

Judges 10-12: Jephthah and the Minor Judges

Overview

Abimelech, the pseudo-judge, marks a watershed in the book of Judges (chart).

- Before him, the work of a judge concludes with a period of rest, that is, absence of conflict. Neither he nor any later judge ever brings rest. Instead we are told the length of time that the ruler reigned (9:22) or judged Israel (10:2, 3; 12:7, 9, 11, 14; 15:20).
- Before him, every judge faces a named adversary (usually in the Retribution phase). After Abimelech, five do not have specific adversaries (compare Deborah in 4:4 before joining Barak).

The judges recorded in these chapters work in diverse areas of the country (Figure 1), reinforcing the consistent theme that during the period between the conquest and the Kingdom, God works locally with his people, not through a central kingship (as Abimelech's disastrous experiment shows).

This section will lead us to revise our chronology of the period. It's fair to ask, "Why bother? What do these numbers have to do with the four purposes for which God has given his word?"

2Tim. 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

The answer is twofold.

First, we should pay attention to the numbers because God has chosen to preserve them for us. They are part of the "all scripture" of which 2 Tim 3:16 speaks. God has anchored his revelation in time and space. Just as knowing the locations of the various judges helps us understand what is going on in the story, so knowing when they worked will help us relate their ministries to one another, and to events in surrounding books.

Second, apparent inconsistencies among these numbers is a major point on which unbelievers attack the veracity of God's word, so it is an encouragement to us to see how they do fit together.

We'll deal with the details during the study, but we should recall the big picture. Figure 2 (chart) sets forth the overall constraints, discussed in our opening study. The main constraint is 1 Kings 6:1, which dates the Exodus as 480 years before Solomon's fourth year (966 BC).

1Kings 6:1 And it came to pass in the **four hundred and eightieth year** after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in **the fourth year** of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Zif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD.

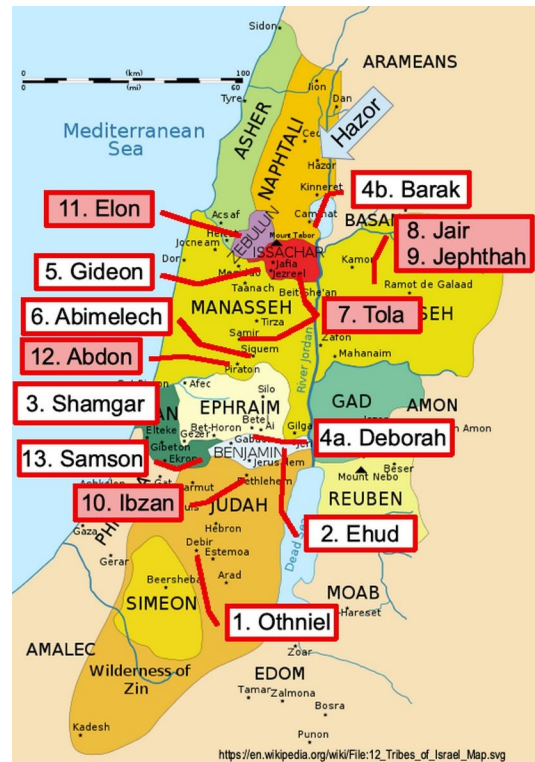


Figure 1: The Six Judges of ch. 10-12

Judges 10-12: Jephthah and the Minor Judges

966 BC is 84 years after the start of Saul's reign, 1050 BC, which roughly¹ marks the end of the judges, leaving 396 years.

The Exodus is 480 years before 966, or 1446 BC. The judges start after 40 years in the wilderness, seven

years of conquest,² and the remaining life of Joshua and the elders that lived beyond him (Jdg 2:7). We don't know exactly how long this period last is, but if we omit it for the moment, the judges start at 1399, 349 years before Saul takes the throne. The total time reported in Judges (period of oppression, rest, ruling, or judging) is 410 years, at least 61 years too many.

So some of the judges must rule concurrently with one another. At the start of our study of Gideon, we considered one possible scheme³ (Figure 3, chart). The Rebellion phase of Gideon's cycle does not say that the children of Israel did evil again, as do most of the others, but only that they did evil (6:1), suggesting that Gideon's history takes us back to the start of the entire

period. But there are two problems with this arrangement, shown by the yellow arrows.

The first problem, identified by the vertical arrows, is that the Ammonite and Philistine oppressions conflict with the periods of rest after Ehud and Barak. Conflict is not rest.

The second problem, represented by the horizontal arrow, comes from Jephthah's attempt to persuade the king of the Ammonites to withdraw peacefully:

Judg. 11:25 And now art thou any thing better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? did he ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against them, 26 While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aroer and her towns, and in all the cities that be along by the coasts of Arnon, **three hundred years?** why therefore did ye not recover them within that time?

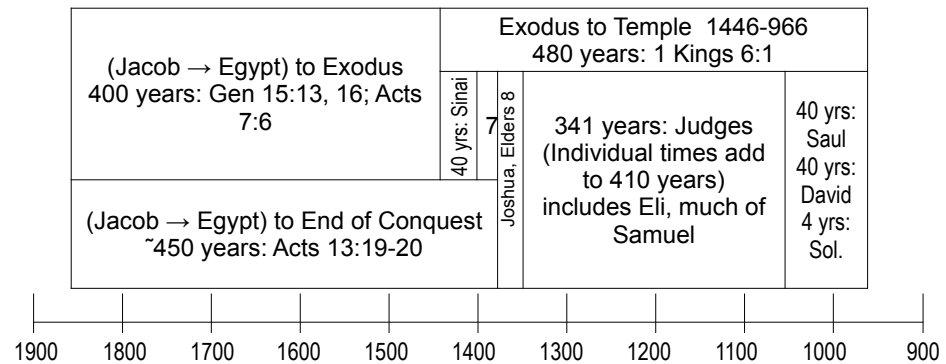


Figure 2: Chronological Constraints for Judges

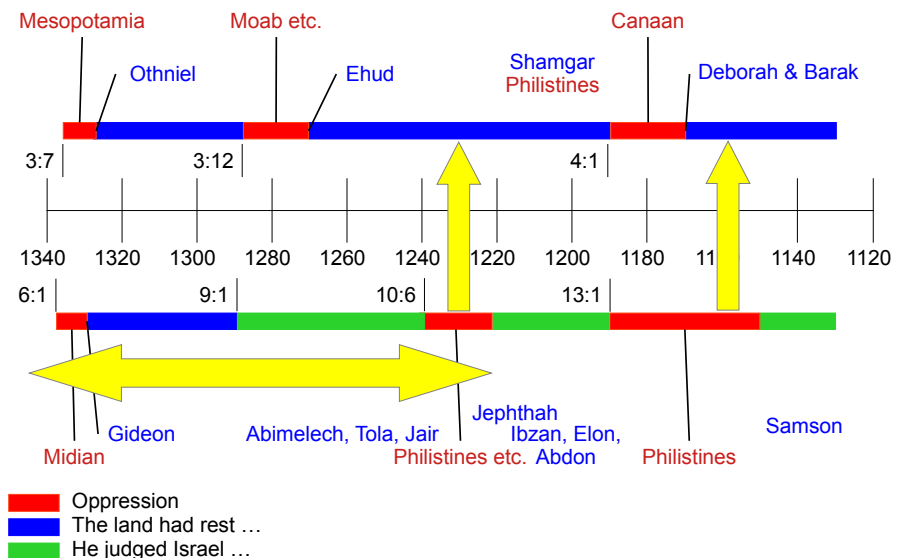


Figure 3: Chronology according to Chisholm.

1 Samuel, who is a judge, and perhaps Abdon, continue into Saul's reign.

2 H. Hoehner, Bib Sac 126:504 (1969), 306-316, note 33

3 R.A. Chisholm, Jr., JETS 52/2 (June 2009) 247-55

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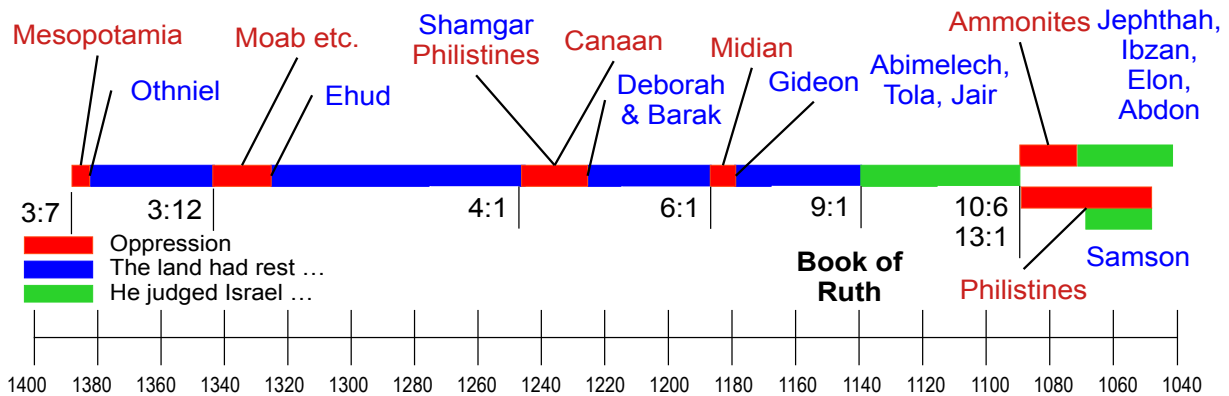


Figure 4: Revised chronology for the Judges

Jephthah reports the time between his own activity and Israel's occupation of Heshbon in transjordan, about a year before entering the land, as 300 years. But if Gideon comes at the start of the period, Jephthah is only about 120 years after Israel passes through Moab. Even allowing for an imperfect memory, the difference seems excessive.

Both of these problems are resolved with two overlaps (Figure 4, chart). See notes for details.

First, 10:7-8 with 13:1 suggests that the events of chapters 10-12 and those of 13-16 are concurrent. 10:7-8 is a chiasmic summary of the two episodes that follow.

Judg. 10:7 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the **Philistines**, and into the hands of the children of **Ammon**. 8 And that year **they** vexed and oppressed the children of Israel: eighteen years, all the children of Israel that were **on the other side Jordan** in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. ... 13:1 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the **Philistines** forty years.

Second, Samson's judgeship is said to be "in the days of the Philistines," and he only "begin[s] to deliver Israel":

13:5 For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall **begin** to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. ... 15:20 And he judged Israel **in the days of the Philistines** twenty years.

Decisive victory over the Philistines awaits the battle of Mizpeh in 1 Samuel 7, which reads like the conclusion of a successful judge:

1Sam. 7:13 So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel:

Further overlaps are possible, particularly within the groups of minor judges (Tola and Jair in 10:1-5, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon in 12:8-15), but these two are sufficient to fit the judges between Joshua and Saul. This scheme also allows 313 years from Israel's entry into the land to Jephthah. In this revised scheme, Gideon follows immediately on Deborah and Barak. Unlike other successive judges, Gideon delivers the same area of the country that they did, though facing a different adversary. The lack of "again" in 6:1 would now indicate that the rebellion that leads to the Midianite oppression is not a new episode of rebellion, but continuation of the same apostasy

that led to Jabin in 4:1. In spite of the victory of Deborah and Barak, the Israelites in that area continued in their sin, leading God to bring in two successive adversaries to the same area.

10:1-5, Tola and Jair

This section describes five of the six “minor judges,” those that do not fit within the standard cycle of Rebellion, Retribution, Repentance, Rebuke, Restoration and Rest. The sixth, Shamgar, defeated some Philistines during Jabin’s oppression. The first two of these minor judges served in different areas of the country, and may have partially overlapped.

A notable feature of the first two judges is that in both cases, others in their families have borne their names before them. Perhaps their willingness to undertake the role of a judge can be traced to their sense of spiritual heritage. We cannot inherit faith from our parents, and God graciously saves many who are the first in their family to believe. But when we do come to know the Lord, it is a precious thing if we can look back to those who have gone before us in faith.

10:1 And after Abimelech there arose to defend Israel—The mission “to defend Israel” uses the verb “to save, deliver” יָשַׁע H3467 that usually describes dealing with an adversary. Here the adversary is not named, but the writer reminds us that Tola follows the disastrous experiment of Abimelech, and that his home was in the same area that Abimelech controlled:

Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in mount Ephraim.—Tola’s name recalls the first son of Issachar (chart). (His father’s name פִּוּאָה is similar, but not identical, to Issachar’s second son פִּוּה.)

Gen. 46:13 And the sons of Issachar; **Tola**, and Phuvah, and Job, and Shimron.

Though a member of the tribe of Issachar, Tola serves in the territory of Ephraim. Compare Deborah’s main contribution in the Jezreel Valley, far from her home area on the border of Benjamin and Ephraim. In both cases, the leadership of someone more remote suggests a lack of local leadership. Why might this be?

This verse is the only reference to a town of this name in Mount Ephraim,⁴ but the consonants are the same as the name Shemer, after whom Samaria was named when Omri constructed it as the capital of the northern kingdom in 1 Kings 16:24 about 878 BC. If so, it would be about 7 miles northwest of Shechem (7.5 miles following the road), on the western side of Mount Ebal, and well within the area of influence of Abimelech. So Tola’s “salvation” may involve restoring a sense of order in this part of the country.

2 And he judged Israel twenty and three years, and died, and was buried in Shamir.—

Previously, Othniel (3:10) and Deborah (4:4) are said to have judged Israel, but this is the first time the expression designates the duration of a judge’s influence. Up to now we have heard that “the land had rest” for a period of years. The shift suggests that as the society continues to decline into chaos, it is no longer possible to identify periods of stability following a judge’s work, and in fact, Samson’s entire judgeship falls within the period of Philistine oppression.

Tola, like Deborah before him, is a stranger to the area of his ministry. There is a principle here. While the Lord usually raises up local leaders, sometimes he does bring in brethren from other areas to encourage and support his people, like the stranger-brethren in 3 John,

4 Josh 15:48 has a Shamir in Judah, and 1 Chr 24:24 mentions a descendant of Levi by this name.

3 John 1:5 Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; 6 Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: 7 Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.

3 And after him arose Jair, a Gileadite,—Now we move to the other side of the Jordan, to Mount Gilead, which was divided between Reuben on the south and half of Manasseh on the north. The geographical cities mentioned in the next verse are in Manasseh, and in fact were associated with an earlier Jair, a descendant of Manasseh in the time of Moses 300 years earlier:

Num. 32:40 And Moses gave Gilead unto Machir the son of Manasseh; and he dwelt therein. 41 And **Jair** the son of Manasseh went and took the small towns [havoth] thereof, and called them Havothjair.

Once again, memory of his spiritual heritage may have inspired this man to leadership.

The villages captured by his ancestor numbered 23:

1Chr. 2:22 And Segub [son of Machir] begat **Jair**, who had three and twenty cities in the land of Gilead.

The later Jair has increased his holdings:

and judged Israel twenty and two years. 4 And he had thirty sons that rode on thirty ass colts, and they had thirty cities, which are called Havothjair unto this day, which are in the land of Gilead. 5 And Jair died, and was buried in Camon.—Jair apparently had many wives. But his sons, unlike those of Gideon, manage to work together

Jair, like Gideon, appears to value a lavish lifestyle, with a harem that can produce many sons and control over many cities. But his effectiveness is questionable, for he leaves his territory vulnerable to the Ammonites, leading to the need for Jephthah to act in the same area.

10:6-8a, Summary of Rebellion and Retribution

Once again, we begin the pattern of Rebellion, Retribution, and so forth. But this time the rebellion is described in general terms, which might characterize the entire period of the judges:

6 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth,—The first two are the male-female pair that form the center of the Canaanite cult.

and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines,—Then he turns to the specific gods of each nation, who for Syria and Zidon would be Baal and Ashtaroth.

and forsook the LORD, and served not him.—In turning after these gods, they forsook their covenant God.

7 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon.—This expression leads us to think of a coalition of Philistines and Ammonites against Israel (like the coalition of Moab, Ammon, and Amalek under Eglon in 3:12-13). But this is unlikely, for two reasons.

1. These nations are on opposite sides of Israel. The Philistines come from the sea, and their cities lie along the coastal plain of Judah. The Ammonites are on other side of the Jordan.

2. As we continue in the history, Jephthah's exploits are entirely with the Ammonites, and there is no involvement with the Philistines until we reach Samson's history in ch. 13.

Given the general nature of the Rebellion and the details of the Retribution, 10:7 is probably a chiasmic summary of the two judges to follow, Jephthah (who fought the Ammonites) and Samson (who fought the Philistines).⁵

8 And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel:—This clause appears to indicate that the oppression ramped up very quickly, reflecting the severity of the Lord's anger.

10:8b-12:7, Jephthah and the Ammonites

Now the narrator focuses on the eastern conflict, between the Ammonites and Jephthah.

10:8b-9, Continuation of Retribution

eighteen years (they vexed and oppressed) all the children of Israel that were on the other side Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead.—The verbs come from the previous half-verse, but now focus on the Ammonite oppression, as shown by the reference to “the other side Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead” (Figure 6, chart). Gilead is used in three ways in this cycle: here it is the mountainous region of Transjordan, far from the Philistines, so “they” must refer to “the children of Ammon.”

9 Moreover the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore distressed.—Israel was so weak that the Ammonites challenged not only northern Transjordan, but also Ephraim and the more southern tribes.

This verse introduces two verbs that are prominent in Jephthah's cycle.

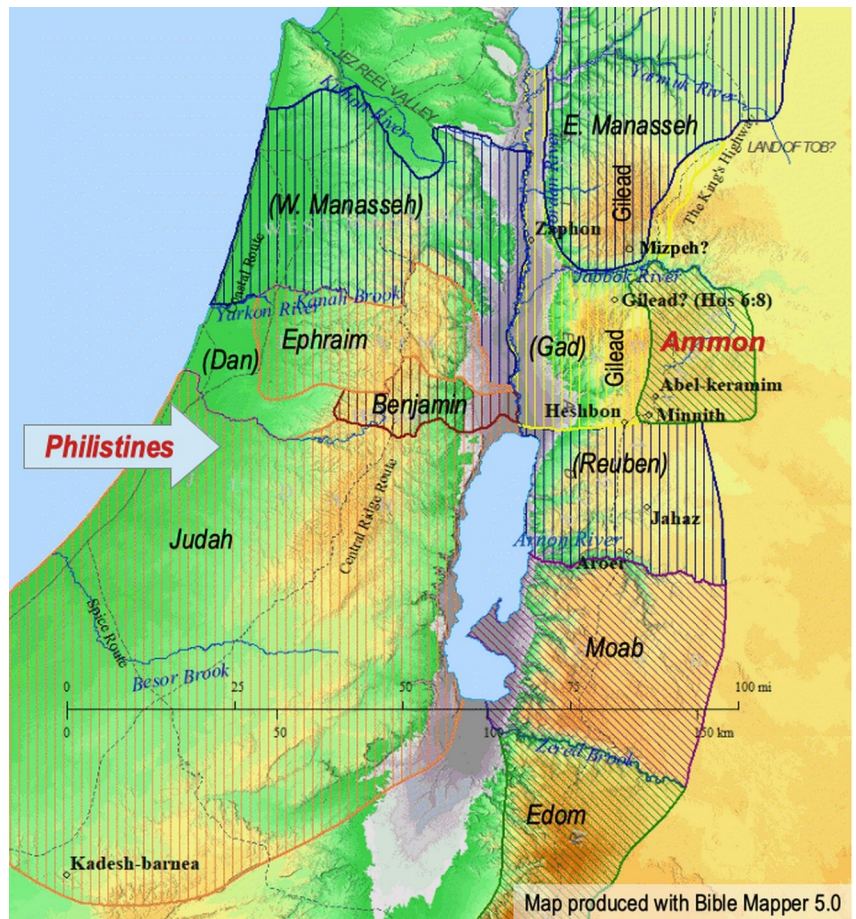


Figure 5: Geography of Jephthah

“Pass over” (עבר H5674, Figure 6, chart) regularly refers to someone⁶ crossing some boundary. Sometimes an adversary is crossing a boundary to oppress or flee Israel: Moabites in 3:28 fleeing

⁵ Thus Wood, Edersheim, and many others.

⁶ Usually an enemy or a judge, but it also describes the movement of the Levite and his concubine from one tribe and city to another in 18:13; 19:12, 14, 18.

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Ehud's army; Midianites in 6:33 crossing Jordan to graze in Jezreel; Gaal in 9:26 entering Shechem to fill a power vacuum; now Ammon crossing the Jordan to attack Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim. Sometimes it refers to a judge: Ehud in 3:26 escaping from Jericho, Gideon in 8:4 pursuing Zebah and Zalmunah across Jordan. But it is concentrated in Jephthah's history, where Jephthah uses it to describe Israel's original possession of Transjordan under Moses, and then, as a second Moses, repeatedly "passes over" to recover that land. Note in particular the high point of the density, coinciding with the coming of the Spirit on Jephthah:

Judg. 11:29 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he **passed over** Gilead, and Manasseh, and **passed over** Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he **passed over** unto the children of Ammon.

The second characteristic verb is "fight," sometimes translated "make war" (לחם H3898, Figure 7, chart), surprisingly uncommon in Judges. The first peak is Judah's obedience in taking possession of the land allotted to them. The second, in Deborah's poem, describes heavenly angels in battle with foreign kings, not a judge as a warrior. 8:1 is Ephraim's description of Gideon's campaign against the Midianites, but they were not there, and could not imagine that it was waged with torches, jars, and trumpets, not with swords. Not until the pseudo-judge Abimelech in ch. 9 does the word become prominent, and the remaining instances are in the history of Jephthah.

When we recall the decline throughout the history of the judges, the use of traditional military tactics by Abimelech and Jephthah should give us pause. It anticipates Paul's admonition,

2Cor. 10:3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: 4 (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

The rise in warfare with Abimelech and Jephthah emphasizes how God has dropped into the background, leaving people to their own devices. When God takes the initiative to raise up a judge, even a carnal one like Samson, deliverance is by supernatural means that bring glory to God.⁷ Recall his words to Gideon when he tells Gideon to reduce the size of his force, already four times smaller than the Midianites:

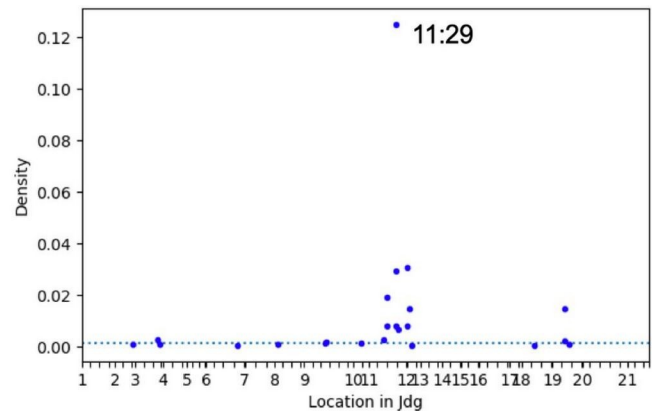


Figure 6: "Cross, pass over" עבר H5674 in Judges

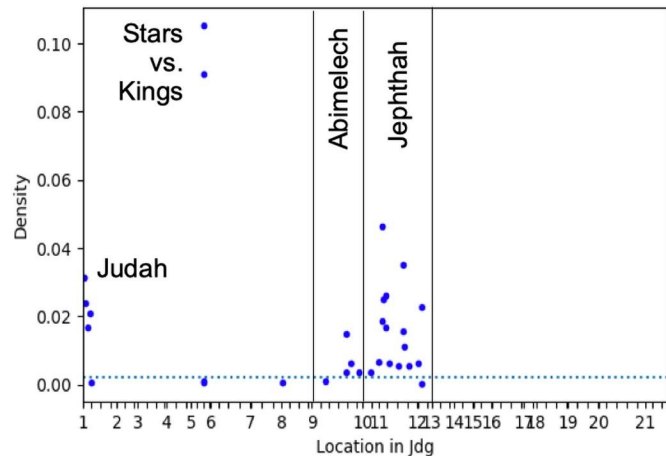


Figure 7: "War" לחם H3898 in Judges

⁷ Even in Joshua and 1 Samuel, the verb is much less common (about 1 word in 1000) than in Judges (2/100). Judges 11, 12 are the two densest chapters in the OT (10.8/1000 and 8.7/1000). The only chapter in Joshua with more than 4/1000 is ch. 10 (7.5/1000). It would be interesting to study carefully the distribution of the verb by subject to see who is taking the initiative in each case.

Jdg 7:2 And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.

10:10-16, Repentance and Rebuke

The next two elements of the cycle, Repentance and Rebuke, also occur in chapters 2 and 6, but here they are in a new configuration (Table 1, chart). In the prototype cycle of chapter 2, the rebuke (2:1-3) comes before the cry of the people (2:4-5), while in the Gideon cycle, the rebuke (6:8-10) follows the cry (6:7). Here, the children of Israel cry to the Lord both before (10:10) and after (10:15) the rebuke (10:11-14).

The comparison shows us the important divisions in all of the rebukes, and lets us focus on the distinctive features of this rebuke.

10 And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, saying, *We have sinned* against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim.—As in chapter 6, there is a cry to the Lord before the rebuke. The people echo both facets of v. 6. Here and in v. 15 are the only places in Judges where they confess, “We have sinned.”

11 And the LORD said unto the children of Israel,—In chapter 2, the angel of the Lord brought the rebuke, while in chapter 6, it was a human prophet. Now the Lord himself speaks without intermediary.

Did not I deliver you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines? 12 The Zidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did oppress you; and ye cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hand.—In ch. 2, he mentions only Egypt. Ch. 6 adds “all that oppressed you,” but this is the most thorough accounting of his deliverance, just as 10:6 is the most detailed account of their rebellion.

We have seen some of these nations before. Sihon in Numbers 21 was an Amorite. Ammon and Amalek supported Eglon, Shamgar dealt with Philistines. The Zidonians probably represent the Canaanites in ch. 4-5, based in the far north in Hazor (Block). The Maonites, otherwise unknown, may be the Meunites (2 Chr 26:7), a desert people who may have been allied with the Midianites whom Gideon conquered.⁸

Table 1 shows that this rebuke lacks three elements in Judges 2 and 6: the gift of the land, God’s assurance of his covenant, and his command not to adopt the idolatry of the Amorites. These omissions are ominous. The *command* is useless in light of v. 6. By refusing to claim and purify the *land* that God gave them, they risk losing it altogether, something that actually happened in the captivities of 722 and 586 BC. And God’s failure to reassure them of his *covenant* ought to strike terror into their hearts.

We know from later scripture that in fact the Lord restored them to their land, and from Lev. 26:15, 44 that his covenant is unbreakable—but they can have no assurance of those blessings while they despise them. So for us: true salvation lasts forever, but the only way I can be assured that I indeed have that true salvation is to see the work of the Spirit in my heart. Salvation is by grace, through faith, plus nothing (John 20:31), but assurance belongs to those who obey (1 John 5:13; 2:3 “hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.”

8 LXX and others in fact read “Midianites,” and given the space dedicated to Gideon’s conquest, it would be strange if they were omitted.

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	Judges 2 (Angel of the Lord)	Judges 6 (Prophet)	Judges 10 (The Lord)
Israel's Cry		6 and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD. 7 And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites,	10 And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim.
Message from the Lord	1 And an (the) angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said,	8 That the LORD sent a prophet [-man] unto the children of Israel, which said unto them,	11 And the LORD said unto the children of Israel,
The Exodus	I made you to go up out of Egypt ,	Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage; 9 And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians ,	Did not I deliver you from the Egyptians ,
Victories over Enemies		and out of the hand of all that oppressed you , and drave them out from before you,	and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines? 12 The Zidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did oppress you ; and ye cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hand.
Gift of the Land	and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers;	and gave you their land ;	
Covenant Assured	and I said, I will never break my covenant with you.	10 And I said unto you, I am the LORD your God;	
Governing Command	2 And ye shall make no league [covenant] with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars:	fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell:	
Disobedience	but ye have not obeyed my voice:	but ye have not obeyed my voice.	13 Yet ye have forsaken me , and served other gods:
Consequences	why have ye done this? 3 Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.		wherefore I will deliver you no more. 14 Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.
Israel's Cry	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 . 5 And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto the LORD.		15 And the children of Israel said unto the LORD, We have sinned : do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day. 16 And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD: and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.

Table 1: The Three Rebukes in Judges

13 Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods:—The Lord endorses the author's indictment of 10:6, and also acknowledges their confession of v. 10.

wherefore I will deliver you no more. 14 Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver [שׁוּץ Hiphil H3467] you in the time of your tribulation.—Compare the words of Joash in defending Gideon:

Judg. 6:31 And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar.

If the gods of v. 6, with whom they are enamored, are real, they ought to be able to deliver Israel from the pagan nations that worship them.

15 And the children of Israel said unto the LORD, We have sinned: do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day. 16 And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD:—They are terrified by the challenge he has given them, and plead with the Lord to intervene on their behalf.

and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.—Most people understand this expression as indicating God's sympathy with Israel. But the verb "grieved" קָצַר H7114 indicates, not his mercy, but his impatience, as seen in other instances of this idiom (chart):

Zech. 11:8 Three shepherds also I cut off in one month; and my soul **loathed** them, and their soul also abhorred me.

Num. 21:4 And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much **discouraged** because of the way.

Judg. 16:16 And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul **was vexed** unto death;

Job 21:4 As for me, is my complaint to man? and if it were so, why should not my spirit be **troubled**?

The word rendered "misery" עֲמַל H5999 can also mean "labour, trouble." Here it probably refers to Israel's labored efforts to persuade God to turn from his wrath. After all, they cry to the Lord not just once, but twice. We might paraphrase, "His soul was vexed with the show Israel put on."

Recall our recent meditations in Hosea 4, where the Lord abandons Israel to her sin:

Hos. 4:17 Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.

Our God is slow to anger (Exod 34:6), but eventually he becomes fed up with our insincerity and abandons us to our sin and its consequences. As our Lord said of the scribes and Pharisees,

Matt. 15:14 Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind.

And Paul three times in Romans 1 tolls the dirge over those who resist God's revelation of himself in nature, "God gave them up" (1:24, 26, 28). It is a terrible thing when God loses patience with someone and abandons them to their sin.

Israel has not yet progressed to the point where the Lord completely abandons them. But their stubbornness does change how he brings deliverance.

Before Abimelech, the restoration phase of a judge's cycle typically begins with the Lord raising up a judge. The summary cycle states (chart):

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Judg. 2:16 Nevertheless the LORD **raised up** judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.

Sometimes this event is stated very succinctly:

Judg. 3:9 And when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD **raised up** a deliverer to the children of Israel, ... even Othniel the son of Kenaz ...

Judg. 3:15 But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD **raised them up** a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, ...

In the case of Barak and Gideon, the call is more detailed. He commissions Deborah to remind Barak of God's call to him, a call that he had apparently ignored:

Judg. 4:6 And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedeshnaphtali, and said unto him, **Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded**, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?

The history of Gideon gives great detail on how the angel of the Lord comes to commission him:

Judg. 6:14 And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?

The pattern stops with Abimelech. He sets himself up as king, and from this point on judges "arise," but are not said to be "raised up".⁹

Judg. 10:1 And after Abimelech there **arose** to defend Israel Tola the son of Puah

Judg. 10:3 And after him **arose** Jair, a Gileadite, and judged Israel twenty and two years.

After Jair, we simply read that someone "judged" Israel. Not until we get to Samson does God again openly take the initiative in setting up a judge.¹⁰ But though the Lord steps out of the spotlight, we will see him working behind the scenes.

10:17-12:7, Restoration

This section is a chiasm (Figure 8, chart), focusing on the battle in 11:32-33.¹¹

10:17-11:11, Gaining a Leader

In keeping with God's decree in 10:13, we no longer read of a judge being "raised up." Instead, the children of Israel set about

choosing a leader, a process to which the writer gives considerable attention. Notice how much longer this element is than the corresponding element in 12:7, reflecting the law of proportion. We are intended to pay close attention to the shift in how God provides leaders.


A Leader Gained & Lost	10:17-11:11 (13 vv)		12:7 (1v)
Attempted Diplomacy	With Ammon 11:12-28 (17)		With Ephraim 12:1-6 (6)
A Vow Made & Performed	11:29-31 (3)		11:34-40 (7)
Divine Deliverance	11:32-33 the Lord delivered them		

Figure 8: Jephthah's Chiastic Career

9 The verbal root is the same, קָם H6965, but the stem shifts from Hiphil (causative) to Qal (simple action).

10 Dave Nelson notes the distinction between Samson, a southern judge, and Abimelech and Jephthah, who operate in the north, and suggests this difference reflects a tendency that later leads the northern tribes to reject the king that God has chosen and appoint their own. The distinction is not as clear for the minor judges, who include southern (Ibzan) as well as northern judges.

11 I have refined the basic structure in David Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament* (Baker, 1999).

17 Then the children of Ammon were gathered together, and encamped in Gilead.—The first use of the term was of the Transjordanian highlands. This second use appears to refer to a city, probably somewhere south of the Jabbok.

And the children of Israel assembled themselves together, and encamped in Mizpeh.—This location appears often in the history. The name means “watchtower.” It could be applied to any elevated location, and several distinct places clearly bear this name. I prefer to identify it with the place where Laban and Jacob concluded their treaty after Jacob fled from Laban (chart).¹²

Gen. 31:48 And Laban said, This heap is a witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galeed; 49 And **Mizpah**; for he said, The LORD watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another.

Jacob’s Mizpeh must be north of the Jabbok (Figure 5, chart), for he meets with Laban before he crosses the river. Thus Israel and Ammon are mustered on opposite sides of the Jabbok.

18 And the people and princes of Gilead said one to another, What man is he that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? he shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.—God has left them to their devices, and they are at a loss. Left to their own wisdom, they can only think of fleshly warfare, described in the characteristic verb of the section. But that requires a general, and who has the charisma to lead them? (See note on מִי הָאִישׁ)

Like Moab, Israel’s foe under Eglon from whom Ehud delivered them in 3:12-30, Ammon is related to Israel. Both are descended from Lot, Abraham’s nephew, through his daughters (chart):

Gen 19:36 Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father. 37 And the firstborn bare a son, and called his name Moab: the same is the father of the Moabites unto this day. 38 And the younger, she also bare a son, and called his name Benammi: the same is the father of **the children of Ammon** unto this day.

Their land marked the limit of Israel’s conquest of Sihon king of Og during the Exodus:

Num 21:23 And Sihon would not suffer Israel to pass through his border: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel into the wilderness: and he came to Jahaz, and fought against Israel. 24 And Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from Arnon unto Jabbok, **even unto the children of Ammon**: for the border of the children of Ammon was strong.

11:1-3, Historical background

11:1 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah.—Now we encounter the third use of the name “Gilead,” a historical person from whom the other two uses derive. Like Tola and Jair, this name has historical connections, for the original Gilead was the grandson of Manasseh through Machir (Num 26:29). He had a noble heritage. But the circumstances of his birth are against him.

2 And Gilead’s wife bare him sons; and his wife’s sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father’s house; for thou art the son of a strange woman.—As in the case of Abimelech, a noble father (Gideon, Gilead) has a son from a mother who is not a full wife (Gideon’s concubine, Gilead’s harlot), and there is tension between the half-brother and the full sons. But whereas Abimelech took steps to destroy the legitimate brothers, here the legitimate brothers act against the illegitimate one.

¹² See note on place names. Both noun formations *miqtal* and *miqtel* are attested in Hebrew (Joüon §88Lf).

3 Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and went out with him.—Again like Abimelech, he attracts a band of “vain men,” other outcasts from society who lived on the fringes. Compare David after he is excluded both from the court of Saul and from refuge with Achish king of Gath:

1 Sam. 22:2 And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men.

We don't know how this band occupied itself, but as with David, it shows Jephthah's leadership capabilities. He is able to organize people who were intrinsically difficult to organize.

We have noted that the writer concentrates instances of the verb עבר H5674 to suggest a parallel between Jephthah and Moses. Here is another:¹³ like Moses, he spent a time in the wilderness, rejected by his people, before he entered into his ministry of deliverance.

11:4-11, Election of Jephthah

4 And it came to pass in process of time, that the children of Ammon made war against Israel.—Eventually, the Ammonite oppression breaks out into open warfare.

5 And it was so, that when the children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob:¹⁴ 6 And they said unto Jephthah, Come, and be our captain, that we may fight [war H3898] with the children of Ammon.—

As we observed in considering the characteristic verb here, warfare is a strategy of human wisdom, and reminds us that the initiative has passed from the Lord to the men of Gilead. Warfare requires a leader. Someone thinks of Jephthah, and his private army, away off in Tob.

7 And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?—He is naturally cautious of their invitation, because of their previous animosity.

8 And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Therefore we turn again to thee now, that thou mayest go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.—But they need a general, and nobody else has the credentials.

Recall Joram's theory of politics (Judg 9:7-21) that rulers tend to be drawn from the least qualified people, and Isaiah's declaration of the Lord's judgment, removing qualified leaders:

Is. 3:1 For, behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water, 2 The mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient, 3 The captain of fifty, and the honourable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator.

The men of Gilead are apparently under such a judgment, and they must reach out to an illegitimate person whom they had previously rejected to find someone who could lead.

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

¹³ I am indebted to Dave Nelson for this first parallel.

¹⁴ Hervey (Pulpit Bible): probably the same as Ishtob, 2 Sam 10:6-8.

They have already offered him headship over the war. Jephthah asks, “What happens if I succeed? Are you going to reject me again?”

Notice the contrast with Abimelech. He is not forcing himself on them. There is no threat of fire from the bramble. He just wants to live in peace. Notice also his sense that any victory must come from the Lord. They are asking him to fight, but he knows where the true power lies.

10 And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words.—They agree to his request, and (12:7) they keep their word.

11 Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead,—So they return from the land of Tob.

and the people made him head and captain over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the LORD in Mizpeh.—They return to Mizpeh, where the elders of Gilead assembled to consider the Ammonite threat (10:17). “Before the Lord” suggests that there may have been a local sanctuary there, perhaps commemorating the treaty between Jacob and Laban. We would expect such a ceremony to take place at the tabernacle, but it is invisible throughout Judges.

11:12-28, Diplomacy and the Ammonite Threat

12 And Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land?—For many people, the massing of a hostile force would justify a preemptive strike (as Israel did in the Six-Day War in 1967). As we saw in his negotiations with the men of Gilead, Jephthah is characterized by his diplomatic approach. Here he negotiates with the king of Ammon before resorting to open conflict, and in chapter 12, he will attempt to negotiate with the men of Ephraim. This preference for a peaceful solution wherever possible is a sign of wisdom (chart):

Prov 25:8 Go not forth hastily to strive,¹⁵ lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame. 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.

Prov. 15:1 A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

Our Lord exhorts us to seek peaceful solutions:

Matt. 5:25 Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.

Jephthah may be inspired by Jacob and Laban, and by other events we will note shortly. His conduct gives us a guidebook for how to deal with people with whom we differ, and the first lesson is to prefer negotiation over strife.

13 And the king of the children of Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land, when they came up out of Egypt, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now therefore restore those lands again peaceably.—Note the rival claims to “my land” by Jephthah and the Ammonite king. The latter insists that the land was his (“my land”) before Israel took possession of it, and that Israel forcefully took it during the Exodus. Therefore it should return to him. He states the limits of his claim: everything between

¹⁵ ריב H7378. Solomon discourages not just a violent response, but also legal action.

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the Arnon (halfway up the Dead Sea) and the Jabbok, from the desert to the Jordan River, in

Judges 11	Numbers 20-21	Deuteronomy 2
16 But when Israel came up from Egypt, ... and came to Kadesh ; 17 Then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom , saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land : but the king of Edom would not hearken thereto.	20:14 And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the king of Edom , Thus saith thy brother Israel, ... 17 Let us pass, I pray thee, through thy country : ... 18 And Edom said unto him, Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword.... 21 Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border: wherefore Israel turned away from him.	4 And command thou the people, saying, Ye are to pass through the coast of your brethren the children of Esau, ... 5 Meddle not with them ; for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as a foot breadth; because I have given mount Seir unto Esau for a possession.
And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab: but he would not consent: and Israel abode in Kadesh.	(Num. 21:14 Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the LORD, What he did in the Red sea, and in the brooks of Arnon, 15 And at the stream of the brooks that goeth down to the dwelling of Ar, and lieth upon the border of Moab.)	9 And the LORD said unto me, Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battle: for I will not give thee of their land for a possession; because I have given Ar unto the children of Lot for a possession. ...
18 Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom , and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab , and pitched on the other side of Arnon , but came not within the border of Moab: for Arnon was the border of Moab .	21:4 And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom : (brazen serpent) ... 11 And they journeyed from Oboth, and pitched at Ijeabaram, in the wilderness which is before Moab, toward the sunrising 13 From thence they removed, and pitched on the other side of Arnon , which is in the wilderness that cometh out of the coasts of the Amorites: for Arnon is the border of Moab , between Moab and the Amorites.	
19 And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land ... 20 But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast : but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel. 21 And the LORD God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them: so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country.	21:21 And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, 22 Let me pass through thy land : ... 23 And Sihon would not suffer Israel to pass through his border : but Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel into the wilderness: and he came to Jahaz, and fought against Israel. 24 And Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from Arnon unto Jabbok, even unto the children of Ammon: ... 25 And Israel took all these cities: and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon, and in all the villages thereof.	26 And I sent messengers out of the wilderness of Kedemoth unto Sihon king of Heshbon with words of peace, saying, 27 Let me pass through thy land : ... 30 But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him : ... 32 Then Sihon came out against us, he and all his people, to fight at Jahaz. 33 And the LORD our God delivered him before us; and we smote him, and his sons, and all his people. 34 And we took all his cities at that time, ...

Table 2: Jephthah's Knowledge of the Law of Moses

other words, the area occupied by Gad and Reuben (Figure 5, chart).

14 And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon: 15 And said unto him,—Jephthah’s response closely follows Israel’s exodus history in Numbers Deuteronomy (Table 2, chart). The second lesson for dealing with conflict is to ground our discussion firmly in the Word of God.

Jephthah’s message to the king of Ammon has three points.

1. The king of Ammon is wrong. Israel never took land from Ammon during the Exodus.
2. The king who did have a legitimate claim to the area didn’t retake it from Israel.
3. Even if Israel had taken the land from Ammon, the Ammonites have let the matter go for so long that it makes no sense to claim it now (a sort of “statute of limitations”).

Thus saith Jephthah, Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon:—First he challenges the claim that Israel took the land from Ammon during the Exodus. He recounts Israel’s journey from Kadesh Barnea to the Plains of Moab.

Israel dealt with three kings: of Edom, Moab, and the Amorites. The first two are related to Israel by blood. Edom was descended from Esau, Jacob’s brother, while Moab, like Ammon, was descended from Lot, Abraham’s nephew. In each case he shows that Israel asked permission to pass through the land, and did not engage in military action unless the other group attacked them.

The encounter between Laban and Jacob is one inspiration for Jephthah’s preference for settling issues by negotiation. No doubt another is Moses’ practice as recorded in the history that Jephthah now summarizes.

Jephthah’s argument assumes knowledge of the geography of the region (Figure 9). Note:

- The territories controlled by Edom, Moab, Ammon, Sihon, and Og at this period (1400 BC)
- The starting point: Mount Hor, near Kadesh-barnea
- The destination: Plains of Moab (Num 22:1), across from Jericho, a large open area where they could prepare to enter the land. It will be important to note that this area is called “plains of Moab,” even though Moab is far to the south.
- The easiest route: dashed line

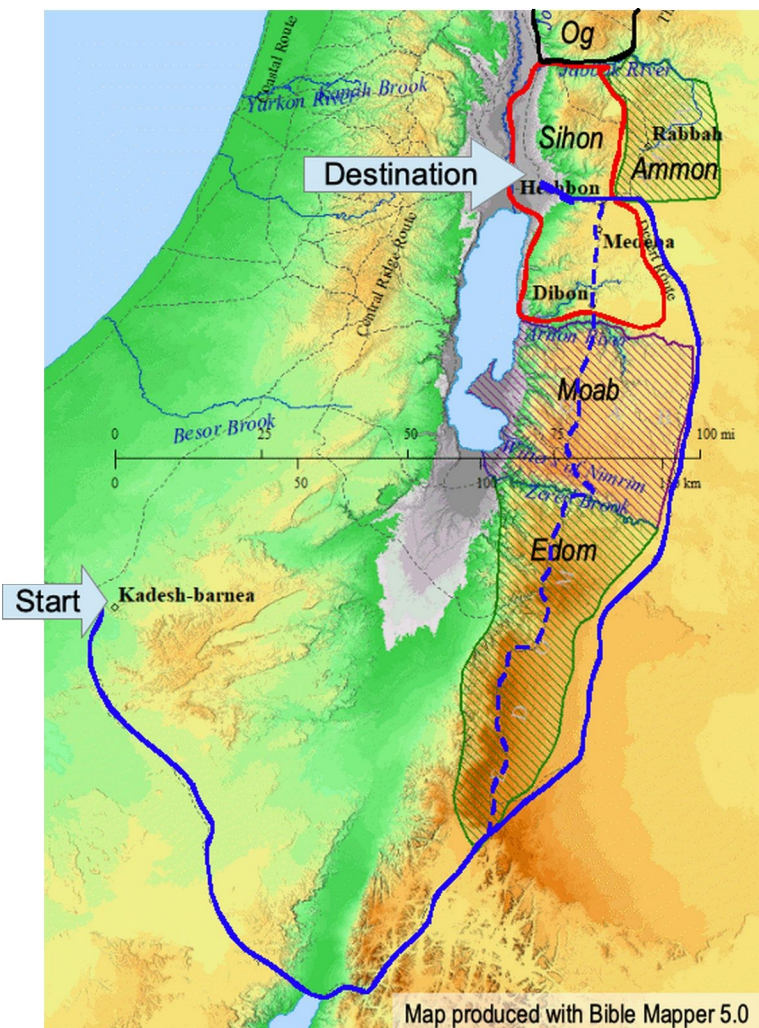


Figure 9: Final Leg of the Wilderness Wanderings

(“King’s Highway”)

- Their actual route: Through the Desert to the east

16 But when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red sea, and came to Kadesh; 17 Then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land: but the king of Edom would not hearken thereto.—Num 20:14-21 and Deut 2:4-7 record the negotiation with the king of Edom.

At this point, the verb עָבַר H5674 “to pass over” begins to accumulate (Figure 6), describing the successive crossings that Israel wants to make to follow the most direct route toward their destination. These references thus characterize Moses’ leadership of the nation during this time.

And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab: but he would not consent:—Moses’ history does not mention the request to the king of Moab, but their avoidance of conflict is consistent with the policy of not interfering with the children of Lot, given in Deut 2:9, 19, and remembered by Jehoshaphat in his prayer in 2 Chr 20:10. Num 21:14 mentions that events in this region were also recorded in “the book of the wars of the Lord,” which does not survive, and may have described this negotiation.

and Israel abode in Kadesh.—When these embassies failed, Israel extended its stay at Kadesh. During this period, Numbers records the death of Aaron at Mount Hor, near Kadesh (20:22-29),

18 Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab,—This itinerary, described in Num 21:4-20, takes Israel to the east of Edom and Moab, skirting the desert. The route would be much more challenging. Numbers records,

Num. 21:4 And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, **to compass the land of Edom:** and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. 5 And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.

In response, God sent the fiery serpents among them.

and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, but came not within the border of Moab: for Arnon was the border of Moab.—According to Num 21:11, they continue to stay to the east to avoid Moab (“in the wilderness which is before Moab, toward the sunrising), until they reach the Arnon, “for Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites” (Num 21:13).

Jephthah omits an interesting detail of Moses’ narrative of the Exodus. After they crossed the Zered at the bottom of the Dead Sea, the Lord told the nation (chart),

Deu 2:18 Thou art to pass over through Ar, the coast of Moab, this day: 19 And when thou comest nigh over against **the children of Ammon**, distress them not, nor meddle with them: for I will not give thee of the land of **the children of Ammon** any possession; because I have given it unto the children of Lot for a possession. ... 37 Only unto the land of **the children of Ammon** thou camest not, nor unto any place of the river Jabbok, nor unto the cities in the mountains, nor unto whatsoever the LORD our God forbad us.

Why does he omit these instructions?

In general, Jephthah follows the wording of Numbers more closely than that of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy relates God's instructions to Moses: "meddle not with [Esau] ... distress not the Moabites ... contend with [Sihon] in battle" (Deut 2:5, 9, 24). Numbers 20-21 says nothing of these instructions, but simply describes what Israel did, which is much more relevant to Ammon's accusation. If someone says, "You did X," it is no defense to say, "God told me not to do X." That would only lead them to say, "All the more reason for you to apologize." It is much more to Jephthah's purpose to focus on the historical record of what Israel actually did.

This omission is a third principle for dealing with those from whom we differ, or in fact for any time we seek to make a point from Scripture: stick to the point. There are many connections from any passage in the word of God to many others, and in study or discussion it can be helpful to explore these, but when we're trying to communicate a point to someone, we should not bring in every possible footnote or cross-reference. We should determine the message the Lord wants us to convey and stick to that.

19 And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place. 20 But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel. 21 And the LORD God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them: so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country.—The only force that Israel used during their journey up the eastern side of the Dead Sea was in response to an attack from Sihon, king of the Amorites. As we saw in our study of Gideon, "Amorites" is not a specific ethnic group (like the Edomites, Moabites, or Ammonites), but a generic term meaning "westerners." It describes the inhabitants of this region from the perspective of Mesopotamia: "those people over in the west." Num 21:21-25 and Deut 2:26-34 describe this battle, and the successful outcome which left Israel in control of "all his cities."

22 And they possessed all the coasts of the Amorites, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto Jordan.—This summary of Num 21:24-25 and Deut 2:34 directly answers the charge of the king of the Ammonites in Judg 11:13 (chart) that "Israel took away my land ... from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan. Jephthah responds, "That is not your land. When we entered it, it was controlled by Sihon king of the Ammorites, and we conquered it from him."

Num 21:24 explicitly bounds the territory in question by the Arnon, the Jabbok, and the children of Ammon, the area Jephthah describes as "the wilderness." At the time Israel entered the land, the Ammonites were located to the east of it, and did not control it.

The sequel in Numbers 21 records that Sihon captured the land in question, not from the Ammonites, but from Moab, which at one time occupied land to the north of the Arnon:

Num. 21:26 For Heshbon was the city of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of **Moab**, and taken all his land out of his hand, even unto Arnon. 27 Wherefore they that speak in proverbs say,

Come into Heshbon, let the city of Sihon be built and prepared:
28 For there is a fire gone out of Heshbon, a flame from the city of Sihon:
it hath consumed Ar of **Moab**, and the lords of the high places of Arnon.
29 Woe to thee, **Moab**! thou art undone, O people of Chemosh:
he hath given his sons that escaped, and his daughters,

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into captivity unto Sihon king of the Amorites.

30 We have shot at them; Heshbon is perished even unto Dibon,
and we have laid them waste even unto Nophah, which reacheth unto Medeba.

31 Thus Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites.

Figure 10 (chart) shows the history of who controlled the land in question, based on these verses and on the regular description of the broad plain opposite Jericho as the plains of *Moab*.

23 So now the LORD God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, and shouldst thou possess it?—Jephthah now summarizes his argument that Israel did not take the land from Ammon. The enemy who held it was not Ammon, but Sihon king of the Amorites, and according to Jephthah's sources, Sihon had previously taken it, not from the Ammonites, but from Moab.

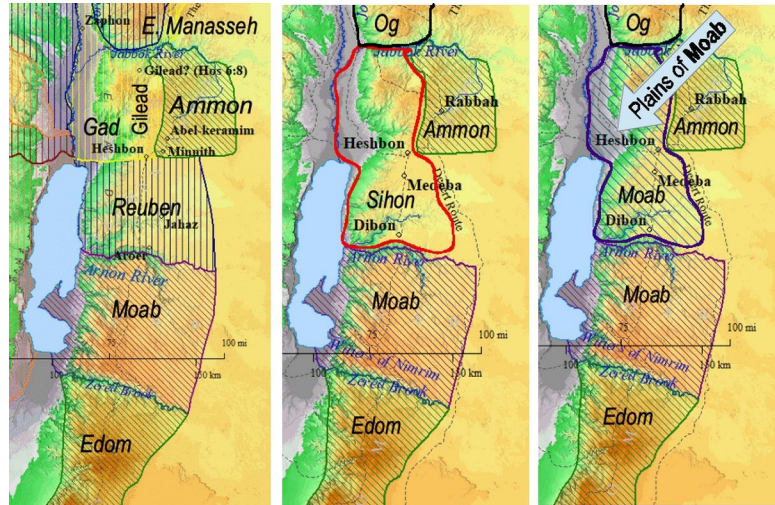


Figure 10: The Land between the Arnon and the Jabbok after (left), just before (center), and long before (right) the conquest

24 Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess?—This statement has led some to question Jephthah's historical accuracy. Elsewhere, Chemosh is the god of Moab, not of Ammon, whose central deity is Molech (chart):

1Kings 11:7 Then did Solomon build an high place for **Chemosh, the abomination of Moab**, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for **Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon**.

In fact, Jephthah's statement is a highly compressed form of his argument from history. The people of the ancient Near East understood gods to belong to regions more than to people. We see this belief elsewhere in the OT. It guided Syria's military strategy against Israel:

1Ki 20:23 And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods are **gods of the hills**; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.

Recall what happened later when Assyria conquered the northern kingdom, deported the Israelites, and settled the land with people from other nations. The Lord sent lions among them, and the people explained it with the theory that each region has its own deity:¹⁶

2Kings 17:26 Wherefore they spake to the king of Assyria, saying, The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of **the God of the land**: therefore he hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of **the God of the land**.

¹⁶ In secular documents, this theory is reflected in the Moabite stone of 830 BC, which speaks of the land of Moab as the land of Chemosh, and the Cyrus cylinder, describing Babylon after the Persian conquest as Marduk's city.

Different nations may come and go, but in the mind of ancient pagans, the deity was attached to the land. It was a radical thing when Jehovah revealed himself to Israel with the formula “I will be your people, and you shall be my God,” a relation that existed before they enter the promised land and continues after they leave it.

So we might paraphrase Jephthah’s comment, “You claim this land as yours. But two conquests ago, the land was Moabite. Their god is Chemosh, who presumably is the controlling deity of this territory. So if you claim the territory, ask him to give it to you.” His rebuke to Ammon resembles the Lord’s rebuke to Israel in 10:14,

Judg 10:14 Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.

So whomsoever the LORD our God ~~shall drive out~~ drove out from before us, them will we possess.—Note the perfect tense of “drove out,” continuing the historical claim. Our God gave us this land by conquest over Sihon, and we will hold it as a fief from him.

Thus the first argument is, that Israel did not in fact take the land in question from Ammon, but from the Amorites, who took it from Moab. Now he presents his second argument: though it was Moabite land, Moab did not take it from us.

25 And now art thou any thing better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab?—

Jephthah records the name of the king of Moab, while leaving the “king of the children of Moab” nameless. One of the worst fates in the ancient world was to have one’s name disappear. The motive for having a kinsman take the barren wife of a deceased man was “that his name be not put out of Israel” (Deut 25:6), and David prays concerning the wicked, “Thou hast rebuked the heathen, thou hast destroyed the wicked, thou hast put out their name for ever and ever” (Ps 9:5). Ruth’s near kinsman refused to redeem her for fear of compromising his own inheritance (Ruth 4:6), but as a result his name has been forgotten. So has the name of the king of Ammon who warred against Jephthah.

did he ever strive [יָרִיב H7378] against Israel, or did he ever fight against them,—Since the contested land originally belonged to Moab, it’s up to Moab, not Ammon, to recover it from Israel. In law, this one party can go to court against another only if it has “standing,” that is, if it is harmed by the actions of the defendant. Moab, not Ammon, has standing in this case. In fact (Numbers 22-24), a king of Moab, not Ammon, was concerned about Israel’s presence in the land at the time of the conquest: Balak the son of Zippor. What action did he take? Jephthah considers two possible actions by Balak: striving and fighting.

“Fight” לָחָם H3898 is the characteristic verb throughout this section describing Ammon’s aggression against Jephthah, and Gilead’s fleshly response. The history is plain: Balak was afraid to engage in war with Israel, who greatly outnumbered his forces.

Num. 22:3 And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they were many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel.

“Strive” יָרִיב H7378 is the verb that describes a covenant lawsuit. Balaam did sue before a higher court. He appealed to the Lord for the return of his land, when he hired Balaam to put a curse on Israel—a strategy that backfired when the Lord turned Balaam’s curse into a blessing.

It is preferable to put a full stop at the end of v. 25, and read v. 26 as a single sentence, giving Jephthah’s third reason, which is analogous to a modern statute of limitations.

26 While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aroer and her towns, and in all the cities that be along by the coasts of Arnon, three hundred years?—By our revised chronology (Figure 4, chart, see notes), 318 years elapsed from the crossing of the Zered to the Ammonite oppression.

why therefore did ye not recover them within that time?—Even if the land was originally yours (which it was not), why haven't you challenged our presence before this?

27 Wherefore I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me: the LORD the Judge be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon.—At this point Jephthah, like a skilled lawyer, rests his case. Let's summarize the lessons we can learn from his appeal to the king of Ammon (chart).

1. Prefer negotiation over conflict. Seek the soft answer that turneth away wrath (Prov 15:1).
2. Know and use the Scripture. Jephthah, like other OT heroes, shows a deep knowledge of the Word of God that had already been given up to his time. He is not afraid to rely on Numbers 20-22 in talking with an unbeliever.
3. Stick to the point. Jephthah does not mention the Lord's prohibition to Moses to enter Ammon, but focuses on his point, which is not what God told Israel, but what Israel did.

28 Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him.—In spite of Jephthah's careful, accurate recounting of Israel's history, the king of Ammon has made up his mind to overrun the land. And that perhaps is a fourth principle that we need to keep in mind: people are not rational. We should not be surprised when they ignore truth and logic in order to satisfy their own lusts.

11:29-31, Preparation for Battle: A Vow Made

29 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah,—The Lord has turned his back on his people (10:13, 14), but he has not turned his back on Jephthah, who loves his word and is faithful to him. In every age, God has his remnant, through whom he glorifies himself.

and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over [the Jabbok] unto the children of Ammon.—Jephthah makes a tour of the area north of the Jabbok. This verse is the peak of the concentration of the verb "to cross or pass over" that is concentrated in this section (Figure 6, chart). The earlier instances describe Moses' desire to "pass through" Edom and the land of Sihon. By applying the verb here and in v. 32 to Jephthah, the writer presents him as a second Moses, delivering his people from bondage. Jephthah may in fact have made this tour to remind people of Israel's original conquest of the land. This parallel reinforces the first, that Jephthah, like Moses, is initially rejected by his people and goes to a far-off land before returning to deliver them.

A third parallel to Moses is the presence of God's Spirit. When Moses needed help in judging the people, the Lord instructed him to set apart seventy elders, and promised,

Num. 11:17 I will take of **the spirit which is upon thee**, and will put it upon them;

Now Jephthah bears that same Spirit to support him in his conflict with the Ammonites.

30 And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD,—The most prominent feature of Jephthah in the minds of many readers is his vow. A natural question is why he would offer this vow in the first place.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with a vow to the Lord. God gives instructions for vows in Leviticus 7 as one of the three types of peace offering, alongside thank offerings and voluntary offerings.¹⁷ Leviticus 22-23 give further instructions, and the institution of the Nazarite (Numbers 6) was a vow. A vow was never required, but if it is made, it must be fulfilled:

Deut. 23:21 When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. 22 But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee.

The Lord has already given Jephthah his Spirit. Why would Jephthah feel the need to obligate himself by making a vow? Some people think the vow is a sign that he is uncertain of the Lord's care, and wants to force his hand. But there is reason to think that it is actually a sign of his faith.

We know from his negotiation with the king of Ammon that Jephthah is intimately acquainted with Numbers 20-22. In the midst of this history, between his request to Edom in Numbers 20 and the journey of the people to compass the land of Edom in Numbers 21, two things happen. First, Aaron dies and is buried at Mount Hor, near Kadesh. Second, the king of Arad, a city in the Negev to the west of the Jordan valley, attacks Israel. Here's the account.

Num. 21:1 And when king [of] Arad the Canaanite, which dwelt in the south, heard tell that Israel came by the way of the spies; then he fought against Israel, and took some of them prisoners. 2 And Israel vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities. 3 And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah.

Jephthah knows from Numbers 20-22 that Israel is vulnerable to unprovoked attack. He also knows that when Arad attacked the people in Numbers 21, the people responded first by making a vow, and then were blessed with victory. Faced with an unprovoked attack, he follows the example of Scripture. Given the rebellious state of the nation, he cannot hope to lead the entire nation in a sincere vow, but he himself will make a vow, showing once again not only his knowledge of the word of God, but his devotion to obey it. The vow, far from being a sign of lack of faith, in fact emphasizes his obedient, godly character.

and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, 31 Then it shall be,—His promise anticipates that someone or something will come to meet him when he returns, and says what he will do with that entity. To understand what he has in mind, we must consider each clause.

that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon,—This part of the vow defines what he will give to the Lord. The critical term is “meet me.” The Hebrew verb קרא H7125 actually means “to call out to me, to greet me.” It appears nearly 900 times in the OT, and almost always refers to verbal activity by one person toward another.¹⁸ Jephthah clearly anticipates that a human will come to greet him on his return.

shall surely be the LORD'S ליהוה,—This expression is often used to speak of dedicating someone to the Lord's service (chart). Note two passages from the law of Moses.

17 In fact, Deut 23:23 [MT 24] characterizes the offering at the end of a vow as a freewill offering.

18 One meaning of this verb is “to read,” which in antiquity was always done aloud. A different verb, פגע H6293, designates an encounter, as of a man with an animal, e.g., Exod 23:4. A few cases where קרא describes a simple encounter may be forms of קרה H7136 but by far the dominant use of קרא indicates a verbal greeting.

Judges 10-12: Jephthah and the Minor Judges

Ex. 13:11 And it shall be when the LORD shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore unto thee and to thy fathers, and shall give it thee, 12 That thou shalt set apart **unto the LORD** ליהוה all that openeth the matrix, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males **shall be the LORD'S** ליהוה. 13 And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem. (cf. Ex 34:20)

The Lord claims all the firstborn males. Clean animals would be used in sacrifice, but two special categories are not eligible for sacrifice: donkeys and humans. These are to be redeemed by offering substitutes.

The expression describing the Lord's ownership appears again in Numbers:

Num 3:11 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 12 And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites **shall be mine** לי; 13 Because all the firstborn are **mine** לי; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: **mine לי shall they be**: I am the LORD.

According to the rest of Numbers 3, in the first generation that came out of Egypt, there were 22,000 Levites (3:39) and 22,273 firstborn from the other tribes (3:43). The Levites were accepted in place of the first 22,000 firstborn, but the others had to be redeemed at the price of five shekels each (3:47), which could be as much as half a year's income for an unskilled laborer (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shekel>).

How is the balance maintained in later years? Once the nation was dispersed in the land, it would be difficult to repeat the census, and the one time it was tried (under David, 2 Samuel 24) it led to the Lord's judgment. The Levites continued to multiply (they were 23,000 by 26:62), and one could assume that this increase in their population counted the corresponding births of non-Levites. In fact, a third approach was taken. Each subsequent male birth required a five shekel redemption, regardless of how many Levites there were (Num 18:16). In other words, not only were firstborn males to be represented in the sanctuary by the Levites, serving before the Lord continually, but they were to be redeemed at five shekels each, a custom that continues in Judaism to this day.¹⁹ In effect, they were redeemed twice.

Jephthah has shown a deep knowledge of the law of Moses. He understands that the Lord claims certain persons for himself—in particular, first-born sons, whose place is taken both by Levites serving in the tabernacle, and by an offering. This part of his vow appears to promise that any person who comes to greet him will be devoted to the service of the sanctuary.

The tabernacle did have servants other than the Levites. Recall the Gibeonite confederacy in Joshua 9, who deceived the invading Israelites into thinking that they came from a far country. Israel entered into covenant with them, and then discovered that they were local and should have been destroyed. Israel kept their covenant, but placed a special requirement on the Gibeonites:

Josh. 9:23 Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water **for** ל the house of my God.

We'll see another example when we discuss how Jephthah fulfills his vow.

¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pidyon_haben

Judges 10-12: Jephthah and the Minor Judges

It is instructive to consider the next vow that we encounter in Scripture,²⁰ that of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1. Samuel is the last of the judges, and this episode falls very close to the time of Jephthah. Hannah also vowed to give a human being to the Lord:

1Sam. 1:11 And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him **unto the LORD ליהוה** all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

What she meant was that he would be devoted to the service of the tabernacle.

and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.—So far, we have learned that Jephthah expects that a human may come out to greet him when he returns, and that he promises to devote whoever comes out to divine service. The difficulty is in this second clause, which clearly says that the one who greets him will be offered up as a burnt offering.²¹ What does this mean?

Some people think that Jephthah actually did sacrifice a human to the Lord. But given his knowledge of and devotion to the law of Moses, he could hardly have been ignorant of the law's prohibition of human sacrifice:

Deut. 12:29 When the LORD thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, whither thou goest to possess them, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their land; 30 Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, ... 31 ... for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; **for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods.**²²

A second possibility is that while he expects a person to meet him, he makes an alternative promise in case it is an animal, in which case it will be offered. But there is no grammatical indication of a disjunction.

There is a third possibility, illustrated by the law of the firstborn, and by the case of Samuel. As we have seen, firstborn males were represented by the Levites, but after the first generation, they also had to be redeemed with five-shekel offering. We may get some idea of what this could purchase from the offerings that Hannah brought to the tabernacle when she brought Samuel:

1Sam. 1:24 And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the LORD in Shiloh: and the child was young. 25 And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli.

Animal sacrifices in the OT often represent the worshipper. The sacrifice of the bullock was a symbol of the total dedication of Samuel to the Lord. What Jephthah probably means by the second part of his promise is that if a human comes out to greet him, he will not only dedicate that person to the service of the tabernacle, but will bring a burnt offering to symbolize the complete dedication of that person to the Lord.

11:32-33, The Battle

32 So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them;—Once again Jephthah “passes over,” recalling Moses’ initial conquest of this territory.

20 The only previous ones were Jacob’s at Bethel (Gen 28:20) and Israel’s when facing Sihon (Num 21:2).

21 Clarke suggests reading the suffix on העליתהו as indirect rather than direct object, but (Clines’ dictionary) the accusative is always the thing offered, and the one to whom it is offered is marked with ל.

22 See also Lev 18:21; 20:2-5

and the LORD delivered [נתן H5414] them into his hands.—Though the Lord has departed from Israel, he is with servant Jephthah. He does not deliver ישע H3467 Israel (10:13), but he does deliver נתן H5414 the Ammonites to Jephthah. The focus is on Jephthah, not the people.

33 And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards (Abel Keramim), with a very great slaughter.—The result is a stunning victory, pushing Ammon back to their proper borders (Figure 5, chart).

Throughout this short description, the only subject of the verbs is Jephthah. It is he, not Israel, or Gilead, or an army, that passes over to fight and that smites. The victory results, not from brute military strength, but as a gift from the Lord, as Jephthah anticipated in Judg 11:9, “if the Lord deliver them before me.”

Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.—This verb (כנע Niphal H3665) regularly describes the defeat of Israel’s enemies: of Moab (Judg 3:30), Jabin (4:23), Midian (8:28), and ultimately the Philistines under Samuel (1 Sam 7:13). But the prepositions in these verses differ from that used here.²³ Elsewhere (1 Ki 21:29; 2 Ki 22:19), this idiom means “to humble oneself before,” describing a voluntary submission in the presence of someone. We might better translate the clause, “And the children of Ammon humbled themselves before the children of Israel.” Israel is a witness of Ammon’s defeat, not its agent.²⁴

11:34-40, A Vow Performed

34 And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances:—Reinforcing the parallel with Moses, Jephthah’s daughter imitates Miriam’s celebration after the Lord’s victory over Egypt at the Red Sea (chart),

Ex. 15:20 And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her **with timbrels and with dances**.

Like her father, she knows the Scriptures.²⁵ We can imagine her watching eagerly for his return, and preparing herself to greet him in the biblical fashion when she learns of his victory. She shows her knowledge of Scripture in two other ways as well.

and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.—Recall the irregularities of Jephthah’s birth. Unable to look back to an honorable ancestry, he must have looked forward to descendants who would respect and honor his memory.

35 And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back.—He promised to devote to the Lord’s service the first person who came out to greet him. He apparently expected this would be a servant, not his only daughter. He underestimated her resolve to follow the biblical example, and he is dismayed when he realizes whom the Lord has chosen.²⁶

23 In 3:30 תחת, in 4:23 and 8:28 לפני; but here מפנה

24 Thus כנע N + מפנה, in the other two instances of the idiom, 1 Ki 21:29; 2 Ki 22:19, “humble oneself before.” We could translate the final clause, “And the children of Ammon humbled themselves before the children of Israel.”

25 The only other reference to such a greeting is when the women of Israel greet Saul and David in 1 Sam 18:6 after the victory over Goliath, but only Exodus and Judges use this precise phrase.

26 Cassel documents the ancient desire that daughters should marry: “Even Roman fathers took it sorrowfully, when their daughters became vestal virgins, notwithstanding the great honor of such a vocation. They were glad to leave such honors to the children of freedmen (Sueton. Aug. 31; Dio Cass. 55, p. 563).”

36 And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth;—She has learned from Scripture not only how to celebrate a divine victory, but also the importance of keeping a vow:

Num. 30:1 And Moses spake unto the heads of the tribes concerning the children of Israel, saying, This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded. 2 If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all **that proceedeth out of his mouth.**

forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies,²⁷ even of the children of Ammon.—The third reflection of her knowledge of Scripture is her conviction that vengeance belongs to the Lord, as Moses had taught:

Deu 32:35 To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence;

The next few verses are our best evidence for what Jephthah actually did with his daughter. Most commentators insist that he put her to death, according to the last clause in 11:31. But there are serious problems with this view.

1. The law of Moses recognizes that pagans had such customs, and clearly condemns them (Lev. 18:21; 20:2–5; Deut. 12:31; 18:10). We have seen that Jephthah knows the law and is committed to follow it. It is inconceivable that he would have violated it so flagrantly.
2. The pagan deity who is best known in the Bible for demanding human sacrifice is Moloch or Molech (Lev. 18:21; 20:2–4; 2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 32:35), who was the deity of the Ammonites (1 Ki 17:11). How likely is it Jephthah, waging the Lord's battle against Ammon, would think he could honor YHWH by offering the worship demanded by his adversary's deity?

In addition to these general considerations, when we read how he performed his vow, there is no reference to her decease. Instead, three times we are reminded that instead of marrying and presenting him with grandchildren, she is committed to remain a virgin:

37 And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows. 38 And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains. 39 And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man.—V. 39 is particularly direct. “He did according to his vow, and she knew no man.” That would be an understatement if she were dead. The obvious understanding is that he dedicated her to serve the Lord as a single woman.

We saw earlier that the tabernacle had attendants who were not Levites. One example is the Gibeonites. There also appears to be a corps of women who served the tabernacle. They are mentioned twice 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.

27 The only other cases where נקמה H5360 is the direct object of עשה H6213 are much later, Ps 149:7 and Ezek 24:17, and may draw on this text. However, in both those cases the target of the vengeance is marked with בִּי and not (as here) with בְּיָמֶי.

Judges 10-12: Jephthah and the Minor Judges

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** **צָבָה** at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

The verb translated “assembling” (**צָבָה** 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** **לְצִבְיָה צָבָה**, 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. Jephthah’s daughter would join this company.

And it was a custom in Israel, 40 That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament recount **תָּנָה** **H8567 the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.**—The verb translated “lament” is very rare, but the closest parallel use is in 5:11, in Deborah’s song celebrating the victory over Jabin and Sisera:²⁸

Judg 5:11 there shall they **rehearse** the righteous acts of the LORD, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel.

There is no lamentation there, but the meaning “recount” fits well in both passages. They gathered to remember her obedience to her father and her devotion to the Lord at his direction.

We know nothing more about these meetings. Three of them may have been in connection with the three annual pilgrimage feasts. Returning once again to the parallel with Samuel, we recall that after Hannah delivered her son to the tabernacle, she visited him regularly.

1Sam. 2:19 Moreover his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.

If Jephthah’s daughter did indeed serve at the tabernacle, the gatherings described in v. 40 may have originated as visits to her, perhaps by the very companions who had accompanied her upon the mountains in v. 38.

²⁸ The verb also appears in Hos 8:9, 10, where it describes some sort of financial transaction.

Judges 10-12: Jephthah and the Minor Judges

Gideon, Judges 8	Jephthah, Judges 12
8:1 And the men of Ephraim said unto him , Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst קרא H7121 us not , when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites?	12:1 And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward [or: to Zaphon], and said unto Jephthah , Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call קרא H7121 us to go with thee?
And they did chide ריב H7378 with him sharply.	we will burn thine house upon thee with fire.
2 And he said unto them, What have I done now in comparison of you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? 3 God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you?	2 And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at great strife with the children of Ammon; and when I called זעק H2199 you, ye delivered me not out of their hands. 3 And when I saw that ye delivered me not, I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon, and the LORD delivered them into my hand: wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day, to fight against me?
Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that.	4 Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim:

Table 3: Ephraim's Contentions with Gideon and Jephthah

12:1-6, Diplomacy and the Ephraimite Threat

This interview resembles Gideon's exchange with Ephraim in ch. 8 (Table 3, chart). Ephraim's motive in both cases is probably greed for spoil. The Midianites and their camels had ornaments of gold. We don't read this about the Ammonites, but Ephraim doesn't know this, and in any event the weapons dropped by the fleeing warriors would be very valuable.

Ephraim is not mentioned in the first cycle in Judges, that involving Othniel of Judah, but we can trace a progression in the next three. Let's review the history (chart):

Ehud of Benjamin summons them to decimate Moab as they fled from Jericho:

Jdg 3:27 And it came to pass, when he was come, that he blew a trumpet **in the mountain of Ephraim**, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mount, and he before them. 28 And he said unto them, Follow after me: for the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. And they went down after him, and **took the fords of Jordan** toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over.

When Barak musters the tribes against Sisera, Ephraim responds, but weakly because of pagan sympathies:

Judg. 5:14 some from **Ephraim**, whose root is in Amalek²⁹

Gideon, like Ehud, asks Ephraim to participate in the clean-up as Midian flees across the Jordan:

Jdg 7:24 And Gideon sent messengers throughout all **mount Ephraim**, saying, Come down against the Midianites, and take before them the waters unto Bethbarah and Jordan. Then all the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and took the waters unto Bethbarah and Jordan.

²⁹ The revised rendering reflects the insight that Ephraim was half-hearted in their support because of their tolerance of the pagan presence (12:15)

Judges 10-12: Jephthah and the Minor Judges

In spite of this, Ephraim complains in 8:1-2 that they were not summoned to the original battle in the Valley of Jezreel, and thus lost the opportunity of gathering spoil there.

So Ephraim is timid. They are not in the forefront of the battle, but want to come in after the victory and share in the spoil. Perhaps that is why no major judge comes from Ephraim. Deborah lives in the border region between Benjamin and Ephraim, but her main purpose is to encourage Barak, from Naphthali:

Judg. 4:5 And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and **Bethel in mount Ephraim**: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

As we have noted, the fact that a woman had to serve indicates the lack of men.

When God needs a judge in Ephraim, he brings in one from Issachar, again suggesting a lack of men ready to step up to the task:

Judg. 10:1 And after Abimelech there arose to defend Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in mount Ephraim.

The only real candidate for an Ephraimite judge is the very last one, Abdon.

Judg. 12:15 And Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died, and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the mount of the Amalekites.

But we will see that he is a self-promoter, and his tribal affiliation is unclear.

So Ephraim is timid, not a tribe of leaders, but they like to complain against some of those who do seek to lead. Both aspects of their conduct are a warning to us. We are engaged in spiritual warfare against the powers of darkness, and Paul would exhort us, as he did Timothy, to be “good soldier[s] of Jesus Christ” (2 Ti 2:3), and as he did the Ephesians, to “put on the whole armor of God” (Eph 6:11). But far too many believers prefer to wait for others to win the victory and then step in to enjoy the spoils, and along the way they complain against those who are engaged in the heat of the battle. May God give us grace to recognize when we are behaving like Ephraimites, and strength by his Spirit to overcome their weakness.

There may be a reason that Ephraim complains against Gideon and Jephthah, but not against Othniel, Ehud, and Barak. Both Gideon and Jephthah are from the tribe of Manasseh, which stands in a special relation to Ephraim.

Ephraim and Manasseh were brothers, born to Joseph in Egypt (chart):

Gen. 41:50 And unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, ... 51 And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: ... 52 And the name of the second called he Ephraim: ...

Manasseh was the first-born. Jacob promoted Joseph's two sons to the status of his own sons, thus effectively giving Joseph a double portion of the birthright. However, he deliberately gave the primary blessing to the younger of the two:

Gen. 48:13 And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near unto him. 14 And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the firstborn. ... 20 ... and he set Ephraim before Manasseh.

In the later history of Israel, Ephraim comes to represent the entire northern kingdom:

Judges 10-12: Jephthah and the Minor Judges

Isa 7:1 And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the **king of Syria**, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, **king of Israel**, went up toward Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it. 2 And it was told the house of David, saying, **Syria** is confederate with **Ephraim**.

Ephraim may feel particularly defensive about its position, since Manasseh was the older brother. They may be jealous that God never chooses a major judge from them, while two judges come from Manasseh. They feel that as the tribe whom Jacob blessed first, they should be consulted on all affairs involving Manasseh—even though they are too timid to take the lead.

Again, Ephraim's conduct is a warning to us. The church is full of those like "Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence" (3 John 1:9), or the mother of James and John, seeking to promote them among the disciples (Matt 20:20). Instead, we are to "prefer one another" (Rom 12:10) and "each esteem other better than themselves" (Php 2:3).

12:1 And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward [or: to Zaphon],—A move to the north would make no sense, but there was a town named "North" just across the Jordan from Ephraim (Figure 5, chart), and it would be reasonable for them to come here to negotiate with Jephthah.

Their complaint is very similar to that against Gideon (Table 3).

and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call קרא H7121 us to go with thee?—The two challenges open in the same way, with almost the same words. Why did you leave us out of the action?

Ephraim, along with Judah and Benjamin, felt the Ammonite oppression, before Jephthah was recruited to lead the resistance:

Judg. 10:9 Moreover the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore distressed.

But Jephthah called none of these tribes to prepare for the battle. Empowered and led by the Spirit, he fought alone.

we will burn thine house upon thee with fire.—This time, they not only strive with the judge from Manasseh, but threaten violence.

2 And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at great strife ריב H7379 with the children of Ammon;—Better, "I am a man of contention—I, and my people, and the children of Ammon, exceedingly."³⁰ His whole life has been marked by contention—first with his own family (who cast him out), then with the Ammonites. The the verb form of the word he uses to describe himself is the one that became attached to Gideon after he contended with Baal, in the nickname "Jerubbaal," "Let Baal strive" (Judg 6:32). The verb also appears in the description of Ephraim's treatment of Gideon in 8:1. The implication is, "I'm a man of strife. First my brethren strove with me. Then the Ammonites came along, and now you."

and when I called יצק H2199 you, ye delivered me not out of their hands.—Jephthah uses a different verb from that in Ephraim's accusation. The verb here often indicates a call for help issued in the heat of conflict, rather than a preparatory muster. We have very limited details on

³⁰ Thus Block.

the battle with Ammon, and Jephthah may well have tried to summon additional forces in the midst of the conflict.³¹

3 And when I saw that ye delivered me not, I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon, and the LORD delivered them into my hand: wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day, to fight against me?

—Note the prominence of the first personal pronoun “I, me” here and in v. 2.

Individual	Spiritual Victory	Fleshly Failing
Jephthah	Judg 11:32-33, over Ammon	Judg 12:4-6, war with Ephraim
Gideon	Judg 7, over Midian	Judg 8, vengeance on Zebah and Zalmunna; abuse of Succoth and Penueh; golden ephod
David	Victories in 2 Samuel: ark (ch. 6), covenant (ch. 7), Mephibosheth (ch. 9), secure borders (ch. 8, 10)	2 Samuel 11, Bathsheba
Elijah	1 Kings 18, contest with prophets of Baal on Mt Carmel	1 Ki 19:4, spiritual depression
Paul	2 Cor 12:7b the abundance of the revelations	2 Cor 12:7a exalted above measure

Table 4: Fleshly Failings follow Spiritual Victories

Jephthah calls what Dr. Fullerton would call “a bad case of first personal pronoun perpendicularitis.” Contrast the impersonal nature of his argument with Ammon. The victory was due to the Spirit of God (11:29), but he now focuses on himself. Something has changed. At first, he withdrew from family conflict until he was called for help. Now he is full of his own importance, and confrontational.

4 Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim:—

When the Lord fought Ammon, he gave victory through Jephthah alone (11:32-33). Even when Jephthah cried to Ephraim for help, he received none. It was a spiritual victory. Now Jephthah assembles all the men of Gilead. They are the subjects of the following verbs. The conflict with Ephraim is waged in the strength of the flesh.

The Spirit has recorded many examples of this sequence of spiritual victory followed by a lapse into the flesh. We need to be on guard against it (Table 4, chart).

Gideon, after his miraculous victory in ch. 7, moves in the flesh against Zebah and Zalmunna in ch. 8, in the process attacking the Israelite towns of Succoth and Penueh, and then sets up a rival sanctuary with a golden ephod.

David in the early chapters of 2 Samuel experiences many instances of spiritual victory: he brings the ark to Jerusalem (ch. 6), the Lord makes a special covenant with him (ch. 7), he reconciles with the house of Saul by bringing Mephibosheth into his household (ch. 9), and he secures the kingdom with great military victories against surrounding nations (ch. 8, 10). Then he sins grievously with Bathsheba (ch. 11).

Elijah in 1 Kings 18 experiences a great victory over the prophets of Baal, only to melt in fear in the next chapter: “take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers” (19:4).

Paul recognizes that the exceptional revelations he received make him vulnerable to such an attack, and that what his physical sufferings are in fact God’s deliverance from that attack:

31 Compare the history of Barak: they are listed as among the combatants (5:14), even though they are not named in his original call (Judg 4:10).

2Co 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.

and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim,—Jephthah assembles an army from Gilead, but then disappears from the action. He appears to have lost control of his force.

because they said, Ye Gileadites are fugitives פליטים of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites.—Their excuse is a taunt from Ephraim against Gilead, claiming that the Gileadites are outcast members of Ephraim. Recall the fraternal relation between the two tribes. Gilead was a grandson of Manasseh (Num 26:29). The term “fugitives, refugees” suggests a setting similar to the book of Ruth, which fits about this time. Just as Elimelech of Bethlehem took refuge in Moab in a time of famine, some Ephraimites may have fled famine or other problems by moving to the land occupied by their brother Manasseh to the east of the Jordan. Compare also 1 Sam 13:7.

5 And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites:—For the third time blood stains the Jordan. Twice before (Moab in ch 3, Midian in ch. 8), Ephraim slew the enemy. Now Gilead is killing Ephraimites—but not just those who came to Zaphon to complain.

and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped פליטים said, Let me go over;—“Which were escaped” is the same term translated “fugitives” in v. 4. Ephraim’s antagonistic attitude in v. 1 stirs up Gileadite animosity against Ephraimites already resident in Gilead. Those fugitives attempt to return home to escape discrimination, but Gilead occupies the fords of Jordan and wipes them out in an early example of inter-tribal ethnic cleansing.

that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay; 6 Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right.—The dialects of Ephraim and eastern Manasseh had diverged,³² distinguishing native-born Gileadites from Ephraimite refugees. Standard Hebrew pronunciation distinguishes *s* and *sh*, as did the dialect of Gilead, but people from Ephraim couldn’t hear or articulate the difference. Like Peter in the house of the high priest betraying the Lord (Mark 14:70), or a Texan in Michigan, they were marked by their speech.

Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.—This number is probably dominated by Ephraimite refugees seeking to return home as quickly as possible to escape the growing animosity they faced in the east.

12:7, Losing a Leader

7 And Jephthah judged Israel six years.—Following his local victory over Ammon, Jephthah’s leadership is respected throughout the nation.

Then died Jephthah the Gileadite, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.—Judges records nine burials (Table 5). In every other case we know where

³² See Joüon-Muraoka §5m for a discussion of the Hebrew sibilant the Hebrew alphabet emerged, but are often non-phonemic in the distinct to merit separate characters, though the difference between

Ref	Person	Place
2:9	Joshua	Timnathheres
8:32	Gideon	Ophrah
10:2	Tola	Shamir
10:5	Jair	Camon
12:7	Jephthah	one of the cities of Gilead
12:10	Ibzon	Bethlehem
12:12	Elon	Aijalon
12:15	Abdon	Pirathon
16:31	Samson	buryingplace of Manoah

Table 5: Burials in Judges

Judges 10-12: Jephthah and the Minor Judges

Ref	10:1-2	10:3-5	10:6-12:7 Jephthah R5	12:8-10	12:11-12	12:13-15
Name	Tola	Jair		Ibzan	Elon	Abdon
Tribe	Issachar	Gilead (Manasseh?)		Judah	Zebulun	Ephraim?
Intro	arose	arose		judged	judged	judged
Details	save Israel; dwelt in Ephraim	30 sons, 30 ass colts, 30 cities		30 sons, 30 dtrs, 30 dtrs in law		40 sons, 30 nephews, 70 ass colts
Judged Israel ...	23 years	22 years		7 years	10 years	8 years
Died, buried in ...	Shamir	Camon		Bethlehem	Aijalon	Pirathon

Table 6: The Pattern of the Minor Judges

the person was buried, but Jephthah's tomb remains unknown. This feature offers a fourth parallel³³ between him and Moses, of whom it is written,

Deut 34:6 no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.

Many cultures decorate the tombs of their departed leaders. The landscape of Israel is dotted with buildings and monuments marking the graves of biblical heroes and Arab sheikhs. France reveres the tomb of Napoleon in the Dôme des Invalides, England's greatest heroes are commemorated in Westminster Abbey, and even some of our presidents lie in state at their presidential libraries. But no man can visit the tomb of Moses, or the tomb of Jephthah. And in this they both anticipate the greatest leader of all, our Lord Jesus. We have a pretty good idea where his tomb was, but unlike theirs, it is empty:

Mat 28:6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

12:8-15, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon

Two minor judges (Tola and Jair in 10:1-5) precede Jephthah, and three more follow him: Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon. They follow a regular pattern (Table 6, chart): they "arise" or "judge" Israel for a period of time, die, and are buried. In four of the five cases the writer gives us additional details of interest. Tola, though belonging to Issachar, served in Ephraim, and he is said to "save" Israel, perhaps from the chaos after Abimelech's abortive attempt at kingship. He is the only one of the five who does the major judges' job of "saving" Israel. The details for three of the other four judges describe large families, stables, and territories.

These judges are called "minor" because they do not follow the pattern established with the other judges of Rebellion, divine Retribution through an adversary, Repentance (or at least crying to the Lord), divine Rebuke, and Restoration through the judge.

The minor judges are distributed throughout the nation (Figure 1, chart).³⁴ And they are all concentrated at the end of the period (Figure 4, chart), when the land no longer has "rest."

³³ In addition to returning from a far land to deliver his brethren who rejected him, "passing over" the lands of Transjordan, and receiving the Spirit of the Lord.

³⁴ There is reason to question the assignment of Pirathon to Manasseh, as Figure 1 does, since 12:15 assigns it to Ephraim. See notes.

Instead of being raised up by God or chosen by the people to save the nation, these judges appear on their own, probably following the example of Abimelech in stepping into a power vacuum to assert their own authority.

12:8 And after him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel. 9 And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters,—The large number of children born to Jair, Ibzan, and Abdon indicate that they had numerous wives. In this, they follow the example of Gideon:

Jdg 8:30 And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives.

whom he sent abroad, and took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons.—Ibzan is using his children to establish relations with other prominent families outside of his own territory. Treaty by marriage is a common practice, persisting even to Europe in the 20th century, and came to its peak under Solomon:

1Ki 11:1 But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites;

And he judged Israel seven years. 10 Then died Ibzan, and was buried at Bethlehem.

11 And after him Elon, a Zebulonite, judged Israel; and he judged Israel ten years. 12 And Elon the Zebulonite died, and was buried in Aijalon in the country of Zebulun.—Elon alone of the minor judges has no additional details recorded about his life.

13 And after him Abdon the son of Hillel, a Pirathonite, judged Israel. 14 And he had forty sons and thirty nephews, that rode on threescore and ten ass colts:—Like Jair and Ibzan, Abdon has many wives, and like Jair, he takes pains to mark the favored status of his offspring (including in his case his nephews) by mounting them on asses. Recall Deborah's description of the three levels of the population whom she calls to praise the Lord for victory over Jabin:

Jdg 5:10 Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and [ye that] walk by the way.

Nobles ride on asses; the elders of the city sit in judgment, and common people have to walk.

and he judged Israel eight years. 15 And Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died, and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim,—Pirathon was a border town between Manasseh and Ephraim (see note), making Abdon the only judge that Ephraim can claim as its own. But the town's tribal affiliation is not its most important characteristic:

in the mount of the Amalekites.—The territory around Pirathon was remembered as “the mount of the Amalekites,” a perennial enemy of Israel who joined with Eglon of Moab (Judg 3:13) and with the Midianites (6:3, 33; 7:12) in attacking the nation during the period of the Judges. Instead of driving them out, Ephraim tolerates their presence, which may explain the tribe's weak showing in the book.

As the concluding chapters will repeatedly remind us, Judges describes how God governed his people during the period when “there was no king in Israel” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25), no centralized authority or standard way of doing things. Some people were uncomfortable with this state of affairs, and Abimelech actually tried to remedy it by setting himself up as king. To a lesser degree, the minor judges show the same tendency. Unlike the major judges, who were either raised up by God or recruited by their fellows, the minor judges simply “arise,” taking power apparently on their own initiative. And the details associated with three of them, as well as

Judges 10-12: Jephthah and the Minor Judges

with Gideon, illustrate the temptation to set up a worldly kingship. Recall the Lord's warning to Israel before they entered the land (chart):

Deut 17:14 When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me; 15 Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother. 16 But he shall not **multiply horses** to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. 17 Neither shall he **multiply wives** to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly **multiply** to himself **silver and gold**.

It's worth recalling that these three areas of weakness correspond to the three requirements that God places upon his people:

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~~ thine **abundance**.

The heart, soul, and abundance correspond to the three main motivations that God has given us. The heart is the center of our psychology, our sense of self and how we relate to other people. the soul is the life force, the source of our desire to be comfortable physically. Abundance deals with our economic sense, the love of beautiful things, things that go beyond the bare necessities of life. These correspond to the three facets of the world that John identifies in his first epistle:

1John 2:16 For all that is in the world, the **lust of the flesh**, and the **lust of the eyes**, and the **pride of life**, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

The lust of the flesh arises when we do not love the Lord with all of our soul, our life force, and manifests itself in the kingly temptation to have many wives. The lust of the eyes, seeking possessions, comes when we do not love the Lord with all our abundance. Kings show this weakness when they amass to themselves silver and gold. The pride of life, exalting ourselves above other people, occurs when we fail to love the Lord with all our heart, and leads kings to seek military strength. These three facets emerge over and over throughout the Old and New testaments, at least a dozen times.³⁵ They define the dimensions of the temptation in the garden to which Eve succumbed, and of the temptation in the wilderness in which our Lord triumphed.

³⁵ These are recorded in *The Three Choices*,
<https://www.cyber-chapel.org/DoctrinalStudies/ThreeChoices/ThreeChoices.pdf>.

Judges 10-12: Jephthah and the Minor Judges

These are the three points on which Solomon failed, and Gideon and three of the minor judges also imitate these marks of pagan kings (Table 7, chart). The minor judges warn us of how easy it is to let down our guard, and serve our own lusts instead of devoting all that we are, emotionally, economically, and physically, to the Lord.

	Horses/Heart/Pride	Wives/Soul/Flesh	Silver & Gold/Abundance/Eyes
Gideon, Judges 8		30 And Gideon had threescore and ten sons ... for he had many wives .	26 And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold ; ...
Jair, Judges 10	4 And he had thirty sons that rode on thirty ass colts , ...	4 And he had thirty sons and they had thirty cities
Ibzan, Judges 12		9 And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters , whom he sent abroad, and took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons.	
Abdon, Judges 12	14 And he had forty sons and thirty nephews, that rode on threescore and ten ass colts :	14 And he had forty sons and thirty nephews,	
Solomon, 1 Kings 10	26 And Solomon ... had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, ... (from Egypt, 1 Ki 10:28)	3 And he had seven hundred wives , princesses, and three hundred concubines:	21 And all king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold , and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; ... silver ... was nothing accounted of ...

Table 7: Major Failings of the Minor Judges (and others)

Notes

Notes on the Revised Chronology

Table 8 (a live spreadsheet in ods) sets forth the details on the revised chronology in Figure 4.

Cycle	Judge	Constraints	Region	Oppres- sion	Rest	Judged	Other	Jephth. 300	Sol 480	Length of Judges	Start Date	End Date	Notes
	Exodus to Kadesh						1		1		1446	1445	
	Kadesh to Zered						38		38		1445	1407	
	Zered to Entry						1	1	1		1407	1406	
	Conquest						7	7	7		1406	1399	Hoehner n. 33
	2:7 gap						8	8	8		1399	1391	to make up 480
1	Othniel		Judah?	8	40			48	48	48	1391	1343	
2	Ehud	3:12 did evil again	Benjamin	18	80			98	98	98	1343	1245	
3	Shamgar		SW (Philistines)										Concurrent with 4 oppression
4	Deb/Barak	4:1 did evil again	Jezreel	20	40			60	60	60	1245	1185	
5	Gideon	6:1 did evil	Jezreel	7	40			47	47	47	1185	1138	Same apostasy in this area as Deb/Barak
	(Abimelech)	8:33 when Gideon was dead	Shechem					3	3	3	1138	1135	
6	Tola	10:1 after Abimelech	Mt Ephraim			23		23	23	23	1135	1112	
7	Jair	10:3 after him	Gilead			22			22	22	1112	1090	overlap with 6 possible
8	Jephthah	10:6 did evil again	Gilead	18		6		18					Concurrent with 12
9	Ibzan	12:8 after him	Judah (Bethlehem)			7							1. partial overlaps possible
10	Elon	12:11 after him	Zebulun			10							2, with overlaps, restrict to 22 years, fitting within 40 years of Philistine oppression
11	Abdon	12:13 after him	Ephraim			8							
12	Samson	13:1 did evil again	Dan	40		20			40	40	1090	1050	20 part of 40; ends 1 Sam 7 Battle of Mizpeh. Date per Wood p. 14
	Eli												Concurrent with 12
	Samuel												Concurrent with 12
	Saul						40		40		1050	1010	
	David						40		40		1010	970	
	Solomon						4		4		970	966	
	Temple										966		

Totals

410 313 480 341

Table 8: Details for Revised Chronology

עבר in ch. 10-12

These chapters represent a concentration of the verb עבר (H5674) “pass over, cross, transgress.” Error: Reference source not found and Figure 11 show the Accordance and LDP plots for this verb in Judges. Only the first instance (2:20) has the ethical sense “transgress”; the others all refer to movement.

The concentration is rooted in Jephthah’s account of the conquest to the king of Ammon (11:17, 19, 20), followed immediately by the account in 11:29 of Jephthah’s passing over. The point appears to be that he is reenacting the conquest.

Note how much clearer the concentration is in the LDP than in the window-based plot used by Accordance.

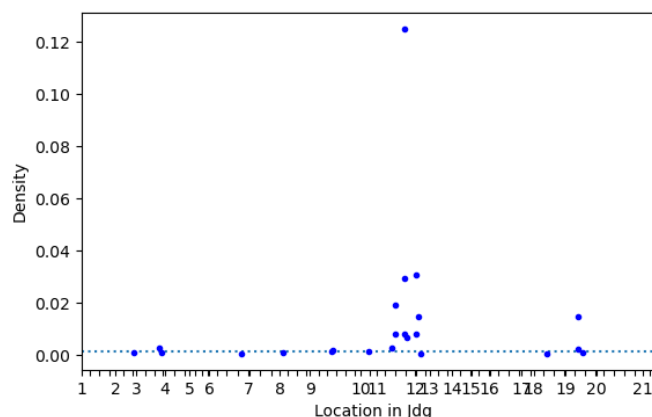


Figure 11: עבר in Judges (Linguistic Density Plot)

Place Names in the History of Jephthah

Ref	Significance	ID (Rasmussen)
11:1, 5 land of Tob	Where Jephthah fled from his brethren	Et-Taiyibeh (266218), 45 mi. NE of Amman Jordan.
10:7; 11:11, 29 Mizpeh	Gideon's home; place of covenant with elders	Kh. Jalad (223169), 15 mi. NW of Amman in Jordan; S of Jabbok, 14 mi. in Gilead.
11:13 Arnon, Jabbok, Jordan	Area that Ammon contests	
11:16 Kadesh		
11:19 Heshbon		
11:20 Jahaz		possibly Kh. el-Medeyiyeh (236110), E of Dead Sea, 11 mi. SE of Medeba.
11:26, 33 Aroer		Arair (228097), ca. 14 mi. E of Dead Sea on N bank of Arnon.
11:33 Minnith		
11:33 Abel keramim		Uncertain; possibly Naur (228142), 8 mi. SW of Amman in Jordan.
12:1 Zaphon		possibly T. es-Saidiyeh (204186), 17 mi. SSE of Beth Shan, just E of Jordan River.

Mizpeh³⁶ is central to the history, but its location is problematic. The name means “watchtower.” It can easily be applied to any elevated location, and several distinct places clearly bear this name, including the land of Mizpeh around Hermon (Josh 11:3), a location in the Moab of

³⁶ Or Mizpah; the MT varies the vocalization, but without clear distinction in reference

David's day (1 Sam 22:3), and a location west of Jordan in Benjamin (Josh 18:26). Rasmussen follows Rainey in placing it south of Jordan, probably on the basis of Ramathmizpeh in the city list of Gad (Josh 13:26). But it is clear that Gad's territory, at least by Jordan, extended "unto the edge of the sea of Chinnereth" (Josh 13:27), therefore well north of the Jabbok.

This particular Mizpeh was apparently a holy site:

Judg. 11:11 Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words **before the LORD in Mizpeh**.

Such status might well have been conveyed by the treaty between Laban and Jacob concluded at a location in Mount Gilead (Gen 31:25), to which Jacob gave the name, invoking the Lord's superintendence of their vow:

Gen. 31:48 And Laban said, This heap is a witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galeed; 49 And **Mizpah**; for he said, The LORD watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another.

This historical association would make it a potent venue for just such an agreement as Jephthah makes with the men of Gilead in 11:11. Jacob's Mizpeh must be north of the Jabbok, for the meeting with Laban takes place before he crosses the river.

10:18 in מי האיש

The expression may be an echo of the repeated challenge in Deut 20:5-8, where four times the officers challenge the assembled army, "What man is he ...?" to excuse those with disqualifying conditions. Gideon invoked this criterion in 7:3. Apparently, when Gideon surveys their militia, after this process nobody is left, and they're left with the opposite problem: "What man is he who will fight?"

Jephthah's Vow

Judg. 11:31 Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, **shall surely be the LORD'S** וְהָיָה לַיהוָה, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.

Advocates of a dedication theory: Edersheim, Cassel, Adam Clarke, Willard Winter (College Press), K&D on 11:39.

Note the consequences, childlessness, with Jephthah's very name, "[YHWH] has opened [the womb]." His whole name reflects the value of children, and now his line is cut off.

Clarke suggests reading the suffix עלִיתָהּ as indirect rather than direct object, but Clines' dictionary gives no instance of this construction. The accusative is always the thing offered, and the one to whom it is offered is marked with ל.

expressing Dedication of Persons to the Lord ליהוה

Ex. 13:11 And it shall be when the LORD shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites, as he swear unto thee and to thy fathers, and shall give it thee, 12 That thou shalt set apart **unto the LORD** לַיהוָה all that openeth the matrix, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males shall be the **LORD'S** לַיהוָה.

Num 3:11 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 12 And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites **shall be mine** **והיו לי**; 13 Because all the firstborn are **mine**; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: **mine shall they be** **לי יהיו**: I am the LORD.

Num. 3:45 Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle; and the Levites **shall be mine** **והיו לי**: I am the LORD.

Num. 8:14 Thus shalt thou separate the Levites from among the children of Israel: and the Levites **shall be mine** **והיו לי** .

Mal. 3:17 And **they shall be mine** **והיו לי**, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

Existence of Dedicated Group of Women at Tabernacle

NB: **צבא** means “to serve,” used often thus of the Levites.

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.

ארץ + Tribe Name

ארץ plus proper noun almost always refers to a nation (Moab, Edom, Egypt) or ethnic group (Canaan). Here are instances where it is a tribe. I collected these to study whether the expression might indicate a more general area than the tribal name alone, in considering the assignment of Pirathon to Ephraim in 12:15, but the usage does not seem to support such a conclusion.

Judg. 12:12 And Elon the Zebulonite died, and was buried in Aijalon in **the country of Zebulun**.

Judg. 21:21 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**.

1Sam. 9:16 To morrow about this time I will send thee a man out of **the land of Benjamin**, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto me.

1Sam. 13:7 And some of the Hebrews went over Jordan to **the land of Gad and Gilead**. As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

1Sam. 30:16 And when he had brought him down, behold, they were spread abroad upon all the earth, eating and drinking, and dancing, because of all the great spoil that they had taken out of the land of the Philistines, and out of **the land of Judah**.

2Sam. 21:14 And the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son buried they in **the country of Benjamin** in Zelah, in the sepulchre of Kish his father: and they performed all that the king commanded. And after that God was intreated for the land.

1Kings 15:20 So Benhadad hearkened unto king Asa, and sent the captains of the hosts which he had against the cities of Israel, and smote Ijon, and Dan, and Abelbethmaachah, and all Cinneroth, with all **the land of Naphtali**.

2Kings 15:29 In the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglathpileser king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abelbethmaachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all **the land of Naphtali**, and carried them captive to Assyria.

2Kings 23:24 Moreover the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in **the land of Judah** and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD.

2Kings 25:22 And as for the people that remained in **the land of Judah**, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, even over them he made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, ruler.

Affiliation of Pirathon

Block questions the description of Pirathon as “in the land of Ephraim,” since the best candidate for Pirathon (modern Fara’ata) lies about 2 km north of the Wadi Kanah, in the territory assigned to Manasseh (Josh 17:9, 10). The phonetic agreement of the names is excellent, leading Rainey and Rasmussen to make this identification.

Conder and Kitchner note that this name is documented only since the 14th century, while the Samaritan Chronicle in the 12th century calls the place Ophrah. I have been unable to verify the earlier name. In the version of the Samaritan Chronicle available to me (<https://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/sam/chron2.htm>), ch. 41 names Fer’ata, west of Shechem, as a refuge of infidels, but I can find no reference in the relevant chapters (38-43) to either Abdon or Ophrah.

The location of Fara’ata with respect to the Wadi Kanah, the boundary between Ephraim and Manasseh, is problematic, since this far east, a number of branches feed into the Kanah, but the valley just to the north of the distinct hill on which Fara’ata sits does drain into the Kanah, and so Fara’ata itself might well have been reckoned to Ephraim rather than Manasseh.