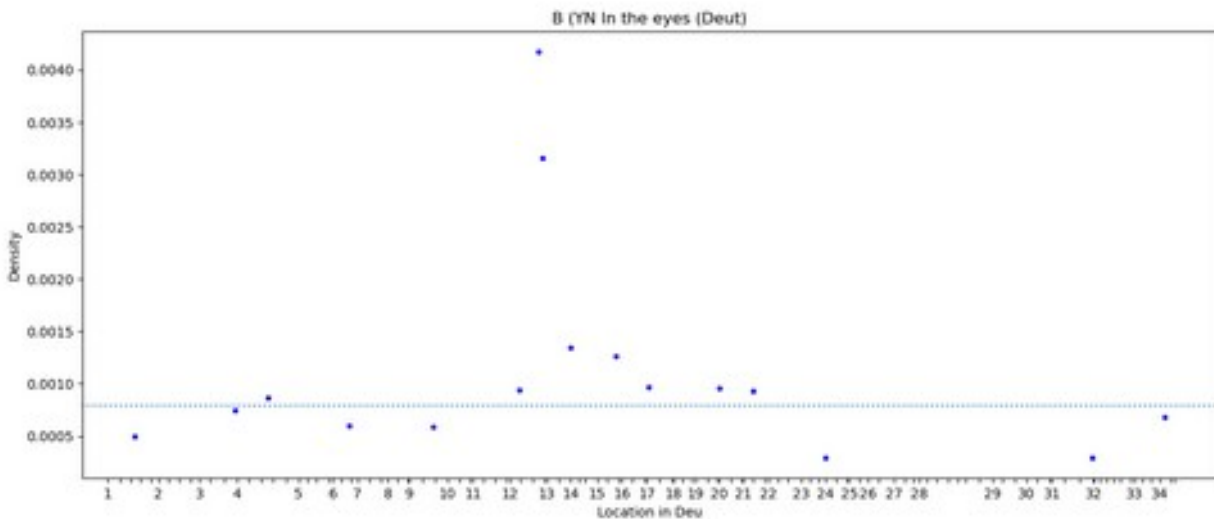


Figure 11: "In the eyes" in Deuteronomy