

Chapter Thirteen

1) And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years. 2) And there was a certain man of Zorah of the tribe of the Danites whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had no children. 3) And the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold, you are barren and have no children; but you shall conceive and bear a son. 4) Therefore beware and drink no wine or strong drink and eat nothing unclean, 5) for lo, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from birth; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines." 6) Then the woman came and told her husband, "A man of God came to me, and his countenance was like the countenance of the angel of God, very terrible; I did not ask him whence he was, and he did not tell me his name; 7) but he said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son; so then drink no wine or strong drink and eat nothing unclean, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from birth to the day of his death.'" 8) Then Manoah entreated the Lord and said, "O, Lord, I pray you, let the man of God whom you send come again to us and teach us what we are to do with the boy that will be born." 9) And God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman as she sat in the field; but Manoah her husband was not with her. 10) And the woman ran in haste and told her husband, "Behold, the man who came to me the other day has appeared to me." 11) And Manoah arose and went after his wife and came to the man and said to him, "Are you the man who spoke to this woman?" And he said, "I am." 12) And Manoah said, "Now when your words come true, what is to be the boy's manner of life, and what is he to do?" 13) And the angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "Of all that I said to the woman let her beware. 14) She may not eat of anything that comes from the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink or eat any unclean thing; all that I commanded her let her observe." 15) Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, "Pray, let us detain you and prepare a kid for you." 16) And the angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "If you detain me, I will not eat of your food; but if you make ready a burnt offering, then offer it to the Lord." (For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the Lord.) 17) And Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, "What is your name so that, when your words come true, we may honor you?" 18) And the angel of the Lord said to him, "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?" 19) So Manoah took the kid with the cereal offering and offered it upon the rock to the Lord, to him who works wonders. 20) And when the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar while Manoah and his wife looked on; and they fell on their faces to the ground. 21) The angel of the Lord appeared no more to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the Lord. 22) And Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God." 23) But his wife said to him, "If the Lord had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and a cereal offering at our hands or shown us all these things, or now announced to us such things as these." 24) And the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the boy grew, and the Lord blessed him. 25) And the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshta-ol.

The conjunctive *v-* begins this new chapter in a familiar yet depressing way, that is, Israel's chronic tendency to do evil (*rah*, cf. 11.27) noted last in 10.6 in a similar situation. The evil isn't spelled out—it doesn't have to because we're so familiar with it—but is related to the worship of Canaanite gods. If we could put it such, the only redeeming factor here as elsewhere is that Israel did evil in the Lord's sight or literally, in his eyes. That means the Lord was ever attentive to Israel throughout her apostasy, never abandoning her, even though she was blind to his divine care.

Vs. 1 makes a matter-of-fact transition, if you will from Israel doing evil to giving them into the hands of the Philistines. Judges first mentions them in 3.31, a tribe destined to plague Israel over the ensuing generations. This time the oppression lasts forty years, details not being given but can be surmised based on previous such instances.

Somewhere within this time span of forty years a certain man is mentioned rendered literally as "one man" named Manoah whose wife (her name isn't given) was unable to have children. In other words, she was barren or *haqar* not unlike the unfortunate daughter of Jephthah in 11.37. "Now Sarai was barren; she had no child" [Gen 11.30]. So while Israel continued to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, at the same time the Lord had his eyes upon Manoah's wife. He decided to send an angel to her, the last time such a heavenly being having made an appearance was to Gideon in 6.11. There the angel came to Gideon whereas here he (chances are it was the same angel) appeared which means that the woman must have recognized his heavenly origin by what he communicated to her. Although further verses reveal this isn't so, nevertheless she had an intimation this was true but couldn't prove it. Such give-and-take is necessary for trust instead of a full-blown manifestation.

The first word out of the angel's mouth is behold or *hineh*, often employed to introduce some dramatic piece of information (cf. 11.34). Usually angels make a quick entrance and an equally quick exit, but here he lingers longer, speaking with the woman in some detail as to the impending birth of a son. Although she didn't realize it at the time, this son is destined to save Israel yet again from her enemies. After having made his appearance, the angel addresses what most likely the woman was expecting, namely, that she would conceive a child. During her impending pregnancy he cautions her by the command *shamar* (cf. 2.22) or beware, that is to take guard over herself which must have increased her expectation. In addition to refraining from wine, she is to do the same regarding strong drink and not to eat unclean food. The former is *shekar* and can refer to drunkenness. This is very important, being mentioned twice in vss. 7 and 14. "Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler; and whoever is led astray by it is not wise" [Prov 11.21]. The latter more specifically implies religious observance, food being *tame* and detailed throughout the book of Leviticus as well as Deuteronomy. In sum, Manoah's wife is to follow the Torah so that her child will, in turn, do the same.

In vs. 5 the angel repeats his words as in vs. 3 about bearing a son almost as though she didn't hear it or more accurately, to make certain she got the drift of his message. Her son is to be called a Nazirite as soon as he comes from the womb, this word meaning separated and is delineated in some detail in Chapter Six of Numbers. There vs. 2 elaborates on the proper name and sums up what's involved. Note that this pertains to both a man and a woman: "When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to separate (*nazar*) himself to the Lord." In the verse at hand, this child's name isn't given, part of a period of waiting until his ritual circumcision as is the case with Jesus (cf. Lk 2.21). As for these Nazirites, we don't hear about them from Numbers Six to the present but can assume that throughout the wearisome bouts of falling away from and returning to the Lord they were instrumental in warding off divine wrath just by their fidelity. They may have had neither priestly nor political power, even were barely tolerated and sometimes despised throughout these travails, acting as leaven within dough.

As for this yet-to-be-named child announced by the nameless angel to the nameless woman, his mission is to commence immediately from birth, being whisked away not unlike Samuel from Hannah: "then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head" [1Sam 1.11]. These words are proper to a Nazirites though nothing explicit as to this is mentioned but intimated strongly. Precisely at that time this child will begin to deliver (*yashah*, cf. 12.3) Israel from the Philistines. Obviously Manoah and his wife found it difficult to conceive of what all this meant and thus paid special attention to him from birth, watching for signs, etc. However, that would not prove to be the case since the child's growth in the Lord would remain hidden, not unlike the so-called hidden years of Jesus Christ which comprised the vast bulk of his life. Nevertheless, as time went on the Israelites could feel something stirring in their midst but couldn't quite put their finger on it.

In vs. 6 after the angel had finished his message Manoah's wife approached her husband to inform him of the situation. She must have hesitated a bit, not knowing what to make of the situation, and instead of speaking about an angel, says that he is a man of God. She had doubts her and rightly so because she had no such confirmation to allay her fears as well as to put her husband at ease. She claims the mysterious man has a face resembling God, *mar'eh* derived from the common verb to see and also means appearance. "Let me see your face, let me hear your voice" [Sg 2.14]. As for this face/appearance, she says that it belongs to an angel...not the Lord himself...and is very terrible, *yare'* (to fear) with the adverb *me'od* or excessively (cf. 12.2). She proceeds to say that this being didn't reveal anything of himself, but she was certain it was not human. Her misgivings are understandable which leads her to wonder why he didn't identify himself. Proof, if you will, would come if the words he speaks about the yet to be born Samson come true. At least this mysterious man or angel spoke of her son-to-be as a Nazirite and in terms with observance of the Torah. Chances are the mother sought out Nazirites in the vicinity, bouncing off them this incident to see if they'd concur; most

likely they did. All this would take some time to come to pass, for she hasn't yet conceived, and a good number of years will have to go by to see if her son would display any outstanding traits.

Manoah took his wife's words with a grain of salt which is why in vs. 8 he entreats the Lord, *hatar* meaning to offer incense. "Then man prays to God, and he accepts him, he comes into his presence with joy" [Job 23.26]. In the verse at hand, Manoah takes a cautious approach reflecting the same as his wife by asking the Lord...*hatar*...to send the man of God once more using "man" instead of angel. He is to teach both him and her, *yarah* meaning to point out with regard to their child about to be born. "I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go" [Ps 32.8].

Vs. 9 contains two conjunctives (*v-*): one prefaced to the verb listened and the other to the noun angel, indicative of the Lord's immediate response to Manoah's prayer, his *hatar* or what just might be involved, namely, offering incense as the verb implies. This time the angel came to his wife sitting in the field, possibly taking a break from planting or harvesting. Manoah wasn't present but certainly was on the look-out to see if this mysterious being would visit her again. Judging by the fast-paced nature of events, the angel approached the woman right away, wishing to confirm what he had said earlier. Nothing is recorded of the exchange in the field except that in vs. 10 she hastened home (*mahar*: cf. 9.48 but not mentioned there) to tell her husband about the man who had appeared "the other day" which means that the two angelic visitations were just a day or two apart. As soon as Manoah saw his wife coming in, he rushed out to greet her, knowing that something had happened.

As noted earlier, angels make a quick entry and equally quick exit. However, this time is different. Vs. 11 has Manoah rushing out to the field where the incident supposedly happened and found the "man." Right away the man/angel identified himself as having spoken with his wife though Manoah is more concerned about the genuineness of the prophecy at hand than whether he was speaking with a man or an angel. Regardless, if the prophecy proves true, there's no question that this being is from God. He test this mysterious person, if you will, by asking what manner of life the boy is to adopt. If he responds that of a Nazirite, no problem since that is essence of the original prophecy. *Mishpat* is the noun for manner of life which fundamentally means judgment and found last in 4.5 but not noted there. The man/angel doesn't let on except referring to his earlier words to Manoah's wife concerning dietary matters. She is to beware (vss. 13 and 14) of all these things as in vs. 2 where the verb, *shamar* is used a second time.

Although as in vs. 15 the text speaks of an angel, Manoah doesn't use this term when speaking with him because he's not sure of his identity. Nevertheless, he manages to detain him a bit further which is unprecedented compared with other angelic encounters. The verb is *hatsar* meaning to hold back or to shut and found in the next verse. "He it is who shall rule over my people" [1Sam 9.17]. Although Manoah offered his visitor a kid to

eat, the angel declined. However, he suggested making a burnt offering which to Manoah must have brought back memories of the tragic story of Jephthah's daughter, the same word used in 11.31. Even though this was reassuring for Manoah—the man/angel with whom he is dealing wasn't an evil spirit, given his request—vs. 16 says that still he didn't know his origin.

Finally curiosity gets the better of Manoah. In vs. 17 he asks his visitor for his name in order to honor him, *kaved* (cf. 9.9). However, he'd do this only when what his visitor speaks about the future birth of Samson. Such a statement is both a legitimate request as well as a ruse. The angel caught on right away and retorted that his name is wonderful or *pily* which has one other biblical reference: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it" [Ps 139.6]. Manoah didn't respond, knowing for certain he was dealing with the real thing and made the *holah* as requested. Vs. 19 says this offering is upon a rock, not an altar, but it is to the Lord who works wonders which is rendered literally as "to make wonders and Manoah and his wife looked on." This literal take suggests that Manoah doesn't make the burnt offering but someone else, that someone else being the angel of the Lord.

As soon as the sacrifice of a kid and cereal offering were made, the angel of the Lord ascended into heaven with the tongues of flame. That means he prepared the offering as suggested above and once done, he jumped upon it and thus ascended. The immediate response by Manoah and his wife was to fall down on their faces in worship. No human being could jump upon a sacrifice and ascend upwards in a flame, so without a doubt this was an angel, something Manoah and his wife has suspected all along but were afraid to admit until now (cf. vs. 21). As both were watching the angel ascend in the flame presumably into heaven, they knew that he wouldn't be visiting them again and expressed a sentiment of dread, of having seen God which means they will die. This echoes the experience of Gideon in 6.23: "Peace be to you; do not fear, you shall not die." Manoah's wife explains with good common sense that they wouldn't be standing there if the Lord had not accepted their burnt offering and announced what he had done, *shamah* (cf. 11.10) being used, that is, the Lord causing her and her husband to hear what the angle had communicated.

The conjunctive *v-* of vs. 24 shows the close connection between this dramatic interaction with an angel and his prophecy by Manoah's wife conceiving and giving birth to Samson whom the Lord blessed (*barak*, cf. 5.9), a fitting way to end Chapter Thirteen. The words of this verse mirror those pertaining to Jesus when he was young: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man" [Lk 2.52]. Some time after this—and it isn't specified—the divine Spirit or *Ruach* (cf. 11.29) began to stir Samson, the verb being *paham* which has four other biblical references and commonly means to be troubled. "You hold my eyelids from closing; I am so troubled that I cannot speak" [Ps 77.4]. This double meaning of *paham*, if you will, is an apt foreshadowing of Samson's life and activity: he's both stirred and causes trouble.

Chapter Fourteen

1) Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. 2) Then he came up and told his father and mother, "I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah; now get her for me as my wife." 3) But his father and mother said to him, "Is there not a woman among the daughters of your kinsmen or among all our people that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me; for she pleases me well." 4) His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord; for he was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel. 5) Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah, and he came to the vineyards of Timnah. And behold, a young lion roared against him; 6) and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion asunder as one tears a kid; and he had nothing in his hand. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. 7) Then he went down and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well. 8) And after a while he returned to take her; and he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and behold, there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey. 9) He scraped it out into his hands and went on, eating as he went; and he came to his father and mother and gave some to them, and they ate. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the carcass of the lion. 10) And his father went down to the woman, and Samson made a feast there; for so the young men used to do. 11) And when the people saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him. 12) And Samson said to them, "Let me now put a riddle to you; if you can tell me what it is, within the seven days of the feast and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty festal garments; 13) but if you cannot tell me what it is, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty festal garments." And they said to him, "Put your riddle, that we may hear it." 14) And he said to them, "Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet." And they could not in three days tell what the riddle was. 15) On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, "Entice your husband to tell us what the riddle is, lest we burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us here to impoverish us?" 16) And Samson's wife wept before him and said, "You only hate me, you do not love me; you have put a riddle to my countrymen, and you have not told me what it is." And he said to her, "Behold, I have not told my father nor my mother, and shall I tell you?" 17) She wept before him the seven days that their feast lasted; and on the seventh day he told her because she pressed him hard. Then she told the riddle to her countrymen. 18) And the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down, "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?" And he said to them, "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my

riddle." 19) And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty men of the town, and took their spoil and gave the festal garments to those who had told the riddle. In hot anger he went back to his father's house. 20) And Samson's wife was given to his companion who had been his best man.

This chapter continues through Chapter Sixteen, an extended section on the story of Samson. Apart from his renowned strength and impulsiveness, what's striking is his inherent naivete, especially dealing with his wife Delilah. You wonder how anyone could be so stupid to fall for her machinations, a Philistine woman, whose people were inimical toward Israel. Anyway, it does lend a certain charm and suspense to the ultimately tragic story.

Chapter Fourteen opens with the usual conjunctive *v-* as and, not translated in the **RSV**. The purpose, of course, is to show a close connection with the divine element in Samson's birth, the intervention of an angel when he was a young adult. Manoah and his wife had raised their son, all the while wondering how he would turn out. Now this first recorded instance of him as an adult must have shaken their faith in God. Samson's impulsiveness must have caused problems as a child and as an adolescent. It's manifest right from vs. 1 when he goes to Timnah and was captivated at once by a Philistine woman, that people hostile to Israel not just now but destined to be so for many generations to come. To Manaoh and his wife this was not just embarrassing but as close to a betrayal as could be. The reason for Samson going to Timnah isn't revealed until vs. 4, ostensibly on some kind of business. Also he was on the hunt for a woman to be his wife which would further disguise his plan. Such is the sense we get from "he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines." That is to say, suddenly he became captivated by a particular woman's beauty. Chances are Samson was alone; if he were with a family member or friend, that person would restrain him at once from consorting with the enemy.

The quick pace of action continues in vs. 2 with another conjunctive *v-* as then. Apparently Samson left Timnah in haste, possibly not finishing his business there, and blurted out to his parents that he had seen an attractive Philistine girl whose name he doesn't mention. As noted in the last paragraph, this is a ruse. Samson was aware of his impulsive nature but at least in this instance was able to have it subservient to another goal.

A conjunctive is prefaced to *hatah* (now...'and now') where Samson reveals his impulsiveness by asking his parents to get the Philistine woman as his wife. Either asking his parents was a custom or he was underage. Of course, Manoah and his wife were stunned beyond belief. In vs. 3 they come off with what you'd expect from loving parents, that is, can't Samson find a wife from among their own kin? They use the forceful words "daughters of your kinsmen" and "among all our people." Here as with the Philistines the term "daughter" seems to indicate that the woman involved, whomever she may be, is

deeply rooted in the tradition of her heritage. So to be a daughter of the Philistines implies all the customs and especially worship of gods bound up with that people. Thus the terminology reveals two radically distinct modes of life at odds with each other.

In vs. 3 both Manoah and his wife come off with the ultimate insult reserved for non-Israelites, that is, calling them uncircumcised, that being applicable to all other inhabitants of Canaan. The root of this can be traced to the covenant of circumcision with Abraham depicted in Chapter Seventeen of Genesis where a physical mark becomes the sign of a covenant “between me and you and all your descendants after you” [vs. 10]. Samson simply ignores his parents’ plea asking them to get that Philistine woman because she’s well pleasing to him, the verb *yashar* more specifically pertaining to that which is right and found next in vs. 7. Another reference is Hab 2.4: “Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fail, but the righteous shall live by his faith.”

Vs. 4 leaves us with a picture of two frustrated, deeply embarrassed parents. However, they failed to grasp that Samson’s blatant request for a Philistine bride has a goal in mind keeping with the angel’s intervention before his birth. He was seeking an occasion or *to’annah* for revenge, the only use of this noun in the Bible. While growing up, Samson felt the full brunt of the Philistines’ persecution of his people and perceived it didn’t necessarily originate from them *per se*. He knew this persecution stemmed from the fact that his people “again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord” [13.1], that familiar theme found throughout Judges. So Samson decided to adopt a tactic not tried earlier. He would adopt a pretense to get at this sworn enemy. Obviously it pained Samson to keep this ruse hidden from his parents. Even if he explained it, they wouldn’t understand. And so the gravity of the situation is summed up by vs. 4 saying “the Philistines had dominion over Israel,” *mashal* being the verb as in 9.2.

Apparently Manoah and his wife caved in to their son’s request and accompanied him back to Timnah. They left either secretly or under the pretense of assisting their son, for if the truth got out, they’d be considered as enemies of their own people. However, when reaching the vineyards in that area Samson encounters a young lion; apparently he wasn’t with his parents but alone. It gives out a roar or *sha’ag*, this verb applying to a clap of thunder or soldiers. “They open wide their mouths at me like a ravening and roaring lion” [Ps 22.13]. At once as indicated by *hineh* or behold (cf. 13.10) the Spirit or *Ruach* came upon Samson, *tsalech* suggestive of prospering or as well as attacking (cf. vs. 19). His parents weren’t surprised at this, even though the encounter with the lion was unexpected, for 13.25 says that the “Spirit of the Lord began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan.” Thus *tsalach* and rushing upon and *paham* as stirring are related. Samson sprang into action by slaying the young lion as if it were a mere kid, the verb *shasah* suggestive of cleaving or cutting into two pieces, not with a weapon but with his bare hands. “He shall tear it by its wings but shall not divide it asunder” [Lev 1.17]. He performed this extraordinary feat, however, without disclosing it to his parents.

The rest of this chapter is a matter-of-fact account of events pertinent to Samson's marriage to a Philistine woman. Although the imagery is vivid, even a bit far-fetched by our standards, there is little wiggle room for expanding upon the text, that is, from the point of view of *lectio divina*. Because of this, occasional observations are put down from this perspective.

Apparently while on his own or without his parents, Samson meets up with his Philistine bride-to-be who again pleased him (vs. 7), *yashar* as in vs. 3, though the text doesn't elaborate on this nor reveal her name. Obviously their conversation centered around getting married for vs. 8 says that Samson returned later to take her. Nothing is said of the ceremony which, because he wanted to maintain his ruse against the Philistines, was in accord with their customs which further appalled his parents. Throughout all this Samson was of a single mind, seeking an occasion against them as noted in vs. 4. In essence this is what underlays the remaining verses of Chapter Fourteen.

Some time later (literally, 'he returned days') Samson returns to the carcass of the lion he had slain in which he found a swarm of bees along with the honey they had produced. He took it, ate some and gave the rest to his parents who seemed to be in the dark as to their son's dealing with the Philistine woman. Chances are that he used this occasion to break word to them about the impending marriage and the feast which obviously would be in accord with Philistine tradition. With some reluctance Manoah met up with the bride in vs. 10 as Samson prepared a feast or *mishteh* which fundamentally means drinking. And found next in vss. 12 and 17. "And he (Lot) made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate" [Gen 19.3].

In vs. 12 Samson proposes a riddle, the verb being *chud* which occurs next in vss. 13 and 16 and has one other reference outside this context and has numerous references, Ezk 17.2: "Son of man, propound a riddle and speak an allegory to the house of Israel." In the verse at hand, *chud* is used with *chydah* which connotes something twisted or involve. "She (queen of Sheba) came to test him (king Solomon) with hard questions" [1Kg 10.1]. The bet was that Samson would give thirty linen garments as well as thirty festal ones. The riddle at hand (vs. 14) pertained to the bees within the lion's carcass which they couldn't solve.

In vs. 15 the **RSV** says that the young men to whom the riddle was proposed returned to Samson without an answer midway through the wedding celebration...four days...whereas the text says seven days, the number seven being representative of completion or perfection. So in their frustration at not being able to solve Samson's riddle and knowing that time was running out, they approached his wife to disclose its meaning. Not only did they demand an answer but showing their desperation, threatened to burn her and her father's house. Adding insult to injury they claimed that she had lured them to the wedding banquet to impoverish them whereas it was Samson who sent out the invitations. The verb *yarash* means to impoverish and found last in 11.23 as dispossessed.

Obviously the force of this threat came as a complete surprise, the woman naturally running off to inform Samson. She blurted out that he hated her and worse, that he had humiliated her before her countrymen to which Samson replied that he didn't inform his parents as well. All along he was plotting against the Philistines, trying to maneuver them into a position where he could take revenge, showing no deviation from this plan. Obviously he couldn't sustain this pressure unless helped by the divine Spirit which had inspired him from birth. In addition, the young men who were part of his wedding entourage were Philistines.

Samson's wife kept up her lament for the full seven days of the wedding feast with vs. 17 putting it dramatic fashion literally as "she wept upon him." This was in full view of those invited, including, of course, the young men who made the threat against her as well as against Samson's parents. Nothing is said of how these people responded to such a spectacle and naturally must have wondered what was going on. In other words, rumors which already were rife about this Israelites marrying a Philistine woman which didn't bode well for future relations in an already tense situation. Finally on the seventh day Samson caved in and told his wife about the riddle, for she had pressed him especially hard on this last day. Something similar would happen later with his second wife Delilah but with disastrous consequences. In fact, those who conspired with Delilah may have taken this incident as a cue. In the verse at hand the verb is *tsuq* which means to be narrow or compressed and found next in 16.16: "And when she (Delilah) pressed him hard with her words day after day and urged him, his soul was vexed to death." The second sentence of vs. 17 begins with the conjunctive *v-* as then which shows the immediate relief the woman felt at knowing the answer which she told those who were threatening her.

Finally those to whom Samson put the riddle approached him on the last day of the wedding feast, that is, the seventh, right at the last minute before the sun went down (vs. 18). All along they conspired to come up with something that would trip him up. So instead of giving an answer, they devised a riddle of their own about something sweeter than honey and stronger than a lion. Without missing a beat Samson responds enigmatically yet at the same time knowing where they got their information. That is, he speaks of "my heifer" with which they had plowed (and heifers weren't used for that), referring, of course, to having pressured his wife. Then at once as intimidated by the conjunctive *v-*, the divine *Ruach* (cf. vs. 6) came upon him mightily, the adverb contained within the verb *tsalach* as in vs. 6. Without a doubt, those in his presence felt this *Ruach* and were terrified. However, Samson left them alone and headed to Ashkelon where he slew thirty men and took the festal garments, giving them to the men who had told the riddle. It seems unclear why Samson slew those men while treating those who pressured his wife with respect. Perhaps it was a way of telling them as well as the Philistines at large not to interfere with him, this all being part of his overall plan to create a ruse to trap and hence take vengeance upon them.

This chapter concludes with Samson returning home in hot anger which is rendered by the noun *'aph* and the verb *charah* as noted in 10.7. Here this *charah* is a continuation, if you will, of the divine *Ruach* upon him, finally leaving when he cooled down. As a result of this, his wife was given to the best man of his wedding, possibly one of those who pressured her to revealing the answer to Samson's riddle. Chances are it was for her own protection, as close to a divorce as possible. If Samson chose this, he would lose his chance to infiltrate the Philistines.

Chapter Fifteen

1) After a while at the time of wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife with a kid; and he said, "I will go in to my wife in the chamber." But her father would not allow him to go in. 2) And her father said, "I really thought that you utterly hated her, so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister fairer than she? Pray take her instead." 3) And Samson said to them, "This time I shall be blameless in regard to the Philistines when I do them mischief." 4) So Samson went and caught three hundred foxes and took torches; and he turned them tail to tail and put a torch between each pair of tails. 5) And when he had set fire to the torches, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines and burned up the shocks and the standing grain as well as the olive orchards. 6) Then the Philistines said, "Who has done this?" And they said, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion." And the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire. 7) And Samson said to them, "If this is what you do, I swear I will be avenged upon you, and after that I will quit." 8) And he smote them hip and thigh with great slaughter; and he went down and stayed in the cleft of the rock of Etam. 9) Then the Philistines came up and encamped in Judah and made a raid on Lehi. 10) And the men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" They said, "We have come up to bind Samson, to do to him as he did to us." 11) Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam and said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us?" And he said to them, "As they did to me, so have I done to them." 12) And they said to him, "We have come down to bind you, that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines." And Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not fall upon me yourselves." 13) They said to him, "No; we will only bind you and give you into their hands; we will not kill you." So they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock. 14) When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the ropes which were on his arms became as flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands. 15) And he found a fresh jawbone of an ass and put out his hand and seized it, and with it he slew a thousand men. 16) And Samson said, "With the jawbone of an ass,

heaps upon heaps, with the jawbone of an ass have I slain a thousand men." 17) When he had finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone out of his hand; and that place was called Ramath-lehi. 18) And he was very thirsty, and he called on the Lord and said, "You have granted this great deliverance by the hand of thy servant; and shall I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?" 19) And God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi, and there came water from it; and when he drank, his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore the name of it was called En-hakkore; it is at Lehi to this day. 20) And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

Please note that Chapter Fifteen, as is the case with some subsequent chapters, is action-packed but admittedly contains not much from the vantage point of *lectio divina*. For the reason, the notations are rather minimal.

This new chapter begins typically with the conjunctive *v-* as but and reads literally, "and it was from days in days" which gives the sense of a considerable passage of time. Also it sets the stage for Samson taking revenge for the giving of his wife to his best man. While that's obvious, less so is his cunning to seek an occasion or *to'annah* (cf. 14.4) to take vengeance upon the Philistines. So off he goes with the present of a kid, most likely a kind of sacrificial offering, informing his father Manoah that he intends to enter his wife's chamber or *cheder* which implies an inner room (cf. 3.24 but not noted there). Manoah found himself in a difficult situation: concern for his son and keeping peace with Samson's best man at the wedding and hence the larger, more threatening Philistine community.

The last verse of the last chapter says that Samson's wife "was given" to his best man whereas here in vs. 2 Manoah is presented as having given her. He did this on the basis of a hatred of her, that of an Israelite for a Philistine, and in the same breath (again the conjunctive *v-* playing a role) blurts out that her sister is more beautiful. In haste and ultimately in vain Manoah tells his son to take this woman. Samson gives no answer but proceeds to take vengeance upon the Philistines, to bring into light that *to'annah* spoke of in the previous passage and referred to in 14.4. Samson prefaces his intent by saying that when he does, he'll be blameless, *naqah* meaning to be pure or innocent. "Then I shall be blameless and innocent of great transgression" [Ps 19.13].

Samson puts into action his *to'annah* in a rather bizarre fashion, that is, by attaching torches to the tails of some three hundred foxes. He sets them on fire and sends them into the standing grain of the Philistines as well as their olive orchards. When someone informs them that it was Samson's doing, immediately (the sense of the conjunctive *v-* in vs. 6) burned both his bride and her father. Now what seems an ever ascending spiral of violence continues with Samson swearing that he'll be avenged upon the perpetrators. The verb is *naqam* as in 16.28, the ultimate vengeance when Samson is about to pull

down the Philistine palace: “That I may be avenged upon the Philistines for one of my two eyes” [16.28].

Nevertheless Samson offers a break by saying that once finished with this *naqam*, he’ll quit or *chadal* (cf. 9.9). Obviously the Philistines were terrified since Samson didn’t spell out his intent and didn’t have time to respond because he slew them with a great slaughter or *makah* (cf. 11.33). The text says that Samson did this with hip and thigh, a note in the **RSV** saying that this is “a proverbial expression of which the original significance has been lost.” Perhaps it alludes to throwing one’s full strength into the action. Once Samson does this, he heads off to what seems to be a cave for refuge located in Etam. We have no information as to what Manoah and his wife thought about all this...surely dismayed...and must have been trying to piece these recent incidents with the angel’s message as to their son’s birth. Samson too must have been confused, having been told by his parents about the angel.

Vs. 9 has the conjunctive *v-* translated as then to show that some time had passed between Samson avenging himself with the “great slaughter” of vs. 8 and his refuge in the rock of the cleft. Out of revenge, the Philistines made a raid on the Israelites but with the more specific aim of either killing or capturing Samson. With this threat looming, the inhabitants of Judah sent an impressive force of some three thousand men to Samson. The tense stand-off ended by physically binding Samson with the intent of handing him over to the Philistines. Before doing so, they bind him to no avail. The Spirit (*Ruach*, cf. 14.19) of the Lord then rushed upon him, the verb *tsalach* again being used which corresponds to the Philistines coming out to meet him while shouting, *ruah* (cf. 7.21 but not noted there), this verb bearing a certain resemblance to *ruach*. *Tsalach* took on dramatic form as Samson slew a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass.

After such a great slaughter, in vs. 18 Samson calls on the Lord (*qara’*, cf. 7.3) to slake his thirst. He attributes this victory to the Lord as a great deliverance or *teshuhah*. “God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance” [Ps 51.14]. At the same time Samson fears that he might be captured by the Philistines, using the degrading term of uncircumcised. Immediately (the conjunctive *v-* beginning vs. 10), the Lord split open a rock which is reminiscent of the Israelites complaining to Moses about lack of water in the wilderness: “and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it that the people may drink” [Ex 17.6]. As is typical for such miraculous instances, Samson is quick to give this place a name which translates as “the spring of him who called.”

Chapter Fifteen concludes with the statement that Samson had judged Israel for twenty years. This doesn’t include the extended story of him and Delilah—a kind of insertion—because the last verse of Chapter Sixteen reads “He had judged Israel twenty years.”

Chapter Sixteen

1) Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a harlot, and he went in to her. 2) The Gazites were told, "Samson has come here," and they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. They kept quiet all night, saying, "Let us wait until the light of the morning; then we will kill him." 3) But Samson lay until midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts and pulled them up, bar and all and put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that is before Hebron. 4) After this he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. 5) And the Lords of the Philistines came to her and said to her, "Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lies and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to subdue him; and we will each give you eleven hundred pieces of silver." 6) And Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me wherein your great strength lies and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you." 7) And Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings which have not been dried, then I shall become weak, and be like any other man." 8) Then the Lords of the Philistines brought her seven fresh bowstrings which had not been dried, and she bound him with them. 9) Now she had men lying in wait in an inner chamber. And she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he snapped the bowstrings, as a string of tow snaps when it touches the fire. So the secret of his strength was not known. 10) And Delilah said to Samson, "Behold, you have mocked me and told me lies; please tell me how you might be bound." 11) And he said to her, "If they bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." 12) So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And the men lying in wait were in an inner chamber. But he snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread. 13) And Delilah said to Samson, "Until now you have mocked me and told me lies; tell me how you might be bound." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and make it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." 14) So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into the web. And she made them tight with the pin and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep and pulled away the pin, the loom and the web. 15) And she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me wherein your great strength lies." 16) And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death. 17) And he told her all his mind and said to her, "A razor has never come upon my head; for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I be shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man." 18) When Delilah saw that he had told her all his mind, she sent and called the Lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up this once, for he has told me all his mind." Then the Lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. 19) She made

him sleep upon her knees; and she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him. 20) And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he awoke from his sleep and said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." And he did not know that the Lord had left him. 21) And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze fetters; and he ground at the mill in the prison. 22) But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved. 23) Now the Lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to rejoice; for they said, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand." 24) And when the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said, "Our god has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has slain many of us." 25) And when their hearts were merry, they said, "Call Samson, that he may make sport for us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he made sport before them. They made him stand between the pillars; 26) and Samson said to the lad who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them." 27) Now the house was full of men and women; all the Lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about three thousand men and women who looked on while Samson made sport. 28) Then Samson called to the Lord and said, "O Lord God, remember me, I pray, and strengthen me, I pray, only this once, O God, that I may be avenged upon the Philistines for one of my two eyes." 29) And Samson grasped the two middle pillars upon which the house rested, and he leaned his weight upon them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. 30) And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." Then he bowed with all his might; and the house fell upon the Lords and upon all the people that were in it. So the dead whom he slew at his death were more than those whom he had slain during his life. 31) Then his brothers and all his family came down and took him and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshta-ol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had judged Israel twenty years.

The reason for Samson going to Gaza isn't given, but we can presume it has something to do with that "occasion against the Philistines" of 14.4. However, once there he came across a harlot or literally a "woman a harlot," the participle *zanah* being used (cf. 8.33). Then again, we wonder what was going through his mind,, given what Samson had done thus far and in light of a footnote to the NIV which makes the following observation about his character: "While Samson certainly possessed physical strength, he lacked moral strength which ultimately led to his ruin." This apt observation seems at odds with the *Ruach* or Spirit making him a Nazirite from birth, that his physical prowess constantly conflicted with his divine calling. Gaza is a major Philistine seaport where such harlots plied their trade, so it was easy to find one.

Samson's recent slaying of the Philistines made him a marked man. Perhaps the international air of a place like Gaza with people from all around the Mediterranean

would make him less conspicuous. However, any guise he may have adopted didn't work, for vs. 2 says that the Philistines were told of his presence among them. So they decided to trap him, *'arav* (cf. 9.34) meaning to lay an ambush. They did this at the city gate, a typical place for a harlot to live so as to attract clients. Such was the case with Rahab the prostitute who had her home in the city wall (cf. Jos 2.15). The conspirators decided to take action at dawn (*boqer* meaning daybreak), not at night, which would attract the least attention. The gates are a kind of crossroads; to carry out such an action in the dead of night would attract guards on the city walls who, in turn, would alert the authorities. Besides, it's a time when customers of the local prostitutes were leaving and others were beginning to mill around, setting up shop, etc., for the day. *Charash* is the verb for kept quiet which also means to plow, to devise or to be deaf. "Keep quiet, put your hand upon your mouth and come with us and be to us a father and a priest" [18.19].

Samson was alerted to the conspiracy against him perhaps due to unusual movement in the dead of night, suspecting that something was wrong, certainly not an attack from the outside which would have caused a general alarm by the guards. At midnight he rose at midnight and literally pulled out the city gate and posts, hauling them to near Hebron which is some thirty-eight miles away. Obviously no mean feat, especially at night and Hebron being in the hill country. Apparently the conspirators were too stunned or afraid to attack Samson, let alone follow him which means they'd fall into the hands of the hated Israelites. The first order of business, of course, was to repair the city gates lest Samson arrive with an army and make an assault. As for the conspirators, quickly they dispersed after hushing up the harlot so as to keep damage to a minimum.

Vs. 4 has the conjunctive *v-* with "after this," again to show the continuity of action and can be take to mirror Samson's impulsive nature with regard to a woman named Delilah. This is the third time he got involved with a woman, the first two (a wife and then a harlot) not being named. As far as Delilah goes, we have no information whether she became his wife or not, she being a Philistine. In a sense, the occasion Samson sought against the Philistines noted in 14.4 and referred to several times thus far hasn't been brought up. While he may have retained the intent of getting revenge upon the Philistines, what we've garnered thus far hasn't confirmed this in light of the three love affairs depicted.

Delilah seems to be either a vulnerable person whom the Philistine leaders or *seren* (cf. 3.3 but not mentioned there) preyed upon. Apparently without much persuasion she consents to their plot to capture Simon who now had, if you will, an especially high price on his head. As for the noun *seren*, it also means an axle of a chariot as though a prince were hinge for the people. In vs. 5 the Philistines appeal to something she's adept in her line of work, namely, to entice Samson or *patah* (cf. 14.5 but not noted there) which means to spread out or to open. If Delilah succeeds in this—and most likely it has sexual connotations—they will succeed. However, she is to ask about Samson's strength or *koach* (cf. 6.14). By now his proclivity for Philistine women is well known, so the conspirators

figured he would reveal this quickly. Then Delilah would give them a prearranged signal, they being nearby, and rush upon Samson and subdue him, *hanah* having a wide range of meanings such as to answer and found in the next verse.

The conjunctive *v-* beginning vs. 6 shows that Delilah puts into effect what the Philistine lords asked her to do, though we don't have a clear idea whether she does this willingly or is compelled to carry out their plan. So Delilah consents, most likely motivated by the offer of eleven hundred pieces of silver. Without missing a beat, in vs. 6 she speaks with Samson (It seems he was in the habit of frequenting her quite a bit), asking about his great strength and how he could be overcome. He responds right away with the intent of deceiving her...that occasion of 14.4...and tells her a lie which the Philistines fell for. So at this first attempt, no one knew the secret of Samson's strength, the word "secret" not being in the Hebrew text.

Despite this obvious attempt on Samson's life, his relationship with Delilah doesn't seem to have dimmed a bit which shows his inherent weakness, naivete, outright stupidity or combination of all three. So in vs. 10 Delilah complains that he had mocked her and told her lies, the verb for the former being *talal* or to heap up or to make high. "I myself will plant it upon a high and lofty mountain" [Ezk 17.22]. Samson doesn't argue but comes up with another misleading statement, again, in reference to being bound. Actually Delilah herself binds Samson as she had done in the first incident. Yet a second time the Philistines sprang upon Samson but to no avail. Delilah doesn't show the least bit of restraint in her attempt to deceive Samson, for a third time she presses him, now with shaving seven locks of hair from his head with which she bound him. Since Samson was a Nazirite and didn't shave his head, that must have been a lot of hair. Anyway, he makes good his escape but for some reason or another, stays with Delilah. By now even for those cheering for Samson, his original inspiration by the *Ruach* or Spirit of God comes into question.

At this point you'd think Delilah would give up and that Samson would see through her compliance with the Philistines, so obvious from the text. Next Delilah claims that Samson's heart or *lev* (cf. 5.9) isn't with her and hasn't revealed the source of his strength. Not only did she say this once or twice but pressed him day after day (literally, 'all days'), *tsuq* (cf. 14.4) being the verb which means to be narrow, straightened. Not only this, she also urged and vexed him to the point of death, words which again make you question Samson's state of mind. The verb for vexed is *qatsar* (cf. 10.16) which fundamentally means to reap or to harvest and here refers to Samson's soul, *nephesh* (cf. 12.3). Perhaps Samson wanted to extend to the max that occasion to get at the Philistines as much as possible but by now realized he was in over his head with no escape. Finally he told Delilah—it's clear, really, if she is a harlot like the other woman or someone vulnerable the Philistines used—his secret which ties in with him being a Nazirite from birth. That was the source of his strength without which he'd be weak which isn't in the Hebrew text.

Vs. 18 has the conjunctive *v-* as when, moving the action right along, with Delilah immediately informing the Philistine lords bidding them to come, for Samson at last revealed his mind which is *lev* or heart (cf. vs. 15). Such poignant words once more reveal Samson's naivete as well as the conniving nature of Delilah, but then again, she may have been forced to conspire with the Philistines. Regardless, there's no mention of what she felt afterwards or her attitude toward Samson when he was in captivity. Also it isn't far-fetched to surmise that part of her reward was to be present in the building which Samson pulled down on himself, the two perishing at one time.

In vs. 19 Delilah makes Samson sleep on her knees, scenes both touching and duplicitous, while one of the Philistines shaved off his seven locks of hair. Then she wakes him up and begins to torment him (*hanah*, cf. vs. 5) because his strength "turned aside from upon (*hal*) him" as the text reads literally. Obviously that strength rested upon the *Ruach* which had been with Samson from his birth. Then as usual, Delilah woke up Samson saying that the Philistines were upon him. The preposition *hal* is used as in "upon him" just mentioned but in the opposite sense. Almost nonchalantly Samson wakes up and says to himself that he'll escape as before, apparently not being able to connect Delilah with the intrigue of the Philistine lords. As Samson became more conscious he makes ready his escape, not rushing out as before since he believed nothing will come of this third assault. The words of vs. 20 are telling: "He did not know that the Lord had left him." Or better, Samson didn't know that the Lord had turned away from upon (*hal* again) him. This intimates that he had a sense of the divine presence...*Ruach*...though his behavior seems to have been fairly consistent in not realizing it.

Vs. 21 gives the terrible details about how the Philistine lords treated Samson. Not only did they seize him but gouged out his eyes and put him in fetters of bronze after which he was forced to grind grain in a prison. Nothing is said of what was going through his mind after been blinded, horrible enough. Then we have him going around and around in an endless circle which heightens the desperation of his plight. It's the exact opposite of being directed aright by the Spirit. Did Samson regret his association with Delilah and wish to kill her? And did Delilah have any regret or pity for him? Vs. 22 begins with the conjunctive *v-* as but which intimates something ominous is in the works, and that pertains to Samson's hair growing back. Since the Philistines knew his strength was associated with his long hair, you'd think they would have taken it into consideration. They were so grateful for having captured their arch-enemy that they overlooked it and were about to pay the ultimate price.

Some time later (the conjunctive *v-* as now beginning vs. 23)—and it doesn't seem to be long after Samson had been blinded and set to grind in the prison—the Philistine lords decided to hold a sacrifice (*zevach*) to their god, Dagon, this the only use of the term in Judges, a deity adopted by the Philistines when they settled in Canaan. However, Dagon is found frequently in Chapter Five of First Samuel. They had great cause for rejoicing

(*samach*: cf. 9.19 but not noted there) because their mortal enemy Samson at last was in their hands. His great strength was known among the Philistines...nothing obvious about that...yet his captors wanted to put it to good use as long as they can, hence grinding in the prison. As for Dagon, naturally they attributed this deity for handing him over.

Once everyone was assembled for the sacrifice (what kind of place isn't specified; perhaps a combination of assembly hall and temple), all eyes were fixed upon Samson who could hear the cheers and jeers but obviously couldn't see them. Then at a certain point (cf. vs. 24) everyone was directed to exclaim with one voice that Dagon had given Samson into their hands, he being a ravager or the participle of *charav* which means to lay waste and found in vs. 7 (i.e., as dried) but not noted there. They had good reason, for they exclaimed that he had slain so many of their people. Once the crowd's loud taunts and insults died down, the wine began to flow freely as intimated by the words of vs. 25, "their hearts were merry." The noun is *lev* (cf. vs. 18) and the adjective is *tov*, the common adjective for good. The next phase of their abuse is to have Samson make sport or *sachaq* which means to smile in the sense of deride and found next in vs. 27.

The prison in which Samson had been going round and round grinding grain is adjacent to the temple or hall (house is the term used) from which he was led in vs. 25. Compare with vs. 24 when the people saw Samson which could be taken as that part of the prison was exposed to the hall. Now that he was in full view of everyone, the text says that he does this *sachaq* or making sport probably prodded on to make some kind of gestures while not knowing who was goading him on. Without a doubt, it was pathetic sight but one of relief to the Philistines who had Samson in their possession for the rest of his life. The display was so successful they considered bringing him out for the same abuse during a future celebration.

Part of this display was to have Samson stationed between two pillars, fastened there so the Philistines could continue their abuse and even throw objects at him. His captors had a young boy (*nahar*) minding him thinking he was secure enough in that position. The image is not unlike a small child watching a large ape with a chain connecting the two. Samson could tell by the voice of this *nahar* that he was young and naive, so he asked to be stationed by the pillars supporting the building. All in all there were some three thousand people who were mocking Samson, having no idea of what the boy was doing because they were so intoxicated.

Once stationed between the two main pillars, the crowd continued to mock Samson, the verb *sachaq* being mentioned again. In his heart Samson knew that he was to have the last *sachaq* against the Philistines, bringing to completion that occasion of 14.4 which had motivated him thus far despite the weakness of his character which wasn't in conformity with his physical strength. Right in the middle of the unbearable noise from three thousand drunken spectators Samson knew he had his chance. Now he called out to the Lord for vengeance knowing that the noise prevented anyone from hearing him.

Obviously they were oblivious of Samson's strength but didn't think he was capable of bringing down the building. In vs. 28 he asked that the Lord to remember him, *zakar* being the verb (cf. 8.34) which can be taken as a request for the divine *Ruach* with which he had been gifted even before his birth to come upon him one last time. Samson wished to be avenged, *naqam* for one of his two eyes. This seems to harken back to 15.7 where *naqam* is found with reference to the burning of Samson's wife and father. In other words, such *naqam* is a manifestation of that original occasion or *to'annah* mentioned a number of times since 14.4.

Samson applied all his might to the two pillars, crying out that he wished to perish with his Philistine captors. Perhaps as the building started to collapse, his eyes met those of Delilah, a sweet revenge of sorts. It turned out that the death of these three thousand Philistines were more than all those he had slain throughout his career. Because the prison was adjacent to the hall, its walls collapsed but not upon the prisoners, enabling them to make good their escape, some of whom must have been Israelites.

So when the dust settled (literally), Samson's family came to retrieve the body and placed it in the tomb of his father Manoah. As they sifted through the rubble trying to identify him, they couldn't help but recall the story of how the angel had announced Samson's birth and what it could mean to them now. Chapter Sixteen ends with the simple observation that Samson had judged Israel for twenty years. Nothing more was needed. Information about how the divine *Ruach* informed Samson was omitted perhaps out of embarrassment resulting from his questionable behavior and relationship with Philistine women, notably Delilah.

Chapter Seventeen

1) There was a man of the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Micah. 2) And he said to his mother, "The eleven hundred pieces of silver which were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse and also spoke it in my ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it." And his mother said, "Blessed be my son by the Lord." 3) And he restored the eleven hundred pieces of silver to his mother; and his mother said, "I consecrate the silver to the Lord from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image; now therefore I will restore it to you." 4) So when he restored the money to his mother, his mother took two hundred pieces of silver and gave it to the silversmith who made it into a graven image and a molten image; and it was in the house of Micah. 5) And the man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and teraphim, and installed one of his sons who became his priest. 6) In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes. 7) Now there was a young man of Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite; and he sojourned there. 8) And the man departed from the town of Bethlehem in Judah to live where he could find a place; and

as he journeyed, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah. 9) And Micah said to him, "From where do you come?" And he said to him, "I am a Levite of Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to sojourn where I may find a place." 10) And Micah said to him, "Stay with me and be to me a father and a priest, and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year and a suit of apparel and your living." 11) And the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man became to him like one of his sons. 12) And Micah installed the Levite, and the young man became his priest and was in the house of Micah. 13) Then Micah said, "Now I know that the Lord will prosper me, because I have a Levite as priest."

It is with some relief that we leave behind the Samson story, pretty much a roller coaster ride from beginning to end even though he was a judge which means loosely a ruler over Israel. However from now to the end of Judges we have, in accord with a footnote in the NIV, a depiction of religious and moral degeneracy. That shouldn't come as a surprise, pretty much the overall theme of Judges to date. What singles out the bulk of the book covered thus far is the repeated appearance of judges who became genuine heroes, rescuing Israel from among its enemies and more importantly, restoring true worship of the Lord. Such is the overall theme of the book, pretty depressing, showing the need for some kind of unified leadership.

Although vs. 1 of this new chapter doesn't have it in English, we begin with the conjunctive *v-* to show the continuity of recent events (Samson) with the present. This will become more evident as pertaining to the overall theme of Judges, the struggle to maintain a religious and political identity apart from the inhabitants of Canaan, chiefly the Philistines. "There was a man" describes Micah who doesn't seem to have anything special about his role in Israel's history. However the way these words are put at the beginning of a new chapter reveal the heart of what Judges is all about. Micah is representative of all Israelites in his concession to foreign deities. He had stolen a significant amount of silver from his mother which makes it a crime right in his own household. His mother had uttered a curse on the unknown thief, *'alah* which fundamentally means to cry out and has five other biblical references, one of which is Hos 4.2: "There is swearing, lying, killing, stealing and committing adultery." This curse which isn't specified wore on Micah for some time because she did it literally in his ears. In fact, she uttered the curse because she had suspected her own son was responsible.

When Micah confessed to having stolen the silver pieces, his mother held no grudge but uttered a blessing for this admission. Immediately Micah felt a rush of shame and returned the silver after which his mother pronounces a consecration. The verb *qadash* is used which means to set apart and is the verbal root for the adjective holy. "I consecrated for my own all the first-born in Israel, both of man and of beast" [Num 3.13]. This act of making holy, of separating, is to the Lord. However, she does it with a completely different end in mind. She wishes to fashion both a graven and molten images...two of

them...a *pesel* and a *masekah*. The former often is made of wood with the veneer of a precious metal (here a silversmith does it). The latter is something comprised of a particular metal and thus is solid. Both are found again in 14: “Do you know that in these houses there are an ephod, teraphim, a graven image and a molten image?” So when Micah’s mother says that she will restore or return it to him, two hundred of the eleven hundred pieces of silver are now in the form of these two idols. That begs the question: What about the nine hundred pieces?

The text reports in a matter-of-fact fashion the blending of what belongs to Israel’s worship (i.e., the Lord) and native idol worship. It’s so common that a report of such activity doesn’t seem to raise an eyebrow. Everyone is doing it which was a boon to the local silversmith. He himself may be an Israelite, not necessarily a Philistine, and thinks nothing except to obtain a profit. Once the two idols had been fashioned, Micah sets them up in his own home perhaps alongside a shrine to the Lord having no problem with this juxtaposition. Next he made an ephod (cf. 8.27) and teraphim, the former being a garment worn by the high priest and the latter being domestic gods which the Lord had forbidden the Israelites to make though Judges contains the first explicit of this term. “For the teraphim utter nonsense, and the diviners see lies” [Zech 10.2]. Thus if you want to be technical and hence devious about it, nothing prevented Micah from these teraphim since the word isn’t contained in the Torah given by the Lord to Moses.

Vs. 5 says that Micah has a shrine in his house compared with the words of vs. 4, “and it (the singular is used for the graven and molten images) was in the house of Micah.” The noun shrine is rendered literally as “house of gods” intimating that he had other idols besides the two at hand, his mother worshiping there as well. With this ready-made shrine Micah decides to set up his own religion, if you will, perhaps imitating many of his fellow Israelites who, in turn, were copying their Philistine neighbors. The next step is obvious. Micah needs an “official” form of worship so decides to have one of his sons become a priest (*kohen*) which is rendered literally as “filling the hand one from his sons” where the common verb *mala’* implies bringing to completion Micah’s intent. Once installed, the only thing lacking is a congregation. And so the image we come off with is Micah, his mother and his son as an ersatz priest who had their home with the shrine attached to it ready for business like a vendor alongside a street.

Vs. 6 sums this up quite well, tongue-in-cheek, saying that because Israel had lacked a king, each man did what he considered right in his own eyes. Interestingly this flowering of various types of worship, both Israelite and Philistine (the two being jumbled together) isn’t attributed as one would think to Israel’s apostasy depicted throughout Judges. Instead, the lack of a king is responsible even though Israel had a system of judges, many of whom were outstanding, including the last or Samson, even if he had been flawed severely. This stands in direct contradistinction to the Lord’s abhorrence for a king in the time of Samuel, Saul and David. “Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say

to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them” [1Sam 8.7].

In light of this, there doesn't seem to be an explicit clamor for a king; Israel was still too weak and scattered in Canaan to unite, so the system of judges moving around seems a pretty good solution. The problem, of course, is that a loose confederation of tribes is subject to great pressure from the surrounding peoples. And as we've seen thus far and especially with the latest example of Micah and his mother, doing right or the adjective *yashar* is crucial, this being derived from the verbal root of the same spelling as found in 14.3: “Get her for me, for she pleases me well.” So the tension between those wanting a king and those relying upon the Lord as with prophets like Samuel who appears later continues to go unresolved. That brings up the question raised with the Samuel quote. If the people have rejected the Lord as they're doing now in Judges, what form of government is best for a people scattered among people hostile to them?

In vs. 7 action shifts from Micah to a young man whose name isn't mentioned, possibly out of embarrassment that he turned out to be a pseudo-priest, if you will, even if he is a Levite. He seems to be a kind of drifter on the look out for a job along clerical lines as connoted by the words in vs. 8 where he's trying to find a place, “place” not in the Hebrew text but just the verb *matsa'* (cf. 6.13) by itself. This adds to his somewhat dubious character which connotes the modern idea of an itinerant preacher. Nothing is said of any position he held or may have held before he came to Micah which makes him all the more suspect. He asks Micah about settling down, knowing at least that he is a Levite which technically qualifies him to be a priest. However, the context implies that he has little or no knowledge let alone experience as how to go about his duties.

So with Micah's store-front style shrine set up ready for business, he found the perfect candidate to work there and gain a congregation. The verb *ya'al* (cf. 1.35 but not noted there) or to wish, reflects this desire to be a priest but has nothing to do with valid credentials to carry out the job.

Vs. 13 concludes this short but instructive chapter with Micah saying to himself that the Lord will make him prosper by reason of having his very own Levite to function as a priest. The verb *yataw* reflects this contentment (the common adjective *tov* or good is derived from it) has an air of being pleased about it which here borders on the delusional. “And the priest's heart was glad” [18.20]. In light of vs. 13, one can't help have a sense of foreboding about what's going to happen next tempered by the fact that the mingling of Israelite (monotheistic) and Philistine (pluralistic) worship will come to a head, the sooner the better even if violence is involved. This will prove true as First Samuel comes to grip with it. However, the Book of Ruth intervenes between Judges and Samuel, a welcome pastoral interlude allowing us to catch our breath.

Chapter Eighteen

1) In those days there was no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking for itself an inheritance to dwell in; for until then no inheritance among the tribes of Israel had fallen to them. 2) So the Danites sent five able men from the whole number of their tribe, from Zorah and from Eshta-ol, to spy out the land and to explore it; and they said to them, "Go and explore the land." And they came to the hill country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah and lodged there. 3) When they were by the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young Levite; and they turned aside and said to him, "Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? What is your business here?" 4) And he said to them, "Thus and thus has Micah dealt with me: he has hired me, and I have become his priest." 5) And they said to him, "Inquire of God, we ask you, that we may know whether the journey on which we are setting out will succeed." 6) And the priest said to them, "Go in peace. The journey on which you go is under the eye of the Lord." 7) Then the five men departed and came to Laish and saw the people who were there, how they dwelt in security after the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and unsuspecting, lacking nothing that is in the earth and possessing wealth, and how they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with any one. 8) And when they came to their brethren at Zorah and Eshta-ol, their brethren said to them, "What do you report?" 9) They said, "Arise, and let us go up against them; for we have seen the land, and behold, it is very fertile. And will you do nothing? Do not be slow to go and enter in and possess the land. 10) When you go, you will come to an unsuspecting people. The land is broad; yea, God has given it into your hands, a place where there is no lack of anything that is in the earth." 11) And six hundred men of the tribe of Dan armed with weapons of war set forth from Zorah and Eshta-ol 12) and went up and encamped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. On this account that place is called Mahaneh-dan to this day; behold, it is west of Kiriath-jearim. 13) And they passed on from there to the hill country of Ephraim, and came to the house of Micah. 14) Then the five men who had gone to spy out the country of Laish said to their brethren, "Do you know that in these houses there are an ephod, teraphim, a graven image and a molten image? Now therefore consider what you will do." 15) And they turned aside from there and came to the house of the young Levite at the home of Micah and asked him of his welfare. 16) Now the six hundred men of the Danites armed with their weapons of war stood by the entrance of the gate; 17) and the five men who had gone to spy out the land went up and entered and took the graven image, the ephod, the teraphim and the molten image while the priest stood by the entrance of the gate with the six hundred men armed with weapons of war. 18) And when these went into Micah's house and took the graven image, the ephod, the teraphim and the molten image, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?" 19) And they said to him, "Keep quiet, put your hand upon your mouth and come with us and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be priest to the

house of one man or to be priest to a tribe and family in Israel?" 20) And the priest's heart was glad; he took the ephod and the teraphim and the graven image and went in the midst of the people. 21) So they turned and departed, putting the little ones and the cattle and the goods in front of them. 22) When they were a good way from the home of Micah, the men who were in the houses near Micah's house were called out, and they overtook the Danites. 23) And they shouted to the Danites who turned round and said to Micah, "What ails you that you come with such a company?" 24) And he said, "You take my gods which I made and the priest and go away, and what have I left? How then do you ask me, 'What ails you?'" 25) And the Danites said to him, "Do not let your voice be heard among us lest angry fellows fall upon you, and you lose your life with the lives of your household." 26) Then the Danites went their way; and when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his home. 27) And taking what Micah had made and the priest who belonged to him, the Danites came to Laish, to a people quiet and unsuspecting and smote them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. 28) And there was no deliverer because it was far from Sidon, and they had no dealings with any one. It was in the valley which belongs to Beth-rehob. And they rebuilt the city and dwelt in it. 29) And they named the city Dan, after the name of Dan their ancestor who was born to Israel; but the name of the city was Laish at the first. 30) And the Danites set up the graven image for themselves; and Jonathan the son of Gershom, son of Moses, and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land. 31) So they set up Micah's graven image which he made, as long as the house of God was at Shiloh.

This chapter's first verse does not open with the conjunctive ν ! Phrases such as "in those days" set a certain mood which permeates any details that follow, setting them off from other time periods and does so in a kind of story-type mode. Vs. 1 echoes 17.6, "In those days there was no king in Israel" adding the real problem: "every man did what was right in his own eyes." Such is the source of Israel's woes which everyone knew but was afraid to confront except at those rare instances when a valiant judge came on the scene.

The tribe of Dan, originally in the southwest of Canaan, was forced by the Philistines to move elsewhere...anywhere but here. No details are given, this tribe apparently suffering the most, with fellow Israelites feeling the continuous conflict as they rubbed elbows with the Philistines and other inhabitants of Canaan. Because of this harassment and what seems like little support from the other eleven tribes, the Danites were not just seeking (*baqash*, cf. 6.29) an inheritance but were doing it "for itself," *lo* suggesting lack of support from their fellow Israelites. They were lacking an inheritance or *nachalah* which means a taking possession found in 2.9 but not noted there. So from the time Israel had entered Canaan under the leadership of Joshua to the present this tribe was left out in the cold. In fact, it is to their credit that they had survived to date. In fact, their experience as survivors evolved into being quite adept at living among foreigners hostile

to them. The verb *naphal* (cf. 7.12) or fallen here suggests the casting of lots with respect to Dan's inheritance or lack of it.

Being in a precarious situation which could devolve any moment into annihilation, the Danites put together a scouting party of five men described as being able and rendered literally as "sons of valor," *chayl* found in 11.1 as describing Jephthah. Furthermore, the noun *qatsa'* is used as whole and means end: "from their ends" which seems to refer to the fact that the Danites rummaged their entire population for candidates suited for such a perilous mission. Their assignment is to both spy out and explore the land which is reminiscent of Joshua sending two men to reconnoiter the land of Canaan (cf. Jos 2.1). The two verbs at hand are *ragal* and *baqash* (cf. vs. 1), the former meaning to tread or explore found next in vs. 14. It applies to Joshua's spies as in 6.25: "She (Rahab) hid the messenger whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho."

So these intrepid men came to the house of Micah, stayed there (vs. 2) and immediately recognized the voice of the Levite whom Micah had taken on as his own personal priest (cf. 17.5), the verb being *nakar* which also means to make known. Perhaps the spies heard him performing some prayer or ritual with regard to the graven images which caused them some alarm. This is indicated by the three rapid-fire questions they posed to him. Caught more or less off guard, the anonymous young Levite responded nervously in vs. 4 that Micah had "thus and thus dealt with me," a way of blurting out words on the spot without much reflection which made his inquirers all the more suspicious that something wasn't quite right. It should be noted also that this is taking place within the larger context of the Philistines who never were far away, a constant threat.

Apparently the five Danites decided, at least for now, to overlook their suspicions because of the Philistine threat just noted. Their assignment wasn't to take any action but to remain faithful to the *ragal* and *baqash* of vs. 1. In vs. 5 they decided to ask this Levite to inquire of God, *sha'al* (cf. 8.14) implying more making an interrogation compared with seeking involved with the verb *baqash*. In the verse at hand *sha'al* is used with the preposition *b-*, literally as "in God." Obviously the Danite spies wished to know whether their mission (*derek* or literally road; cf. 4.9) will succeed or not, the verb *tsalach* noted last in 14.19 as to leap upon as with the Spirit upon Samson. In vs. 6 the young Levite says that it will. The text says nothing about how or if he did what the Danites requested. He bids them to set out in peace or *shalom* (cf. 11.13) because the *derek* just noted is under the Lord's eye, this be rendered by the preposition *nokach* meaning before. "But the man would not spend the night; he rose up and departed and arrived opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem)" [19.10].

Vs. 7 has the five spies from the tribe of Dan departing the Levite priest at Micah's house. Apparently Micah was either absent or was prudent enough not to say anything about the questionable religious practice going on, not wanting the Danites to become more suspicious than they already were. Their next stop was Laish whose inhabitants

went about their lives in security which is rendered literally as “which within it the dwelling to trust,” *betach* (cf. 8.11). They resemble (*mishpat*: cf. 13.13 as manner of life) the Sidonians, that is, on the shores of the Mediterranean meaning that the water provided a measure of security instead of being surrounded by land on all four sides. Judges describes these people as quiet, unsuspecting and not lacking what is in the earth. The first two are participles, *shaqat* (cf. 8.28) and *batach* (cf. vs. 7, the third is the noun *davar* (word; here as thing; cf. 11.37) and possessing wealth. The last is rendered such by the verb *yarash* (cf. 14.15) with the noun *hetser*, the only use of this word in the Bible which means restraint; from the verbal root meaning to shut up and thus implying something akin to a treasury.

Added to this is the fact that the inhabitants of Laish stayed by themselves, were self-sufficient and not dealing (*davar* again with) people around them. Indeed, this is admirable and impressed the five spies deeply, especially because the Philistines were harassing their own tribe, forcing them to move elsewhere. While location is important, there seems to be more to it, the way they organized themselves and managed to fend off conflict with their neighbors. Getting this insight meant more than observation from a distance. The spies had to make their way into towns and surrounding areas to converse with the locals and get an idea of how they managed to pull this off. Yet the predatory attitude represented by the spies was at odds with the people they observed and was bound to conflict with them. Some of the Laish-ites must have suspected the spies’ intent but nothing comes of it.

The spies had enough and didn’t feel the need for further exploration which means they decided on the spot to turn around, make their way home as quickly as possible and inform their fellow Danites. Vs. 8 has their countrymen ask about their journey which is rendered literally as “what you?” They could see the excitement on their faces knowing that their report would be favorable, not unlike Joshua’s two spies which returned home with their glowing report. The first word out of their mouth was “arise” (*qum*, cf. 7.15), clearly indicative of making haste. If the Danites decided to go, they’d have to make the treacherous hundred mile journey through land controlled by Philistines as well as other tribes, not to mention their fellow Israelites. At the same time they’d have to keep their journey under wraps as best as possible in order not to arouse suspicion. And so it seemed that none of the tribe of Dan objected. The general way of describing Laish is that is fertile, the common adjective good (*tov*) with the adverb *me’od* (cf. 13.6) meaning anything that is excessive.

Vs. 9 has a question the five spies anxiously put to their fellows concerning some hesitancy, their own eagerness possibly coloring the way they phrased it. All five blurted out as one man that the Danites won’t follow up on their glowing report and stay home which means continued persecution by the Philistines. The verb *chashah* (to be silent, still) is used here, that the Danities will remain silent which is equivalent of not doing anything. “Do you know that Ramoth-gilead belongs to us, and we keep quiet and do not

take it out of the hand of the king of Syria” [1Kg 22.3]? On this heels of the question the five ask comes an exhortation that their countrymen do not delay to possess Laish, *hatsal* suggestive of being slothful and the only example of this verb in the Bible.

Now to convince the Danites—and this should work if nothing else does—the five spies say that the people of Laish are completely unsuspecting, the participle *batach* being used as in vs. 7. The *batach* being described in both references involve both self-complacency and some naivete, an ideal combination for a take-over. Laish is so spectacular that it’s a broad plain and lacking in nothing...besides, the five claim that the Lord has given it into their hands. They must have seen themselves cast in the same role as Joshua’s two spies who reported that “the Lord has given all the land into our hands” [Jos 2.24].

The persuasive words of the five spies won over the Danites who decided to send a sizeable force of six hundred men ominously described as having weapons of war and camp at a place they rename which translates as Camp of Dan. This is a way of saying they’re serious about their pursuit even though they haven’t achieved their final destination. All in all their expedition must have made such an impression in Judah that it’s called such “to this day” [vs. 12]. Being in such a place named after their tribe implies they had settled down for some time, the reasons not being explicit. However, it was temporary, for they set out to the house of Micah (cf. vs. 13) where the five spies had met that young Levite. On this expedition the spies accompanying the six hundred Danites wanted to bring to attention the irregular form of worship with which that priest was involved. This needs to be put in the overall context of the Book of Judges replete with examples of Israel’s apostasy which got them into so much trouble. Apparently the Danites were not as affected by the worship of alien gods, perhaps by reason of their relative isolation far to the south and being under constant pressure by the Philistines. That meant they had to cling more faithfully to worship of the God of Israel.

When the expedition arrived at Micah’s house, they asked about the reported ephod, teraphim and two images which allegedly the young Levite was using...in essence, setting up his own religion. They refer to the place as “these houses” which implies a rather elaborate setup, perhaps with several temples and assistants to the Levite plying their trade. With the same intensity used when giving their report about Laish, the five ask their fellow Danites to consider (*yadah*, cf. 11.39) what to do about this situation. While Micah and the Levite are singled out here, chances are such ersatz practices must have been fairly common, given the constant reports we’ve heard about Israel not being faithful to the Lord. The force of six hundred must have had a leader who isn’t mentioned, but was dependent upon the five spies familiarity with Micah’s to ask of his welfare which is rendered by the noun *shalom* (cf. vs. 6). Obviously Micah and the young Levite as well as any other hangers-on were troubled by so many men turning up at their doorstep, again described in vs. 16 as “armed with their weapons of war.”

The unnamed commander showed admirable restraint, sending the five spies into Micah's house to remove the stuff they had seen earlier and which had upset them so much. Nothing is said about what happened to these objects, but most likely they were marked for destruction. In the meanwhile, the Levite stood by face-to-face with the six hundred men again described deliberately as "armed with their weapons of war." He had the gall to ask what they were doing by removing the so-called sacred objects. The five told the Levite basically to shut up which made him think that he was doomed. Then to his complete surprise, the Danites asked him to be both their father and their priest. They put it in such unexpectedly glowing terms that he couldn't refuse the invitation to fulfill this twofold role not just for one man (Micah) but for a tribe of Israel (Dan). In other words, the five were appealing to his vanity and desire for gain which makes you wonder what their ulterior intent might be. Vs. 20 puts this well, namely, that the Levite's heart (*lev*, cf. 16.25) was glad, the verb *yataw* (cf. 17.13).

Then something unusual happened. The Levite took his sacred objects along apparently without objection by the Danites who initially seemed intent on destroying them. Not only that, vs. 20 says that the Levite went in the midst of the people (*qerev*, cf. 3.5) suggesting that not only was he allowed to continue his odd mixture of Israelite-Philistine worship but to do so freely. Perhaps the Danites were sensitive to this long-standing mixture, if you will, of the two modes of worship. To upset the balance outright would be too dangerous at this just before a military assault point, so best to let things be. As for the Levite, we have no further information on what happened to him.

Vs. 21 says that not only did the Danites depart Micah's house but they turned which means they left that place at once, possibly with some residual guilt at bringing along the Levite priest. When the soldiers were some distance from Micah's house, he and those living nearby ran after them, indignant that they had taken their sacred objects as well as their priest. After all, they had been enjoying a new-found prestige among the locals as well as making a considerable amount of money. The verb *zahaq* (cf. 10.14) in vs. 23 as ails means to cry out which Micah and his associates did as soon as they caught sight of the Danites. Fortunately for Micah and those with them, the Danites cautioned him to keep his voice down in case some of their company decide to kill them on the spot. This was sufficient to end the confrontation with Micah returning home and the Danites continuing their ominous advance towards Laish.

Vs. 27 has the Danites coming upon Laish whose inhabitants are both quiet and unsuspecting, *shaqat* and *batach* as noted in vs. 7. This way of describing these people is unsettling because they're about to be pounced upon and lose their precious way of life all the more outstanding amid the strife depicted throughout Judges. The Danites treated them ruthlessly, burning their homes and slaying them with the edge of the sword, not standing a chance. Vs. 28 sums it up, that is, these people had no deliverer, *natsal* (cf. 10.15) because they've become so settled in their way of life. So once this undesirable deed had been accomplished, the Danites name Laish after their own tribe.

At this juncture we have no information as to what the eleven tribes of Israel made of this, Dan having accomplished a bold move out of desperation to escape persecution from the Philistines. Perhaps it gave them courage that this single tribe could accomplish such a feat, even if it meant the wholesale slaughter of a people which minded its own business. Then again, the Lord himself urged Joshua to wipe out all those he encountered when entering the promised land which some of the Danites used to bolster the rationale for their actions.

The peacefulness of Laish's inhabitants is infringed upon, even in death, with the Danites setting up graven images or *pesel* found last in vs. 20 but not noted there. This is largely thanks to the conniving Levite who wished to profit from the people as much as possible. Such an abominable practice noted many times throughout Judges in various ways continues with Jonathan and his sons among the Danites right until the land was captured. We lack information about this but can assume that his practice of worshiping alien gods continues for some time into the future. As for Jonathan, he's identified as being the grandson of Moses, a first-class embarrassment if ever there was one. Apparently the text fiddles with the name of this most venerable patriarch and changes it to Manasseh.

Vs. 31 concludes Chapter Eighteen on a depressing note, that is, the Danites set up the *pesel* belonging to Micah presumably under the guardianship of the apostate Levite. The words "set up" suggest erection of a temple which rivaled Shiloh and dedicated to the God of Israel. And Shiloh takes on significance here insofar as it concerns the story of Samuel whom his mother Hannah handed over to become a priest in the temple there. At least this verse has a redemptive note about it though the rivalry between the God of Israel and the local deities continued as a source of conflict.

Chapter Nineteen

1) In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite was sojourning in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim who took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. 2) And his concubine became angry with him, and she went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah and was there some four months. 3) Then her husband arose and went after her to speak kindly to her and bring her back. He had with him his servant and a couple of asses. And he came to her father's house; and when the girl's father saw him, he came with joy to meet him. 4) And his father-in-law, the girl's father, made him stay, and he remained with him three days; so they ate and drank and lodged there. 5) And on the fourth day they arose early in the morning, and he prepared to go; but the girl's father said to his son-in-law, "Strengthen your heart with a morsel of bread, and after that you may go." 6) So the two men sat and ate and

drank together; and the girl's father said to the man, "Be pleased to spend the night, and let your heart be merry." 7) And when the man rose up to go, his father-in-law urged him till he lodged there again. 8) And on the fifth day he arose early in the morning to depart; and the girl's father said, "Strengthen your heart and tarry until the day declines." So they ate, both of them. 9) And when the man and his concubine and his servant rose up to depart, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said to him, "Behold, now the day has waned toward evening; pray tarry all night. Behold, the day draws to its close; lodge here and let your heart be merry; and tomorrow you shall arise early in the morning for your journey, and go home." 10) But the man would not spend the night; he rose up and departed and arrived opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). He had with him a couple of saddled asses, and his concubine was with him. 11) When they were near Jebus, the day was far spent, and the servant said to his master, "Come now, let us turn aside to this city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it." 12) And his master said to him, "We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners who do not belong to the people of Israel; but we will pass on to Gibe-ah." 13) And he said to his servant, "Come and let us draw near to one of these places and spend the night at Gibe-ah or at Ramah." 14) So they passed on and went their way; and the sun went down on them near Gibe-ah, which belongs to Benjamin, 15) and they turned aside there to go in and spend the night at Gibe-ah. And he went in and sat down in the open square of the city; for no man took them into his house to spend the night. 16) And behold, an old man was coming from his work in the field at evening; the man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was sojourning in Gibe-ah; the men of the place were Benjaminites. 17) And he lifted up his eyes and saw the wayfarer in the open square of the city; and the old man said, "Where are you going, and whence do you come?" 18) And he said to him, "We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, from which I come. I went to Bethlehem in Judah; and I am going to my home; and nobody takes me into his house. 19) We have straw and provender for our asses with bread and wine for me and your maidservant and the young man with your servants; there is no lack of anything." 20) And the old man said, "Peace be to you; I will care for all your wants; only do not spend the night in the square." 21) So he brought him into his house, and gave the asses provender; and they washed their feet and ate and drank. 22) As they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, base fellows, beset the house round about, beating on the door; and they said to the old man, the master of the house, "Bring out the man who came into your house that we may know him." 23) And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brethren, do not act so wickedly; seeing that this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing. 24) Behold, here are my virgin daughter and his concubine; let me bring them out now. Ravish them and do with them what seems good to you; but against this man do not do so vile a thing." 25) But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and put her out to them; and they knew her and abused

her all night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go. 26) And as morning appeared, the woman came and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was till it was light. 27) And her master rose up in the morning, and when he opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, behold, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house with her hands on the threshold. 28) He said to her, "Get up, let us be going." But there was no answer. Then he put her upon the ass; and the man rose up and went away to his home. 29) And when he entered his house, he took a knife and laying hold of his concubine he divided her limb by limb into twelve pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. 30) And all who saw it said, "Such a thing has never happened or been seen from the day that the people of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt until this day; consider it, take counsel and speak."

This chapter is a pretty much straight-forward account of events which doesn't lend itself as much to *lectio divina*. For this reason the notations that follow aren't as many.

Phrases such as "in those days" create a certain mood which affects the details that follow, setting them off from other time periods and does so in a story-type mode, this being noted with regard to the first verse of Chapter Eighteen. That verse does not have the conjunctive *v*- whereas vs. 1 of this chapter does. Right at the beginning the lack of a king in Israel is mentioned which takes on greater urgency towards the end of Judges. In fact, the very last verse of this book concludes with this rather desperate observation. In essence, we're being set up for events in First Samuel, the people choosing Saul as their king. As for Chapter Nineteen, what such words mean will become more evident due to the overall lawlessness about to be depicted.

The name of the "certain Levite" isn't given just like the Levite first in the service of Micah and then with the Danites. He's singled out as living in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim or *yarkah* which also applies to the back or rear and in general, any remote place. "We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim" [vs. 8]. Even mention of *yarkah* lends a certain forlornness to Israel not having a king. As for this anonymous Levite, we don't have a clue as to what he was doing; he may have functioned autonomously like the Levite affiliated with Micah or was carrying on as best he could to preserve Israel's religious identity. Also he may have been married which didn't preclude him from taking a concubine or *pylegesh*, this noun found in 8.31 but not noted there.

For some reason or other the concubine became angry with the Levite which is rendered literally as "she is acting as a prostitute on him," the verb being *zanah* (cf. 16.1). This word suggests that she was having an affair (or several), an obvious reason for the split even though she was a concubine. And so she returned home to Bethlehem where she had a husband who urged her to return, speaking kindly with her which in vs. 3 is

rendered as “to speak on her heart” (*lev*, cf. 18.20). This relationship between a husband and wife, concubine and man with whom she’s living, may have been uncommon and may tie in with the ominous words of “there was no king in Israel,” that is, Israel lacked a final arbiter to settle such relationships. While we’ve encountered a number of outstanding judges, nevertheless they lacked control over the twelve tribes. Also the frequent mention of unnamed people is another element contributing to the lack of discipline in morals and religious observance.

The husband of this concubine had a good relationship with her father as indicated by the words “he (the father-in-law) came with joy” in vs. 3 (*samach*, cf. 16.23), the two remaining together. It was so good that the husband decided to linger for some days. However, nothing is said whether or not the situation is sorted out. Finally the husband left with his concubine, their relationship apparently improved though nothing is said about it.

En route home they approached Jebus or Jerusalem but didn’t stay there because it was occupied by foreigners or Canaanites called Jebusites, *nakry* being the term found in vs. 12. “I have been a sojourner in a foreign land” [Ex 2.22]. Finally when it got dark they stayed at Gibe-ah because it belonged to the tribe of Benjamin. This journey back to Ephraim shows the rather hodgepodge fabric of the land with some Israelites here and natives of the land there, again intimating the overall theme of this chapter as well as the lack of a king. The party stayed in the city square because no one would take them in for the night which didn’t bode well for what was about to happen. Finally an elderly farmer saw them and took them in, he being from the hill country of Ephraim. He pressed them to stay the night with him, warning them to avoid the city square without saying why which adds to the drama. At this point the story starts to resemble that of Lot in Chapter Nineteen of Genesis.

Everyone was getting along just fine as indicated by the words in vs. 22, “they were making their hearts merry, the noun *lev* with the verb *yataw*, both found together in 18.20. Since all came from the same place, they shared stories about people they knew and so forth well into the night. Then a group of men described as base fellows in vs. 22 and rendered literally as “sons of Belial” surrounded the house, again as with the man who took in Lot and his family. Belial translates as worthless or something unprofitable (literally as ‘without value’) found in 20.13: “Now therefore give up the men, the base fellows in Gibe-ah, that we may put them to death.” Not only did these men surround the house, they beat on the door demanding to know the visitor who had arrived, *yadah* (cf. 18.14) clearly here meaning to have sexual relations. Again as with Lot: “Bring them out to us that we may know them” [Gen 19.5].

The elderly man apparently lived alone and seems more disposed to offer hospitality than the people among whom he was living. After all he was from the country where hospitality is a way of life whereas the Gibe-ahites were city dwellers wary of strangers.

In vs. 23 this man steps outside his house and begs the “sons of Belial” not to act so wickedly or *rahaḥ* as in Gen 19:7: “I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly.” Also he implores them not to do such a vile thing or *nevalah* which also means something shameful or folly. “For they have committed abomination and wantonness in Israel” [20.6]. Then the Levite steps in and just like the man who sheltered Lot, he sends out both his virgin daughter along with concubine belonging to the Levite that they may ravish them. The verb is *hanah* noted last in 16.4 as torment and as mentioned several places, has a wide variety of meanings. Thus the integrity of this visitor is to be protected at all costs, all the more pressing by coming from the same place.

Vs. 25 says that these “sons of Belial” didn’t pay attention to the man or more accurately, weren’t willing (*’avaḥ*) to listen. Though nothing is said of his daughter—she must have been abused as well—the mob knew (*yadah* again) the concubine and abused her for the entire night. The verb *halal* is used, fundamentally as to accomplish or to glean as well as to maltreat and suggests brutal treatment as a reference with the same verb indicates: “Five thousand men of them were cut down in the highways” [20.45]. Perhaps more to send a message than outrightly killing the poor girl, the men decided to let her live, her Levite master having found her at first light. Then he told her abruptly and without any sympathy to get up be off. When she didn’t respond, he cut her into twelve pieces (the words ‘limb by limb’ add to the viciousness of the deed) and sent these pieces throughout the territory (*gevul* commonly means boundary) of Israel.

And so Chapter Nineteen concludes with this vicious deed which seems entirely unnecessary. It’s all the more horrendous by reason of a Levite doing such an abominable act. In fact, the “sons of Belial” must have been equally terrified. As vs. 30 says with some dramatic flair, no such deed had been done since Israel left Egypt to the present. Since several references are made with the Lot story, those who learned of the concubine couldn’t help but draw the parallel but with implications that soon would have a far reaching effect. As for vs. 30, it’s put as an utterance by the collective voice of Israel in order to bring home the message. It concludes with the twofold exhortation to both take counsel and speak, the former being *huts* and having one other biblical reference, Is 8.10: “Take counsel together, but it will come to nought.” As for the speaking (*davar*), it’s a command to spread word of the deed and to keep it alive to prevent it from happening again.

Chapter Twenty

1) Then all the people of Israel came out, from Dan to Beer-sheba, including the land of Gilead, and the congregation assembled as one man to the Lord at Mizpah. 2) And the chiefs of all the people, of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand men on foot that drew the sword. 3) (Now the Benjaminites heard that the people of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.) And the

people of Israel said, "Tell us, how was this wickedness brought to pass?" 4) And the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, "I came to Gibe-ah that belongs to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to spend the night. 5) And the men of Gibe-ah rose against me and beset the house round about me by night; they meant to kill me, and they ravished my concubine, and she is dead. 6) And I took my concubine and cut her in pieces and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel; for they have committed abomination and wantonness in Israel. 7) Behold, you people of Israel, all of you, give your advice and counsel here." 8) And all the people arose as one man, saying, "We will not any of us go to his tent, and none of us will return to his house. 9) But now this is what we will do to Gibe-ah: we will go up against it by lot, 10) and we will take ten men of a hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel and a hundred of a thousand and a thousand of ten thousand to bring provisions for the people that when they come they may requite Gibe-ah of Benjamin for all the wanton crime which they have committed in Israel." 11) So all the men of Israel gathered against the city united as one man. 12) And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What wickedness is this that has taken place among you? 13) Now therefore give up the men, the base fellows in Gibe-ah, that we may put them to death and put away evil from Israel." But the Benjaminites would not listen to the voice of their brethren, the people of Israel. 14) And the Benjaminites came together out of the cities to Gibe-ah to go out to battle against the people of Israel. 15) And the Benjaminites mustered out of their cities on that day twenty-six thousand men that drew the sword besides the inhabitants of Gibe-ah who mustered seven hundred picked men. 16) Among all these were seven hundred picked men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss. 17) And the men of Israel, apart from Benjamin, mustered four hundred thousand men that drew sword; all these were men of war. 18) The people of Israel arose and went up to Bethel and inquired of God, "Which of us shall go up first to battle against the Benjaminites?" And the Lord said, "Judah shall go up first." 19) Then the people of Israel rose in the morning and encamped against Gibe-ah. 20) And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin; and the men of Israel drew up the battle line against them at Gibe-ah. 21) The Benjaminites came out of Gibe-ah and felled to the ground on that day twenty-two thousand men of the Israelites. 22) But the people, the men of Israel, took courage and again formed the battle line in the same place where they had formed it on the first day. 23) And the people of Israel went up and wept before the Lord until the evening; and they inquired of the Lord, "Shall we again draw near to battle against our brethren the Benjaminites?" And the Lord said, "Go up against them." 24) So the people of Israel came near against the Benjaminites the second day. 25) And Benjamin went against them out of Gibe-ah the second day and felled to the ground eighteen thousand men of the people of Israel; all these were men who drew the sword. 26) Then all the people of Israel, the whole army, went up and came to Bethel and wept; they sat there before the

Lord and fasted that day until evening and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. 27) And the people of Israel inquired of the Lord (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, 28) and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, ministered before it in those days), saying, "Shall we yet again go out to battle against our brethren the Benjaminites or shall we cease?" And the Lord said, "Go up; for tomorrow I will give them into your hand." 29) So Israel set men in ambush round about Gibe-ah. 30) And the people of Israel went up against the Benjaminites on the third day and set themselves in array against Gibe-ah, as at other times. 31) And the Benjaminites went out against the people and were drawn away from the city; and as at other times they began to smite and kill some of the people, in the highways, one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibe-ah and in the open country about thirty men of Israel. 32) And the Benjaminites said, "They are routed before us, as at the first." But the men of Israel said, "Let us flee and draw them away from the city to the highways." 33) And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place and set themselves in array at Baal-tamar; and the men of Israel who were in ambush rushed out of their place west of Geba. 34) And there came against Gibe-ah ten thousand picked men out of all Israel, and the battle was hard; but the Benjaminites did not know that disaster was close upon them. 35) And the Lord defeated Benjamin before Israel; and the men of Israel destroyed twenty-five thousand one hundred men of Benjamin that day; all these were men who drew the sword. 36) So the Benjaminites saw that they were defeated. The men of Israel gave ground to Benjamin because they trusted to the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibe-ah. 37) And the men in ambush made haste and rushed upon Gibe-ah; the men in ambush moved out and smote all the city with the edge of the sword. 38) Now the appointed signal between the men of Israel and the men in ambush was that when they made a great cloud of smoke rise up out of the city 39) the men of Israel should turn in battle. Now Benjamin had begun to smite and kill about thirty men of Israel; they said, "Surely they are smitten down before us as in the first battle." 40) But when the signal began to rise out of the city in a column of smoke, the Benjaminites looked behind them; and behold, the whole of the city went up in smoke to heaven. 41) Then the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were dismayed, for they saw that disaster was close upon them. 42) Therefore they turned their backs before the men of Israel in the direction of the wilderness; but the battle overtook them, and those who came out of the cities destroyed them in the midst of them. 43) Cutting down the Benjaminites, they pursued them and trod them down from Nohah as far as opposite Gibe-ah on the east. 44) Eighteen thousand men of Benjamin fell, all of them men of valor. 45) And they turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon; five thousand men of them were cut down in the highways, and they were pursued hard to Gidom, and two thousand men of them were slain. 46) So all who fell that day of Benjamin were twenty-five thousand men that drew the sword, all of them men of valor. 47) But six hundred men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon and abode at the

rock of Rimmon four months. 48) And the men of Israel turned back against the Benjaminites and smote them with the edge of the sword, men and beasts and all that they found. And all the towns which they found they set on fire.

As noted with regard to the last chapter, the one at hand (second longest in Judges, Chapter Nine consisting of fifty-seven verses) similarly consists of a straight-forward account of events which don't lend themselves as much to *lectio divina*. For this reason the notations that follow aren't as many.

The conjunctive *v-* as then has a definite urgency about it for two reasons. First, the grisly dismemberment of the concubine by the Levite towards the end of the last chapter,, the reason for which isn't given but most likely to spark fear among the Israelites. Secondly, a dread resulting from the treatment of the elderly man's daughter while he was entertaining a visitor. The dread is rooted in an eerie parallel with the Sodom and Gomorrah story of Lot already outlined. If the Lord destroyed those two cities as a result of immoral behavior, would he do the same with Gibe-ah? The Israelites didn't want to take a chance, hence everyone came out from Dan to Beersheba. Once they did, the congregation gathered as one man, the verb being *qahal* and the noun *hedah*. The verb often refers to an urgent or solemn assembly, the one at hand being a perfect example. The following contains both words: "And the congregation was assembled at the door of the tent of meeting" [Lev 8.4]. The Israelites gathered hastily under direction of their chiefs or *pinah* which also means a corner. "The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner" [Ps 118.22].

And so these leaders presented themselves in the assembly or *qahal* which here goes by the formal title "people of God." "Which of all the tribes of Israel did not come up in the assembly to the Lord" [21.5]? Nothing is said about the role of judges who governed Israel, Samson being the last one noted. Perhaps the twelve tribes were more rudderless at this point though the incident which compelled them to assemble just might change that. The seriousness and determination is enhanced further by the huge number of men (four hundred-thousand) described as "drew the sword." In fact, this multitude of swords was already drawn and ready to spring into action. Again, the prospect of the Lord obliterating Gibe-ah must have been behind this collective determination.

Both the **RSV** and **NIV** have vs. 3 in parentheses, that is, the Benjaminites heard about what was transpiring. Who couldn't help but not it? The gathering of four hundred thousand armed men obviously aroused everyone's attention, including the Philistines who strangely aren't mentioned. This was an internal affair, and despite the huge number of soldiers, they posed no direct threat to them. The first question from the collective mouth of the people is to know how such a wicked act came about, *raha* (cf. 19.23). It doesn't seem clear at this point whether they were angry at the Levite's behavior or the way the Gibe-ahites treated him and his host. This prompted the Levite to explain the situation which was true, for most likely his host was present to back him up. Note that

in vs. 6 the Levite sends these twelve pieces to what he calls the inheritance of Israel, *nachalah* (cf. 18.10). According to him, the inhabitants of Gibe-ah are guilty of both an abomination and wantonness or *zimah* and *nevalah* (cf. 19.24). The former is suggestive of uncleanness and fornication and the latter of shame. As for *zimah*: “Men in whose hands are evil devices and whose right hands are full of bribes” [Ps 26.10].

After having spoken with such boldness which took back his listeners, the Levite asks for Israel’s collective advice and counsel or *davar* (cf. 18.7) and *hetsah*. “The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nought” [Ps 33.10]. Given the customs and behavior of the day, the Israelites aren’t so much upset about how the Levite treated his concubine but the way the Gibe-ahites had treated him. Interestingly, this is the second account of a Levite whose behavior is questionable, the other being in Micah’s employment who turned out to be an opportunist, so this doesn’t put the Levites in especially good light. Nevertheless, the Israelites decide upon immediate revenge once they hear the Levite’s report. They arise (*qum*, cf. 18.9), a verb which suggests their indignance as a single man, this being the second instance of such unity, the first being in vs. 1.

Vss. 9-10 outline the plot the Israelites put together to deal with the inhabitants of Gibe-ah which consists of casting lots for those to make the attack and those to supply the troops. Once this was in place, the Israelites gather around the city as one man, the third instance this phrase is used and reveals their resolve. As noted earlier, in the back of their minds is the fear that the Lord might do not just to Gibe-ah but to themselves as he had done to Sodom and Gomorrah, the two instances of immoral behavior bearing a striking resemblance.

In vs. 12 the Israelites try to ward off a military confrontation, for after all, they were one and the same nation. They sent emissaries throughout the tribe of Benjamin asking about the wickedness (*rahalah*, cf. vs. 3) that had occurred, again, no mention of the unfortunate concubine who is treated less than a piece of property. They demanded that the “sons of Belial” be handed over not just to execute them but to remove the evil (*rahalah* again) not just from Benjamin but from Israel, again that idea of the nation as one person. Unfortunately the Benjaminites refused to comply which forced the Israelites to mobilized twenty-six thousand men. Gibe-ah, on the other hand, could only come up with seven hundred. In vs. 17 which seems to recount events a bit later has Israel summoning four hundred thousand men as noted in vs. 2.

The Israelites wanted their expedition to go off without a hitch. For this reason they went to Bethel—this huge number of people on the move to that place—and inquired of God, *sha’al* being the verb as in 18.5, a not entirely dissimilar situation. Its use with the preposition *b-* reads literally “in the Lord.” Right away they received a response that Judah is the first to assault the Benjaminites. No details are given as to how this *sha’al* was effected. Given the future course of events, the failure to offer sacrifices and take up a fast contributed to their defeat. Nevertheless, a priest must have been the one who

came off with the answer the Israelites wanted. It proved not so much as false but as too hasty a request. 19 has the people of Israel encamping against Gibe-ah; nothing more is said of Judah's role in the divinely sanctioned assault.

You'd think that the single-mindedness of the Israelites would win the day at once. However, the Benjaminites put up a stiff resistance and routed them. Then vs. 22 says that the Israelites took courage, *chazaq* (cf. 7.11) and reformed their battle position. During a pause between that unexpected defeat and a second assault, the Israelites wept before the Lord and made a second *sha'al*...inquiry...of the Lord. No mention is made of Bethel; perhaps they did this on the spot, afraid to leave their fortified position. Just like the response at Bethel, the Israelites were told to go up against Gibe-ah.

Vs. 24 has the Israelites approaching the Benjaminites again, many of whom must have been wary of their first defeat. That wouldn't have been so bad, but the Lord himself told them to do it. Would they have the courage to try again? And if they were defeated? Unfortunately for the Israelites disaster struck a second time. Now the entire army decided to go to Bethel where they wept and sat there, this gesture suggesting a determination not to be let down again. They wouldn't leave unless being assured of victory. This time they fasted and made offerings which weren't explicitly mentioned during the first visit. Once this more thoughtful procedure was adopted and carried through, the Israelites did a third *sha'al* of the Lord. Vs. 27 explicitly says that the ark of the Lord was at the Bethel temple and Phinehas was the priest in charge. Both these facts weren't mentioned during the first visit to Bethel which means the ark nor Phinehas were absent. It seems to be a way of saying that Israel was simply too careless in its approach for divine assistance. And that approach must have been colored by contact with local divinities which was the cause of all their problems as stated so many times in Judges yet nothing was done to rectify it. Thus in vs. 28 through the mouthpiece of Phineas the people asked whether or not to go out against their brethren, this term showing considerably hesitancy and a chastened mind compared with the earlier two occasions. The response? The Lord says not only will he hand over the Gib-eahites but will give them into Israel's hand...tomorrow.

This third time proved to be successful. It involved a ruse by drawing the Benjaminites away from Gibe-ah who attacked a pre-arranged group of Israelites acting as bait. Then the Israelites sprang their trap, but during the intense battle, the Benjaminites failed to recognize that disaster (*raha* again) was about to happen. This conflict must have been painful for both sides, all being Israelites. At the same time each tribe retained its own identity, especially in the hostile environment of Canaan, and most likely were unfamiliar with those of other tribes except in a cursory fashion.

The remaining verses go into considerable detail as to how the ambush worked and the utter defeat of the Benjaminites. Those who fought against their countrymen did so because of those "sons of Belial" who set this whole tragedy in motion. Chances are these

men were cowards and didn't participate in the battle. Also the Israelites must have taken great pains to seek them out and deal with them once and for all. All in all, a second Sodom and Gomorrah had been averted.

Chapter Twenty-One

1) Now the men of Israel had sworn at Mizpah, "No one of us shall give his daughter in marriage to Benjamin." 2) And the people came to Bethel and sat there till evening before God, and they lifted up their voices and wept bitterly. 3) And they said, "O Lord, the God of Israel, why has this come to pass in Israel, that there should be today one tribe lacking in Israel?" 4) And on the morrow the people rose early and built there an altar and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. 5) And the people of Israel said, "Which of all the tribes of Israel did not come up in the assembly to the Lord?" For they had taken a great oath concerning him who did not come up to the Lord to Mizpah, saying, "He shall be put to death." 6) And the people of Israel had compassion for Benjamin their brother and said, "One tribe is cut off from Israel this day. 7) What shall we do for wives for those who are left since we have sworn by the Lord that we will not give them any of our daughters for wives?" 8) And they said, "What one is there of the tribes of Israel that did not come up to the Lord to Mizpah?" And behold, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh-gilead to the assembly. 9) For when the people were mustered, behold, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead was there. 10) So the congregation sent there twelve thousand of their bravest men and commanded them, "Go and smite the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword; also the women and the little ones. 11) This is what you shall do; every male and every woman that has lain with a male you shall utterly destroy." 12) And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead four hundred young virgins who had not known man by lying with him; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh which is in the land of Canaan. 13) Then the whole congregation sent word to the Benjaminites who were at the rock of Rimmon and proclaimed peace to them. 14) And Benjamin returned at that time; and they gave them the women whom they had saved alive of the women of Jabesh-gilead; but they did not suffice for them. 15) And the people had compassion on Benjamin because the Lord had made a breach in the tribes of Israel. 16) Then the elders of the congregation said, "What shall we do for wives for those who are left since the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?" 17) And they said, "There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, that a tribe be not blotted out from Israel. 18) Yet we cannot give them wives of our daughters." For the people of Israel had sworn, "Cursed be he who gives a wife to Benjamin." 19) So they said, "Behold, there is the yearly feast of the Lord at Shiloh, which is north of Bethel on the east of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem and south of Lebonah." 20) And they commanded

the Benjaminites, saying, "Go and lie in wait in the vineyards 21) and watch; if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in the dances, then come out of the vineyards and seize each man his wife from the daughters of Shiloh and go to the land of Benjamin. 22) And when their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, we will say to them, `Grant them graciously to us; because we did not take for each man of them his wife in battle, neither did you give them to them, else you would now be guilty.'" 23) And the Benjaminites did so and took their wives according to their number from the dancers whom they carried off; then they went and returned to their inheritance and rebuilt the towns and dwelt in them. 24) And the people of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family, and they went out from there every man to his inheritance. 25) In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.

As noted with regard to the last chapter, the one at hand similarly consists of a straightforward account of events which don't lend themselves as much to *lectio divina*. For this reason the notations that follow aren't as many.

The conjunctive *v-* opening this final chapter translates as now, showing a close connection between the defeat of the tribe of Benjamin and the aftermath. Understandably they didn't want to engage in any marital relationships. Then in the next verse (i.e., vs. 2) the people came to Bethel yet again. This time Phinehas saw them from afar, informed beforehand as to the defeat of Benjamin, and wondered what the Israelites would want now. To his surprise, the people streamed into the temple area in complete silence and sat down after which they wept bitterly, the adjective *gado* being used meaning great...a great weeping. Without consulting him, spontaneously the people cried out about Benjamin being on the verge of extinction. To the Israelites the number twelve as in twelve tribes is sacred and to fall short of it wouldn't enable the nation to continue in existence.

Although Bethel was a shrine and a shrine presumably has an altar, the Israelites decided to erect an altar there on which they made offerings. Nothing is said about Phinehas' role in all this; perhaps he had an agreement to allow parallel worship, if you will, at least for the time being. If he were to interfere, surely he'd feel the collective wrath of Israel come crashing down upon him. Once this had been done—and the people breathed a collective sigh of relief that the first step of reconciliation had taken place—they questioned as one man which of the twelve tribes hadn't come to the assembly (*qahal*, cf. 20.2) in Mizpah. This was ratified by an oath; failure to do so means imposition of the death sentence, but all this is subsumed, if you will, by Israel's collective compassion for Benjamin which vs. 6 calls their brother. The verb here is *nacham* (cf. 2.18). Such *nacham* centers around the oath all Israelites made not to give their daughters in marriage to anyone of the tribe of Benjamin. Yet they remained distressed by the fact that one tribe was missing to make up the full complement of twelve.

Vs. 8 says that no one came from Jabesh-gilead to the *qahal* or sacred assembly meaning they were wiped out, the thoroughness of which is brought home by slaying women and little ones in vs. 10. Nevertheless, the Israelites discovered some four hundred virgins whom they brought to Shiloh after which the remaining Benjaminites were summoned to take them as wives...chid brides in actuality. Vs. 15 sums up this additional traumatic situation by saying that the people had compassion on Benjamin, *nacham* as noted above.

While this was a painful but important step in securing the future for the tribe of Benjamin, more had to be done which means making provision for those survivors or *peleytah*, this noun meaning someone who has escaped from having been blotted out or *machah*. A reference for the first is “And they shall eat what is left to you after the hail” [Ex 10.5]. A reference for the second which means to wipe out is “Let them be blotted out of the book of the living” [Ps 69.28]. This created a double bind for the Israelites. They were moved to compassion to save the tribe of Benjamin yet at the same time are bound by oath (cf. vs. 1) not to marry anyone of that tribe.

While a heated discussion was taking place, someone comes up with a brilliant solution centered around a yearly feast at Shiloh. During this festival the Benjaminites were bidden to snatch young women who performed dances. If their families complained, the Israelites would ask them politely, not forcefully, to consent. They used as leverage the fact that they didn't slay their wives in battle nor did the families of these maidens give them, else they'd be guilty. Thus a solution ensuring the future of Benjamin as well as all Israel was assured. The next to last verse says that each Israelite went off to his respective tribe and family as well as inheritance.

Then the last verse come on to conclude the Book of Judges with some unease which had permeated most of it with the now familiar statement of Israel not just lacking a king but with every man doing what was right in his eyes. In other words, back to square one with no resolution yet in sight, a rather despairing way to conclude the Book of Judges. However, given the current order of books of the Bible, Ruth follows next, a pleasant interlude. Then we get into First Samuel which finally brings up this issue about a king. Though Judges laments its lack, as often pointed out, the Lord is dead-set against it as when the people demand a king and end up with Saul. Though that was a tragic turn of events followed by the foibles of David and Solomon, Israel was set on a firm path of governance which it had lacked under the judges. Throughout the account of those kings, a chief theme of Judges remains constant, namely, that any inclination to evil results in alienation from the Lord. Yet the Lord remains at hand to receive either an individual an entire nation such as Israel, something those noble judges had manifested. Such is the inspiring message of the Book of Judges.

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