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THE
BOOK OF JUDGES.

BY

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NOTE.

OUR knowledge of the geography of Scripture has received marvellous additions through the 'Palestine Exploration Fund;' and use has been made of these as far as possible. But changes of opinion are occasionally avowed by the most practised explorers; and differences of opinion also exist among men well entitled to deference.

Thus Lieutenant Conder now thinks it probable that *Bezek*, i. 4, is the ruin *Bezkah*, south of Lydda (Ludd). Again, he very naturally lays stress on the statement in Ps. lxxxiii. 9, 10, that *Sisera* and *Jabin* perished at *Endor*, three and a half miles south of Mount Tabor, as proof that the battle, iv. 15-17, took place on the plain south-west of that mountain; and he brings this into connection with his view that *Jael's* tent was at *Bezaanaim* (*Bessûm*), nearly half-way from Mount Tabor to *Tiberias*. Once more, he now adopts the view of Mr. Merrill, the American Explorer, that *Succoth*, viii. 5, is *Tell Der'ala* on the east side of the *Jordan*, in the great plain north of the river *Jabbok*, about one mile from the river, and three miles from where it leaves the hills. And Mr. Birch believes that the name *Seirath*, iii. 26, survives in *Umm Sirah* and *Wady Umm Sirah*, about three miles north-west of *Ayin es Sultân*, the fountain of *Elisha* at *Jericho*.

THE BOOK OF JUDGES.



INTRODUCTION.

THE Book of Judges gives the history of the people of God from the time that they had been settled by Joshua in the land of Canaan until the increasing disorders in the Hebrew commonwealth called for changes in the constitution, whose introduction is narrated in the Books of Samuel. The recent critical speculations which at present excite controversy are less intimately or directly concerned with this book than with most others; though the study of it must exert an influence on one's mind, and, as I think, must contribute to their decision.

The materials are scanty indeed out of which to construct a reply to the questions, At what time was the book written? and, Who was its author? The mention of 'the captivity of the land,' ch. xviii. 30, is held by some to prove that it was not composed before the Babylonian exile, or at all events before the fall of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes: my own opinion is that this refers to the catastrophe in the time of Eli, 1 Sam. iv. 21, 22, the date being the same in the two verses, 30 and 31, viz., the end of the time that the house of God was in Shiloh. Apart from this, there is nothing said which hints at any time later than the rise of the kingdom; yet there is emphasis put on the fact of there being no king in Israel at the time that certain disorders appeared, ch. xvii. 6, xviii. 1, xix. 1, xxi. 25—a circumstance which might indicate that the hopeful feelings associated with the great revolution which introduced the kingdom were shared by the writer.

Whatever hypothesis may be preferred as to the authorship and date of composition, most readers will be impressed by the naturalness of the writing, as if by one with full and accurate knowledge of the facts which he relates. It is supposed by some that he made a compilation, at one time from copious materials, at another from a dry brief chronicle. I believe, on the contrary, that in this as in other

The Book is a Theocratic History.

historical books, the copiousness and the brevity are due to the intention of the writers, whose plan was not to write an ordinary history, but to furnish a view of the progress of the kingdom of God on earth, or as it is sometimes called, a theocratic history. Thirty-eight out of the forty years of wandering in the wilderness are an almost total blank to us, like the vastly longer period of the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt; and so it is often in the subsequent history: years, or even generations, are passed over in silence, or nearly so, because they had little bearing on the progress of God's kingdom. And in what is narrated we have the same theocratic spirit manifested: thus the faith and patience of Gideon, rewarded by his first victory, are related with great minuteness, because from the Divine point of view it was really of more importance than the Ephraimite victory over Oreb and Zeeb which is disposed of in two verses, ch. vii. 24, 25; though as seen by the eye of man the latter was acknowledged by Gideon himself to be far greater, ch. viii. 2, 3, and is so referred to by the prophet Isaiah (ch. x. 26 with ix. 4).

Yet it is a history, not an essay: therefore there is no abstract discussion nor any formal divisions. The machinery and mode of working the theocracy are not paraded before us, but we are left to learn for ourselves from the narrative. Nor does the theory of the theocracy stand out very prominently, because we have here on the whole a record of decay: the civil government is weak and irregular, especially in the way of united action on the part of the tribes; and the ecclesiastical government is no better, as we see the failure of the central worship at Shiloh, in the hands of the high priests of the house of Aaron's son Eleazar, who (as we learn elsewhere) let their office fall to the younger branch of Aaron's house, who also proved unworthy of it; and descendants of Moses appear as leaders in apostasy. However, the third great means of guiding the people of God, the agency of the prophets, does appear from time to time with marked energy; and on one occasion the same person was prophetess and judge, the only female ruler who is distinctly mentioned in the book.

Undoubtedly the prominent feature, bringing out the theocratic character of the history, is the repeated mention of the Angel of Jehovah, who was already well known in patriarchal history, Gen. xvi. 7-13, etc.; who appeared to Moses at the burning bush, Ex. iii. 2-14, etc.; and who manifested Himself to Joshua as the Captain or

Its Four Periods.

Prince of the host of Jehovah, Josh. v. 13-15, when Canaan was to be conquered. The prevalent opinion in the Church has always been that this is no other than the Lord Jesus Christ in His pre-existent state, an opinion which I heartily adopt. He who was with the Church in the wilderness, as Stephen says, Acts vii. 38, came forth at successive crises to call the people back to Himself, and to bestow His Holy Spirit in a remarkable degree on some chosen instrument : ch. ii. 1 and iii. 10 ; ch. vi. 12 and 34 ; ch. x. 11 (as I infer from parity of circumstances, though the statement is less definite) and xi. 29 ; ch. xiii. 3-21 and ver. 25, xiv. 6, 19, xv. 14. These four crises mark out the four great periods in the history, sinning and recovery, each with certain characteristics of its own : but always leaving the people more sunken than they had been before, and always requiring a new intervention of the great Angel and a new gift of the Spirit of the Lord at ever shortening intervals, the second scarcely half the length of the first, and the third about half the length of the second, while the fourth is altogether peculiar, as shall be noted immediately.¹ The first period, the richest in experience, includes three servitudes to the heathen, ever increasing in length, and probably also in severity (the agents becoming ever more closely connected with Israel) and in degradation, as the third was to a tribe of the conquered Canaanites who would have been no longer in existence had Israel done their duty. During this period there is nothing to show that the Judges retained office throughout the years of quiet which followed upon their victories that saved Israel, though the Septuagint translation makes Ehud judge the people till he died. The second period has only a single servitude to the heathen, yet one of extreme severity : but there was a tyranny exercised over Israel by a usurper, the son of their great deliverer and judge, which seems to have called for remedies at the hand of God as much as if it had been slavery to the heathen. The third period had also only a single servitude, yet by the combined agency of two nations on opposite sides of Israel (compare Isa. ix. 12) ; and Israel also suffered from a melancholy civil war. Four judges in succession rose up to heal the wounds of the commonwealth. In this third period the authority

¹ The more weight is due to this principle of division or arrangement of the contents of the book, because it does not entirely agree with the cases of more detailed history : Othniel's history is given briefly, and Barak's fully ; yet on Othniel the Spirit was specially bestowed, iii. 10, and not on Barak.

Transition to the Kingdom.

of the judges seems thoroughly consolidated, and the length of their several administrations is given, as to some extent had been the case even from the time of Gideon in the second period. The fourth period was one of servitude to the Philistines from first to last: the judge 'judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years,' ch. xv. 20, during the forty of servitude; and his mission was merely to 'begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines,' xiii. 5, the full deliverance being accomplished only by his death.

It remains to add, with reference to the connection of this book with the Books of Samuel, that in my view its history closes with the collapse of the original line of Judges: the system had been more and more proving insufficient, and it broke down when the last Judge saved Israel by dying, and left his people without a head in the very hour of their liberation. At this point, as I understand, a constitutional change occurred: another judge judged Israel, but he was clothed with additional authority and had exceptional advantages; for he was Eli, who was at the same time the High Priest of the Lord at Shiloh, and thus combined the supreme civil and ecclesiastical authority. His administration may possibly have had some measure of success: we are not informed on the point; but at all events, it broke down in that catastrophe when his worthless sons died on the day of a bloody defeat, and he himself died of a broken heart because the ark of God was taken and the glory departed or went into exile from Israel. Another experiment was made, after a time of anarchy, when Samuel united in himself not merely two of the offices which served as channels for the grace of God to Israel, but all the three: for besides being prophet and priest, he was king in all but the name. And thus, on the failure of this modification of the constitution, as he grew old and his sons proved themselves unfit for carrying on his work, all intermediate expedients were abandoned as insufficient, and the kingdom was boldly introduced.

The body of the history is prefaced by an introduction, as far as ch. iii. 6, in which we have some general preliminary matter, as to the occupation of the land by the Israelites, and as to the course of sinning and repenting which they ran again and again. And there are two appendices to the book, ch. xvii. and xviii., and ch. xix.-xxii., probably referring to a very early time, which illustrate the general condition of Israel, the spiritual and the moral declension which first made it necessary that Judges should be raised up to maintain the

The Chronology of the Book.

unity and purity of Israel, and which in the end made it manifest that a stronger constitution was required. But with this we may compare the testimony of Ruth, that there was much of real moral and spiritual goodness in Israel amidst all this declension. Nor is there any reason to call the age of the Judges barbarous or mythical, as many do: just as there is no reason for regarding this book as a set of fragmentary notices of scenes in the history of a disjointed people not yet worthy to be called a nation.

The chronology of the book is very difficult, and the questions connected with it may require more light to be thrown on them than we can furnish. In the meantime, it is sufficient to present the following table of servitudes to the heathen and deliverance by the Judges, in the four periods already explained:—

FIRST PERIOD, CH. III. 7-V.

	YEARS.
I. <i>Servitude</i> .—Chushan Rishathaim, of Mesopotamia,	8 }
1. Judge Othniel,	40 }
II. <i>Servitude</i> .—Eglon, of Moab; Ammon, Amalek,	18 }
2. Judge Ehud, }	80 }
3. Judge Shamgar, }	20 }
III. <i>Servitude</i> .—Jabin, of Hazor, within Canaan,	40 }
4. Judge Deborah, }	40 }
5. Judge Barak, }	— 206

SECOND PERIOD, CH. VI.—X. 5.

IV. <i>Servitude</i> .—Midian, Amalek, and children of the East,	7 }
6. Judge Gideon,	40 }
Tyrant (<i>servitude</i>) Abimelech,	3
7. Judge Tola,	23
8. Judge Jair,	22
	— 95

THIRD PERIOD, CH. X. 6—XII.

V. <i>Servitude</i> .—Ammonites with Philistines,	18 }
9. Judge Jephthah,	6 }
10. Judge Ibzan,	7
11. Judge Elon,	10
12. Judge Abdon,	8
	— 49

FOURTH PERIOD, CH. XIII.—XVI.

VI. <i>Servitude</i> .—Philistines,	40
13. Judge Samson (' In the days of the Philistines, ' 20) }	— 40
	— 390

CHAPTER I.—III. 6.

INTRODUCTION.

CHAPTER I.

Vers. 1, 2. How the work of occupying the land was carried out.—Joshua had acted as Moses' minister, even after the death of that eminent servant of Jehovah : but now that Joshua was dead, how was the work to be carried out which he had charged the children of Israel in his two closing addresses to complete by exterminating the Canaanites? There is nothing to justify the conjecture that there might have been a successor to Joshua, if he had been sufficiently on the alert, or if the jealousies of the tribes had not stood in the way. Moses would have had no successor but for the failure of his faith, Num. xx. 12, xxvii. 12-23 : Joshua had in no respect failed in his supplementary work. And all that was needed now was to rely on the presence and guidance of the invisible God and King of Israel, whom Joshua had the right of consulting by the Urim through the agency of the high priest. We do read in this book of such consultation repeatedly, ch. xx. 18-28 ; and in language of question and answer so much resembling what is narrated here very shortly, that we need not doubt the sameness of the procedure. The instruction that Judah should go up at the beginning may have borne some reference to that tribe being the first to receive its possession ; or to its being the largest ; or to the propriety of assigning to it the post of honour after the other great house, that of Joseph, had so long held it in the person of Joshua. Or it may have been connected with the precedence and Messianic hopes linked on to the fortunes of the house of Judah in Jacob's dying prophecy, Gen. xlix. 8-12 ; in which case Judah stands out as pre-eminently the representative of Abraham, to whom the land was given at the very time that we read of the Canaanites and the Perizzites being in it, Gen. xii. 6, xiii. 7, as we again read here, vers. 1, 4.

Vers. 3-20. The exploits of Judah and Simeon.—There is considerable difficulty about the order of these events, though on the whole it seems best to adhere to the view taken in the A. V. that there is a

 CHAP. I. 3-20.—*The Exploits of Judah and Simeon.*

break at the end of ver. 7, expressed by the use of the pluperfect in ver. 8; the Hebrew form of expression is no less reconcilable with this logical connection of the two verses, than with the connection of mere order of time, in which latter case ver. 8 would have to be rendered, 'And the children of Israel fought against Jerusalem, and took it and smote it,' etc. In favour of the A. V. observe:—(1) It gives the reason why they brought this Canaanite king to Jerusalem, ver. 7; because it had been already taken by Judah, ver. 8. (2) The going up of the Kenites out of the city of palm trees along with the children of Judah, ver. 16, belongs to an earlier period than the date of vers. 3-7. (3) This earlier date would also suit vers. 11-15 admirably, as to facts already recorded in Josh. xv. 15-19, and repeated here in order to make the narrative complete. (4) The history of what Simeon did with the aid of Judah, ver. 17, follows naturally on what Judah did with the aid of Simeon, vers. 3-7; while in vers. 8, 9, 10, the expressions 'the children of Judah' and 'Judah' favour the belief that these were achievements of Judah alone before Simeon had come as an ally.—Ver. 3. There seems to have been nothing reprehensible, but the reverse, in this invitation to Simeon to act along with Judah: the two tribes were territorially mixed up, and Simeon was as remarkable for weakness as Judah was for strength.—Ver. 5. *Bezek* is not again named, except in 1 Sam. xi. 8, if these be not two different places. Conder (*Pal. Expl.* 1876, p. 12) follows Reland in identifying it with Bezeth in Maccabees, and he finds it in important ruins, Beit Z'ata, north of the modern village of Kufin, about 6½ miles north of Hebron, on the road to Jerusalem, probably the Christian episcopal city Diocletianopolis. *Adoni-bezek* means 'lord of Bezek,' a name apparently of the same form as Adonizèdek and Melchizedek.—Vers. 6, 7. He himself acknowledged that he now met with a just requital for his cruelty to the multitude of petty 'kings' who gathered their meat under his table—a fact which gives us an insight into the condition of society among those depraved nations whom Israel received commandment to destroy: how far Israel had a right to take this apparently cruel revenge upon him, we cannot tell, certainly nothing of the kind is recorded in the wars of Joshua.—Ver. 8. Jerusalem lay on the very borders of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and both had therefore an immediate interest and duty in taking it; see ver. 21, and Josh. xv. 63: from a comparison of these passages it must be inferred that Judah and Benjamin

 CHAP. I. 21-36.—*The Situation and Conduct of the other Tribes.*

were only at times and in an imperfect degree successful, perhaps sometimes burning the lower city and sometimes occupying it jointly with the Canaanites, but probably not able to take (at least, to take and keep) the stronghold of Zion till David's exploit, 2 Sam. v. 7.—Vers. 10-15. This is a repetition of Josh. xv. 14-19 with a few verbal changes.—Ver. 16. The children of a Kenite (for the definite article is not in the Hebrew) must have accepted the invitation of Moses to cast in their lot with Israel, Num. x. 29-32; and when the tribe of Judah moved southwards from the city of palm trees, that is, Jericho, Deut. xxxiv. 3, they accompanied it into that southland, or Negeb, beyond Arad (see on Josh. xii. 14), which has been traced in late years by travellers who have recognised its importance in sacred geography. The city of Kain or Cain, Josh. xv. 57, is naturally associated with these Kenites.—Ver. 17. When Judah repaid the kindness done by Simeon, they went and smote the city Zephath, and called it Hormah, that is, 'a devoted thing,' on account of the utter ruin to which it was given up. See on this at Josh. xii. 14.—Ver. 18. This victorious inroad upon the powerful Philistine cities belongs certainly to an exceptional period of success such as is indicated in the next verse: in general, Israel had enough to do in resisting Philistine attacks. Compare with this verse Josh. xv. 45-47, where the Philistine cities are assigned to Judah: there, as here, only three are mentioned, but the three are Ekron, Ashdod, and Gaza.—Ver. 19. Such glorious successes fell to the lot of Judah so long as they had the faith of Caleb when he proposed to go against the Anakim, 'If so be Jehovah be with me, then I shall be able to dispossess them, as Jehovah said, Josh. xiv. 12. And it must have been failing faith which led to want of success against the inhabitants of the valley (or perhaps collectively, the valleys, a word different here and in ver. 34, from that mis-translated so in ver. 9, see margin) in spite of their chariots of iron: compare Josh. xvii. 12, 18, and Ps. xx. 7, 8.—Ver. 20. See ver. 10.

Vers. 21-36. The situation and conduct of the other tribes.—(1) Ver. 21. *Benjamin* failed to dispossess the Jebusites in Jerusalem. See on ver. 8. (2) and (3) Vers. 22-29. *The house of Joseph* is most naturally understood of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh together: then the half-tribe of Manasseh is named apart in vers. 27, 28, and Ephraim apart in ver. 29. The whole house of Joseph had even stronger reasons for acting in concert than Judah and Simeon had: and they may have maintained somewhat of that supremacy which Joshua's leader-

CHAP. I. 21-36.—*The Situation and Conduct of the other Tribes.*

ship and the pitching of the holy tent within their borders might encourage them to assume, and which they certainly did more or less retain during the period of the Judges; for so we read of their assisting Dan, ver. 35; and this attack on Bethel was in the territory of Benjamin (though at the very border, so much so that some think it lay partly in Ephraim), their sister tribe descended from Rachel, as Dan was from Rachel's handmaid. Their independent action, apart from the southern tribes of Judah and Simeon, already mentioned, and from the northern tribes to be mentioned next, is perhaps hinted in the words, 'The house of Joseph, they also:' and when it is added, 'Jehovah was with them,' as already with Judah, ver. 19, this evinces the largeness of His grace and the elasticity of their political constitution. In ver. 23 it may be fairly questioned whether the verb means 'they descried,' or 'they sent to descry:' in ver. 24 the word is not the usual one for 'spies,' but it is often rendered 'watchmen' or 'keepers.' The *Hittites*, ver. 26, among whom the man whom they spared took up his residence, and built his new city with the old name, are mentioned again in Josh. i. 4, where see note. Conder suggests that this may be Luweizeh, near Banias (Dan). *Manasseh's neglect of duty*, vers. 27, 28, has been recorded already in Josh. xvii. 11-13, which see for notes on the geography; and a sixth city, Endor, is named there. The cause of the sinful toleration of these Canaanite settlements within the land of Israel is said to have been the persistency of the Canaanites who *would* dwell in that land: the other side to this statement, of course, is the carelessness, or fickleness, or thoughtlessness, or cowardice of the children of Israel who let them alone. The expedient to which they had recourse in their times of prosperity and strength was a compromise very naturally suggested by the crafty Phœnician traders, who had intercourse continually with Damascus and the East, and who must have suffered very severely when the kindred and friendly nations of Canaan were dispossessed by the Israelites. To these poor and simple-minded people they suggested that those six Canaanite cities or territories might be permitted to remain on payment of tribute: this was nothing worse than a custom-house tax, at the cost of which an uninterrupted communication was kept up between the Mediterranean Sea and the river Jordan along the great plain of Jezreel. But the disastrous result of disobedience to the command of God was the existence of a compact and powerful mass of heathenism in

 CHAP. I. 21-36.—*The Situation and Conduct of the other Tribes.*

the heart of Israel, which no doubt contributed to the ruin of the first king of Israel, 1 Sam. xxxi., and continued increasingly to work mischief until the people were carried captive by invaders who entered Palestine along the road which lust of gain had left or thrown open. Even the powerful tribe of *Ephraim* failed to dispossess the Canaanites of Gezer, ver. 29, as already recorded in Josh. xvi. 10.—(4) *Issachar* is passed over in silence, alone of all the western tribes: some conjecture because Issachar had done so nobly as to leave no Canaanites, in which condition the eastern tribes might also be supposed to be; but this is almost too favourable a supposition to be readily accepted, especially as the cities left by the Manassites were geographically within the limits of Issachar, Josh. xvii. 11. And there is reason to fear the contrary from Gen. xlix. 14, 15.—(5) Ver. 30. *Zebulun* in the north was content with that unlawful but plausible expedient which had been adopted by Manasseh in the centre of the land. Since Nahalol is certainly the town named Nahallal in Josh. xix. 15, possibly Kattath, which is named before it there, may be the same as Kitron, which stands in the like position here, and is never again mentioned. The Talmud has identified it with Zippori, Sepphorio, the modern Sefürieh, three miles north-west of Nazareth.—(6) Vers. 31, 32. *Asher* was in a still worse condition than any of the tribes yet mentioned: for instead of the Canaanites being left here and there among the Asherites, it is the Asherites who are said to have dwelt among the Canaanites, without any recorded attempt to continue driving them out, or even to reduce them to tribute. Of the seven places here named, four are named in Josh. xix. 28, 30, assuming that Aphek there is Aphik here: and two of them, *Ahlab* and *Helbah*, are mentioned only here, and are unknown to us. The first of all, *Accho*, is named only here, but is well known in the modern Acre or Akka, still an important place on account of its harbour, and specially famous in the time of the Crusades: it stands at the northern end of the bay of Acre. In the New Testament it is once mentioned by the Greek name Ptolemais, Acts xxi. 7.—(7) Ver. 33. *Naphtali*, like Asher, 'dwelt among the Canaanites;' yet did not sink quite so low as Asher, but 'the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became tributaries unto them.' These two cities are named together in Josh. xix. 38. Perhaps this heathenish condition of the two tribes of Asher and Naphtali led to the designation of their country as Galilee of the Gentiles, or nations, Isa. ix. 1.—(8) Vers. 34 and 35.

 CHAP. II. 1-5.—*Solemn Remonstrance against their Negligence.*

Dan in some respects seems to have suffered most, being hemmed in by the Amorites, who even pressed in upon them in the mountain district. As to *Aijalon*, or Ajalon, see at Josh. x. 12 and xix. 42; and with *Shaalbin* compare Shaalabbin, Josh. xix. 42. — Ver. 36. This verse has been understood very variously; nor can its connection and its precise force be determined until the meaning of the geographical terms is settled. For *the going up to Akrabbim*, or Maaleh Akrabbim, see at Josh. xv. 3. *The rock* is understood by some to be a proper name, Sela, the capital of Edom, in the great valley running from the Dead Sea to the Red Sea, 2 Kings xiv. 7; Isa. xvi. 1: by others to be some well-known cliff, such as that from which water was brought by Moses the second time, Num. xx. 8-11.

 CHAPTER II. 1-5.—SOLEMN REMONSTRANCE AGAINST THEIR
 NEGLIGENCE.

Ver. 1. *An angel* ought certainly to be, The Angel. This is the only adequate rendering of the Hebrew words: and it is confirmed by the usage of this book, in which the angel representative of Jehovah curses those who did nothing in the struggles of Deborah and Barak, ch. v. 23; and comes out to commission Gideon, ch. vi. 11 (though again it is mistranslated), and to announce to Samson's parents the birth of a deliverer, ch. xiii. 3, whereas other angels are never mentioned. The only objection worth considering is, that the Angel of Jehovah is never introduced speaking to other than individuals, certainly never to the whole congregation, unless at ver. 4: a difficulty which presses as much against the supposition of a created angel, and could only lead us to think of a mere human messenger, from whom, however, the Angel of Jehovah is carefully distinguished in ch. vi. 8 and 12. Moreover, the objection insists on ver. 4 implying that the address was not made, in the first instance, to a few, or to a single person, to be communicated to the rest, but was made 'unto all the children of Israel' at once: in which case it may safely be replied that it is a self-destructive argument, since no human messenger could make them all hear him at once. The Angel *came up from Gilgal to Bochim*, that is, from Gilgal, where he had last appeared, in the character of Captain of Jehovah's host, Josh. v. 13-15, just as we read in Ex. xiv. 19, of his moving from the front of the camp of Israel, and going behind them; perhaps leaving with some trail of light, like the star which guided the wise men to Bethlehem; or in some way like

 CHAP. II. 1-5.—*Solemn Remonstrance against their Negligence.*

that in which the Angel of Jehovah manifested Himself and His movements to David and the elders of Israel and Ornan, 1 Chron. xxi. 12-20; 2 Chron. iii. 1; or simply with a reappearance of the pillar of cloud and fire in which he had led them. Bochim is never heard of again; and the name, meaning 'weepers,' was given in consequence of the events here narrated, ver. 5. Since there is no other hint of the locality, the common opinion is in all likelihood correct, that the place was at Shiloh, and that the time was at one of the three great feasts, when the people were assembled before Jehovah, and when the sacrifices which would therefore have been in any circumstances presented, were presented with peculiar exercises of faith and repentance, the result of this solemn appeal to Israel. Such manifestations of the Divine glory were by no means unknown at times of sinning, Ex. xvi. 10, xxxiii. 9; Num. xii. 5, xiv. 10, xvi. 19, xx. 6. *I made you to go up out of Egypt* (which ought to belong to a new sentence, entirely apart from the first clause of the verse, introduced by the word, *And he said*) is expressed in an unusual form in Hebrew, perhaps referring back to the words the Angel had used to Moses at the burning bush, Ex. iii. 8, 17, as the whole message rests upon a number of statements in the law of Moses. These were familiar to the people, and immediately affected their consciences powerfully: for the original in ver. 4 suggests that as soon as the words of the Angel reached the people, the blessed result was effected.—Ver. 3 may equally well begin, 'Wherefore I also say,' in the present.

1. *Why was there no need of a successor to Joshua?*
2. *How were instructions to be given to Israel in carrying out the conquest of the land?*
3. *Why is it probable that there is a break in the order of time between ver. 7 and ver. 8?*
4. *Why should Judah and Simeon naturally act together?*
5. *What may we say of the treatment of Adoni-bezek?*
6. *Who were the Kenites? And the Philistines?*
7. *How did the house of Joseph act?*
8. *How was Manasseh tempted to act, and with what results?*
9. *What peculiarity is there in the conduct of Asher and Naphtali?*
10. *Who is the Angel mentioned in ii. 1?*
11. *Where and when may the events at Bochim have occurred?*

 CHAP. II. 6-9.—*The Death of Joshua.*

CHAPTER II. 6-III. 6.—A SUMMARY OF THE HISTORY TO BE UNFOLDED IN DETAIL, SUCCESSIVE SINNING AND SALVATION.

Vers. 6-9. The death of Joshua and the elders his companions. This narrative is the same as Josh. xxiv. 28-31, excepting a few verbal alterations. As to Timnath-heres, see at Josh. xix. 50.—**Ver. 10.** The turning-point in Israel's history was the rising up of another generation, when all those were dead who had come with Joshua into Canaan: compare the case of the children of Israel coming into Egypt, Ex. i. 6-8. The slackness in exterminating the Canaanites, of which the first chapter has given an account, was accompanied by a slackness in the godly training of their own children.—**Vers. 11-13.** The usual evil consequences soon manifested themselves: minds left empty of careful, loving training in the things of God, became a prey to immorality and to false worship in which vice was tolerated; and open apostasy from Jehovah, who had brought them out of Egypt, was the unavoidable consequence of worshipping the false gods with whom he refused to be in any way associated. Baal, which means 'owner,' may have been the name given by the Canaanite races to 'the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth' (Gen. xiv. 19); but corrupting and degrading His character and worship, they thought of 'gods many and lords many' (1 Cor. viii. 5), and used the plural form of Baal, Baalim, to express the idea of the several idols whom they adored. And next they thought of male and female divinities, the latter being called Ashtaroth in the plural: the singular, Ashtoreth, occurs in 1 Kings xi. 5, 33, 2 Kings xxiii. 13, in which books the plural Baalim is to be found only once, 1 Kings xviii. 18. Heathenism is the worship of the powers of nature, and is liable to great confusion and many changes: but the prevalent idea seems to have connected Baal and Ashtoreth with the sun and moon, though there seems also to have been some reference to the stars, probably the planets Jupiter and Venus. Ashtoreth, in the three passages where the word occurs, is styled the goddess or the abomination of the Zidonians; and there is also evidence outside the Bible that Zidon was a centre of her worship. But no doubt it was widely spread; and probably we may identify Ashtoreth with the Assyrian goddess Ishtar, familiar to us in consequence of recent discoveries.—**Vers. 14, 15.** The penal consequences of forsaking Jehovah for these idols. His anger kindling, which is a standing expression; His giving them

 CHAP. II. 14-16.—*The Raising up of Judges.*

into the hands of spoilers, a somewhat uncommon word, occurring from time to time down to 2 Kings xvii. 20, 'Jehovah rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and gave them into the hands of spoilers, until He had cast them out of His sight,' and His selling them into the hands of their hostile neighbours, as if by a deliberate judicial act, ch. iii. 8, iv. 2, x. 7, according to the warning in the song of Moses, Deut. xxxii. 30, 'except their Rock had sold them.' Though the description of universal misfortune agrees with the threatenings in Lev. xxvi. 17, etc., Deut. xxviii. 25, etc., there is no definite mention elsewhere of this oath to do them harm : but it is to be inferred as a part of 'the quarrel of His covenant' confirmed by an oath, which they had broken.—**Ver. 16.** The raising up of judges gave proof that even in the worst condition of Israel, He who had sold them was still their Redeemer, and that the broken covenant really contained the provisions of a covenant of grace. It is a pity that the true rendering of the verb, 'saved,' was not given here and in ver. 18 ; for it has no connection with the verb, 'delivered,' in ver. 23, or the usual verb at vi. 9, viii. 34, etc. The like is to be said of iii. 9, 15, 31, viii. 22, x. 1, 12, 13, 14, xii. 2, 3, xiii. 5. Some people are unwilling to use the words 'save' and 'saviour' and 'salvation' of any temporal or outward mercy : but Scripture uses them freely with this application, when both the spiritual and the eternal blessing ought to have been laid hold of, and surely were by some. Thus our Lord said to persons whom He cured, 'Thy faith hath saved thee,' and Obadiah, ver. 21, describes the blessings of Messiah's times in language taken from this Book of Judges, 'And saviours shall come upon Mount Zion to judge the Mount of Esau, and the kingdom shall be Jehovah's.' It has been debated whether these judges saved Israel by peaceful judging, restoring the law of Moses and renewing the age of justice and happiness ; or by executing judgment on the enemies of Jehovah, and of Israel who were thus set free and restored to peace and well-being. Both ideas are naturally included in the word ; and we have no reason to think that Tola, for instance, ch. x. 1, saved Israel in any other than the peaceful sense of the word, after the evils of Abimelech's usurpation. Yet the language of this verse favours the belief that the predominant sense of the word is saving 'out of the hand of those that spoiled them.' There is one case of popular election to the office of judge, that of Jephthah ; yet he was at the same time called and fitted for his office very specially by the Spirit

 CHAP. II. 17-24.—*Sinning and Consequent Chastening.*

coming upon him: and this verse clearly assigns the call of the judges ultimately to Jehovah, who 'raised them up,' compare 1 Chron. xvii. 6. This expression seems also to hint that the office was extraordinary and occasional, that judges would not have been raised up, had not the spiritual and social evils afflicting the commonwealth made it expedient that Jehovah, 'the Hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble' (Jer. xiv. 8), should raise up vicegerents of His authority upon earth, as He afterwards raised up earthly kings under Himself the true King of Israel.—**Vers. 17-19. The relief was not a thorough and lasting cure.** Even while the judge lived, the people did not hearken to him, but committed spiritual adultery, Ex. xxxiv. 15, turning aside quickly, like their fathers, Ex. xxxii. 8. The source of relief had been the sovereign mercy of their God, as in the similar case before the redemption from Egypt, Ex. ii. 23-25. The substance of the relief was partly the raising up of the judge; but especially it was that 'Jehovah was with the judge,' as in better times, when no judge was as yet needed, He had been with Judah and with the house of Joseph, i. 19, 22. The miserable result, at least with reference to the carnal multitude of the Israelites, was a relapse after the death of the judge, the last state being worse than the first, as they became more corrupt than their fathers, and did not cease from (or, in the vivid Hebrew statement, 'they let fall nothing of') their own doings and their stubborn way.—**Vers. 20-24. The consequent chastening.** In any case the nations were to have been dispossessed gradually: see on iii. 1, 2. But an additional reason came out to view, now that Israel did their utmost to sink from being the covenant people of Jehovah, to being a nation indistinguishable from the other nations, such as those whom Joshua had left. Why should these now be rooted out by God before Israel? Why not rather leave them to be a source of temptation, since Israel deliberately rushed into the temptation? For many a time they were forewarned that this would prove a snare. Accordingly He said that He would no more drive out or dispossess these nations. It is impossible to determine whether His saying this was on occasion of the rebuke administered at Bochim, vers. 2, 3, or at some later time. And again there is doubt as to the time, since ver. 22 might equally well be translated, 'that through them I might prove Israel, whether they would keep,' etc.—**Chap. III. 1-4. The nations left for this purpose.** He would have left remnants of them (or suffered them to remain, as the

 CHAP. III. 1-6.—*The Miserable Failure of Israel in the Day of Trial.*

word in ver. 1 and in ii. 23 might be rendered) in any case, not driving them out at once, for the reason originally given, that Israel could not at once take possession of the whole land to the best advantage, Ex. xxiii. 29, 30. The death of Joshua brought out an additional reason, the importance of training in the knowledge of the art of war that new generation whose deplorable ignorance and carelessness have been already mentioned : for this kind of war required faith and holiness, Ps. xlv. 1-5, as Joshua had well known. But along with this, and on account of the sinfulness of the people, a third reason assumed importance, namely, that Israel's faithfulness might be tested, ver. 4, repeating ver. 1 and ii. 22, on account of the special prominence now to be given to this consideration in the altered state of Israel. The nations left for these purposes remind us of those already enumerated in Josh. xiii. 2-5, which see for the geography : but they have also been mentioned (except the Hivites) in the first chapter of this book ; the Philistines in ver. 18, the Canaanites in vers. 27, 29, 30, 32, 33, and the Zidonians in ver. 31.—**Vers. 5, 6. The miserable failure of Israel in the day of trial.** They dwelt among the devoted nations, as was said of Asher and Naphtali in i. 32, 33. The Gergashites alone of the whole seven nations are unmentioned, unless, indeed, we understand the Canaanites to be a general name including the five which follow : see on Josh. iii. 10 and ix. 1. This close intermingling in other ways led to inter-connection by marriage, in spite of distinct emphatic prohibition, Ex. xxxiv. 16 ; Deut. vii. 1-4. And the final issue was communion in the worship of their gods.

1. *How was the absence of godly family training felt ?*
 2. *Explain the names Baalim and Ashtaroth.*
 3. *How is the verb ' saved ' used in the narratives in this book ?*
 4. *Were the judges civil or military saviours ?*
 5. *How were they appointed ?*
 6. *To what extent was their work effective ?*
 7. *What chastisement was inflicted on disobedient Israel ?*
 8. *What various reasons are given for the Canaanites being suffered to remain in the land ?*
 9. *How did the corruption work into the homes of Israel ?*
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CHAPTER III. 7-V. 31.

THE FIRST PERIOD OF SINNING AND RECOVERY.

CHAPTER III. 7-11.—OTHNIEL.

Ver. 7. The children of Israel did evil in the sight of Jehovah, or did that which is evil; a very regularly-recurring phrase, as is also the kindling of Jehovah's anger, and His selling them, ver. 8, see at ii. 14. When they forgot Jehovah, they soon took to the worship of other gods. *They served Baalim and the groves.* As to Baalim. see at ii. 11, 13. 'The groves' is a rendering derived from the old Greek version, the Septuagint, but now abandoned for the literal Hebrew, Asheroth, the plural of Asherah, which also occurs. By some this is held to be a different form of the word Ashtaroth, already conjoined with Baal at ii. 13: by most authorities it is explained as upright wooden posts or pillars, apparently dedicated to Ashtaroth, and spoken of, on the one hand, as being planted, made, or set up, and on the other hand, as being cut or hewn down and burned; and where a number of these wooden pillars were set up together, it is easy to understand how the word came to be explained to mean a grove.—**Ver. 8.** *Chushan-rishathaim* is unknown in history: his name has been translated, 'Chushan of double wickedness,' which may perhaps have been an alteration of some foreign name into a Hebrew word so as to express the detestation with which the people regarded their first enslaver. *Mesopotamia*, the country between the two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, is the ancient and happy rendering of the Hebrew *Aram-naharaim*, that is, Syria of the two rivers. In Gen. xiv. we have a record of an invasion of southern Palestine and the surrounding districts by four kings, from the neighbourhood of Mesopotamia, as it would seem, who held the country in subjection for twelve or thirteen years.—**Vers. 9, 10.** No details are given of this saviour and his mode of working, although it seems to have been in battle. He was already mentioned in i. 13; see on the parallel passage, Josh. xv. 13-19, some reasons for believing him to be the nephew of Caleb, not his brother. The essential matter is that the Israelites cried unto Jehovah, and that He raised them up a saviour; an experience to be repeated in the case of a nation outwardly so far from him as Egypt, Isa. xix. 20. The distinguishing circumstance is that the Spirit of

Jehovah came upon Othniel for his work. No doubt He is always present and efficient in every good work : but something marked and special is to be inferred from the mention here made of him, as again in Gideon's case, vi. 34 ; Jephthah's, xi. 29 ; and Samson's, xiii. 25. These events are therefore to be regarded as marking the four great epochs in this long period of alternate sinning and repentance : of their analogies more may yet be said.—**Ver. 11.** The land had rest (or quiet, as it is often rendered, for instance viii. 28), another very frequent expression in this book. There is no evidence whatever that Othniel ruled the people during these forty years, or even that he lived through them all ; certainly such living could not be supposed in the case of the eighty years after Ehud's victory, ver. 30. There is clear evidence of continuous rule by the judges no earlier than in the case of Gideon, if even so early. The 'judging' of the first judges may have been entirely concentrated in the act by which they saved the people from their oppressors, as here, ver. 10. And the mention of Othniel's death after the mention of the forty years of rest, is naturally explained by the habitual connection of the death of the judge with the renewed corruption of the nation, ii. 19, iv. 1, viii. 33. Othniel is the only judge mentioned as by birth belonging to the great tribe of Judah, till we come to Ibzan of Bethlehem, xii. 8.

CHAPTER III. 12-30.—EHUD.

Vers. 12-14. The second servitude was from an enemy nearer at hand, and probably less powerful, than the king of Mesopotamia : these circumstances taken in conjunction with the fact that it lasted not eight but eighteen years, evince the increasing severity of the discipline on sinning Israel. The oppressor specially named is the king of Moab, but the children of Ammon and the Amalekites were associated with him ; the former were next neighbours to Moab on the north, closely allied by blood, for both were the descendants of Lot ; and probably they were accustomed to act together, as they had together been protected by a special Divine command given to the conquering Israelites, Deut. ii. 9-23. Indeed, on that occasion the Edomites were included in the same protection, and in some sense the Edomites included the Amalekites, who are here associated with Moab and Ammon ; yet strictly the Amalekites formed a nationality by themselves, a peculiarly warlike and daring race, and with a special grudge against Israel even as they were the

objects of a special curse on account of Israel, Ex. xvii. 8-16; Num. xxiv. 20; Deut. xxv. 17-19. Ammon and Amalek no doubt demanded and obtained a fair price for their assistance, since it was they, along with Eglon and the Moabites, not Moab alone, as an English reader would suppose, who possessed the city of palm trees, that is, Jericho; see at i. 16. Yet Moab is manifestly the leader, having indeed old causes of quarrel with Israel ever since the days of Balaam and the sin of Baal-peor, Num. xxii., xxv.; though perhaps no motive was needed other than the hope of spoil when Israel could be taken at a disadvantage.—**Ver. 15.** The cry to Jehovah led to His raising up a new saviour, who is named 'the Benjamite,' perhaps because he was already famous among his people, so that he was the man selected to bear the present, a kind of tribute, to Eglon, perhaps because the city of palm trees lay within the territory of the tribe out of which the saviour arose. He was 'a man left-handed,' a peculiarity which fitted him for the task he set before himself, as it seems to have been common in Benjamin, xx. 16; 1 Chron. xii. 2: from the last passage it is rightly inferred that these men were left-handed in the sense of being able to use both hands alike. There may have been some connection between their habit of training themselves to this art and the name which Jacob gave to his son, their ancestor, Benjamin, 'the son of the right hand.'—**Ver. 16.** A dagger is a fair enough rendering, but the Hebrew is simply, a sword. The length of it is expressed by a word which occurs only here, and whose meaning is quite uncertain: in the Septuagint Greek it is translated 'a span,' but in the Vulgate Latin and others, 'a palm' or hand-breadth.—**Vers. 19-20.** *Ehud's stratagem.* The 'quarries' mentioned here and ver. 26 are so understood according to Jewish tradition; but everywhere else the word, a common one, is rendered 'graven images,' and it is natural to think of some idols set up as symbols of the heathen supremacy, or perhaps as marks of the boundary of immediate jurisdiction exercised by the king of Moab when residing at the city of palm trees. Gilgal lay to the east of Jericho, see at Josh. iv. 19. Did Ehud then travel south-eastward instead of westward, so as to allay every imaginable suspicion? He had been at the head of a large deputation, apparently more formal and influential than usual, since it is styled 'the people' in ver. 18, by whom the present was offered to the king; and after their business had been transacted with punctilious order and submission, and they had been led away by him, he returned all alone,

as the bearer of some private communication. He found the king alone, for he had by this time retired to the summer parlour, literally 'the upper-room of cooling.' Ehud's language may have been intentionally ambiguous, for it might mean, 'I have a Divine commission unto thee,' a word addressed to himself telling him something to do to Eglon, although the other translation is probably the simpler, and conveys the meaning as Eglon understood it. We are in no way bound to say that Ehud acted rightly in all this, for he might sin very greatly in the manner in which he executed his commission to save Israel; yet it is to be remembered by those who condemn him, that with the purest and noblest earthly motives, at all events, for the deliverance of his country, he simply did what many are applauded for doing, as their names are emblazoned in the pages of classic and other history. But it is an old inference that the duty is far more clearly incumbent on us than it was on Eglon to hear a message from God with reverence and readiness.—**Vers. 22, 23. The killing and the escape.** The last words of ver. 22 are certainly mistranslated in the A. V., whose marginal rendering is very natural, though in any case we are left pretty much to guess, because the noun occurs nowhere else. The Hebrew noun for a sword being feminine, while the verb here is masculine, it must be the blade which came out; or it is perhaps safer to render, 'and he went out toward the open space,' making the subject of this verb Ehud, as he certainly is of the foregoing verb. The next verse then describes his action more precisely: Ehud went out toward the porch, another word which never occurs again, but appears to mean a place enclosed by pillars, perhaps the enclosure on the flat roof of that upper chamber, from which he could get down to the street without entering the house; see Matt. xxiv. 17.—**Vers. 26-30. The victory and salvation of Israel.** Seirath, ver. 26, is unknown. Ehud's arrangements were no doubt made beforehand, in the confident expectation that he would succeed in killing Eglon, and freeing Israel, ver. 28: his blowing the trumpet was the concerted signal, which rallied the children of Israel round him. 'The fords of Jordan by Moab' may have been all the fords that could have been used for escape by the Moabites, who had been stationed within the land of Israel; perhaps chiefly those fords near Jericho at which Joshua would have led the people across. The destruction of the Moabites in Canaan was complete: the number, 10,000, is considerable, especially as the description marks them

CHAP. III. 31.—*Shamgar.*

out as picked troops. Since there is nothing to make us think of an attack upon the land of Moab itself, we conclude that the two nations were content to let and to be let alone. And the land of Israel did enjoy a long rest, but not a word is said of Ehud's administration, whether it had any existence, and if it had, what was its duration. Compare what was said on ver. 11.

CHAPTER III. 31.—SHAMGAR.

Of no other judge is so little said; yet there is no reason to depreciate him below the level of the men with whom he is associated in this book, since 'he also saved Israel,' from foes so dangerous as the Philistines, and with an instrument so unlikely as an ox-goad. True, he is not said to have judged Israel, nor does he receive the name of judge: but not to urge that this may be explained by the brevity of the notice given of him, the same derogatory remark might be made in reference to Ehud, to Barak, and even to Gideon. We might rather infer that he was a person of some importance from what is said in the song of Deborah, v. 6, 'In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways.' This is the only additional help we have for determining the precise time at which he lived: and it amounts to very little. Assuming that Jael is the woman who killed Sisera (for she is mentioned prominently in the song, and we know nothing of any other), the days of desolation coupled with her name must have been those of servitude to Jabin after Ehud's death: but it would remain quite open to conjecture whether the days of Shamgar were contemporaneous with hers or earlier. That they were earlier is the more probable view, considering that the death of Ehud is mentioned after the exploit of Shamgar. Not improbably they were so early as to be contemporaneous with the Moabite servitude, as at a later time we find the Ammonites and the Philistines together oppressing Israel, x. 7: in which case Shamgar may have assisted Ehud in the work of saving Israel, though still coming 'after him.' Otherwise, there was room enough for Philistine invasion, and need to be saved from melancholy consequences during those eighty years in which the land on the whole 'had rest.' See what has been said on vers. 11 and 30.

1. *What were the groves?*
2. *What is recorded as specially qualifying Oihmiel for his work?*

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3. *Are there any other cases of the same kind recorded?*
4. *Did Othniel rule the people throughout the forty years of quiet?*
5. *Who were the agents in the second chastisement of Israel, and how do they compare with the first?*
6. *What bodily peculiarity had the appointed saviour in common with many in his tribe?*
7. *What are we to say of his stratagem?*
8. *How far was his success immediate and complete?*
9. *What things do we miss being said of Shamgar?*
10. *What can we learn from a notice of him elsewhere?*

CHAPTER IV.—DEBORAH AND BARAK.

Vers. 1-3. The servitude to Jabin. This third fall into gross idolatry, occurring of course during the eighty years of rest and quiet, mentioned in iii. 30, though we cannot say how early or how late, was followed by a third servitude, longer than either of the two preceding, and more disgraceful, because the instrument was not an independent sovereign outside their own land, but one of the remnant of the Canaanites whom they ought to have destroyed. Jabin reigned in Hazor, and was therefore a king of the same name, and reigning in the same place, as one of Joshua's foes: see Josh. xi. 1, and the note there. Probably the rebuilder of this city and the restorer of this Canaanite kingdom either traced his descent from his namesake, or wished to associate his reign with that older one: and revenge and other causes led him to make his rule over Israel remarkably severe. *Harosheth* has been generally looked for somewhere near Hazor: but much probability attaches to the opinion of Dr. Thomson (*The Land and the Book*), who identifies it with Harothieh, a hill or mound covered with remains of antiquity, at the south-eastern corner of the plain of Akka, on the north side of the Kishon, yet very close to Mount Carmel.—**Vers. 4, 5. Deborah** stands out before us very prominently, a witness to the degradation of the people and to the goodness of the covenant God of Israel, who raised up for them at this time a person endowed with the gift of prophecy, the first case recorded since the death of Moses, probably 200 years before; and this person a woman and also a judge. There is no reason for supposing that she was a judge in any other sense than the rest of the judges in this book; though ver. 5 makes it plain that the commencement of her work was that side of

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the judge's office which consisted in holding up the law to Israel, and bringing them back to righteousness. A woman might be able to do this where a man would have failed, under a tyranny such as Jabin's for the Hebrew expression suggests that she was judging Israel and dwelling under her palm tree while his tyranny was in full operation. Her place of judgment was between Bethel and Ramah, now Beitin and Er Râm (see on Josh. vii. 2, xviii. 25), the latter five miles south of the former, on that high plateau named Mount Ephraim, though in that part of it which lay within the territory of Benjamin. The palm tree was known as an emblem of the land of Palestine; and there may have been an allusion to this (compare Baal-tamar, 'Baal,' or 'owner' of the palm tree, a place in this neighbourhood, ch. xx. 33) in her dwelling or sitting under the palm tree distinguished by her name. Her husband may have been dead, though she is called his wife; for it is not in accordance with the language of the Bible to speak of the widow of a man. The words have been translated 'a woman of a fiery spirit,' discarding the proper name; but this is unlikely.—**Vers. 6-10. Barak called and sent to the work.** The prophetess and judge called Barak to her southern home from his in the far north, the city of refuge in Naphtali, Kedesh; see at Josh. xii. 22, xx. 7. As on a former occasion Jehovah had fixed who should go up first against the Canaanites, i. 1, 2, so now His prophetess laid this duty on Barak's own tribe, and on Zebulun, its neighbour to the south: so that in this case, as in Ehud's, deliverance was to come from the very quarter in which the oppressor had his seat. *Tabor*, now *Jebel Tûr*, eleven miles west of the sea of Galilee, a mountain singularly prominent not so much from its height, which is 1843 feet, as from its cone-like or egg-like shape, and its isolated position at the north-east extremity of the great plain of Jezreel, which was watered by the Kishon, chap. v. 21. Barak was to 'draw toward Mount Tabor,' or to 'draw out in it,' an obscure expression, which some content themselves with calling a military term, while others connect it with the same word as used of the lambs for the Passover, Ex. xii. 21, where, as here, we read, 'draw out and take,' as if he were to elude the tyrant's vigilance by taking small bodies of troops one after another to the place of meeting. And Deborah in the name of Jehovah added, 'and I will draw,' or 'draw out,' 'to thee,' the opposing army in all its force, but only to give it into Barak's hand. The magnificent valley of Jezreel, the only place in Palestine where cavalry can act freely, and therefore the scene of

numerous important battles, promised to be eminently suitable for Jabin's chariots of iron, see Josh. xvii. 16-18 : and at the hills on the north-west of this valley Harosheth has been conjecturally placed ; yet here a victory should be achieved as great and marvellous as Joshua's over the earlier Jabin. Barak's refusal to go without Deborah may reasonably be attributed rather to piety than to fear, especially as we read of no hesitation in coming at the first call of Deborah. Nevertheless there was something in it of making conditions ere he would yield obedience to the command of Jehovah, and therefore in the issue of the war he was not to have the glory he might have had ; he began by relying too much on the bodily presence of a woman, saint and prophetess though she was ; and in the end Sisera should be sold by Jehovah into a woman's hand. From ver. 10 it may probably be inferred that Deborah and Barak took up their position at Kedesh, and there made their preparations with the two chosen tribes ; though in the end he went up to Tabor, ver. 12, whither he must have sent or led on his troops at the time for action.—**Ver. 11. Heber the Kenite.** The woman into whose hand Sisera was to be sold was the wife of Heber, one of the race of Kain, or a Kenite, and a descendant of Hobab, Num. x. 29-32, called in the A. V. here 'the father-in-law of Moses,' rather 'brother-in-law,' for this meaning appears also to be included in the word. *Zaanaim* is another form of *Zaanannim* ; the 'oak in *Zaanannim*,' or 'of *Bezaannim*,' is mentioned in Josh. xix. 33 (to be translated 'the oak in *Z.*,' not 'Allon to *Z.*'). It is vain to speculate on the circumstances or motives which had led him to separate from his countrymen living in the territory of Judah, towards the south, i. 16, and to move gradually in a northerly direction till he came as far as this oak which was by Kedesh. But since he thus moved about, he might be or become a conspicuous personage in the land of Israel, and his wife no less so, judging from the evidence of her strength of character ; and a similar inference may be drawn from the mention of peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber, ver. 17 : and this takes off any feeling of surprise at the mention of 'the days of Jael,' to which reference has been already made at iii. 31.—**Vers. 12-14. Preparations for the battle.** The matter chiefly deserving of attention here is that Barak should have ventured to go down from Mount Tabor into the great valley where all the Canaanite forces already were. But this was his reply to Deborah's 'Up ! for this is the day,' etc., and, 'Is not Jehovah gone

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out before thee?'—**Vers. 15–17. The complete victory.** This was because Jehovah discomfited Sisera and his camp, that is, struck panic into them; see on Josh. x. 10. But the writer is careful to make an unprecedented addition (for in Ex. xvii. 13 'discomfited' stands for an entirely different Hebrew word), that this panic was 'with the edge of the sword.' 'It was before Barak;' for while the excellency of the power was of God, doing what Barak could not naturally have achieved, still he had to use his sword as if all depended on himself. He naturally pursued Sisera's host (in Hebrew, his camp, that is, the camp in motion) towards Harosheth, westward near to the mouth of the Kishon; whereas Sisera escaped on foot in a north-easterly direction for 35 or 40 miles, as it is commonly thought, till he came to the oak in Zaanaim, beside Barak's home at Kedesh. We know nothing of the circumstances which enabled the house of Heber to retain their friendly relations with Israel, and yet to be at peace with Jabin.—**Vers. 18–22. Jael puts Sisera to death.** The terrible scene which is vividly presented in these verses is surrounded with difficulties which our ignorance cannot solve. How did Sisera find his way straight to a woman's tent, ver. 17? Was he so great a coward that he broke through all ordinary rules to seek refuge with Jael and not with Heber? Or had he base intentions, such as have been sometimes imputed to him, such as would explain and justify all that Jael did, and such as his mother's language, ver. 30, suggests to be in accordance with his habits? Again, could hers be an act of deliberate treachery? or was it unpremeditated murder in consequence of suddenly discovering the impossibility of preserving a neutral attitude? Was it an attempt to avoid Barak's wrath on account of harbouring his great enemy, who had been trying to school her into a course of lying for his own benefit? Or had she all along disapproved of her husband's neutrality, and felt that the Kenites were in duty bound to act along with Israel? and when she saw Sisera sleeping unprotected and unsuspecting in her tent, did an evil impulse hurry her along to endeavour to set things right again, with the idea that this was the critical moment in which God was calling her to fulfil that prophecy of Deborah's (ver. 9) which no doubt circulated among the women of the land? According to the laws of hospitality in those countries, Sisera was entitled to consider himself safe when she gave him food and drink: and there was apparent heartiness in answering his request for water by giving him milk from the skin that hung beside

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her. The 'mantle' with which she covered him is better translated 'rug, or blanket' in the margin of the A. V.; many think of it as made of hair, or of skin: the word does not occur again, and is obscure.—Vers. 23, 24. **The full deliverance of Israel.** That day determined the fate of Jabin, whose commander was brought back to die thus ingloriously almost at Barak's home. But the language suggests a struggle kept up for some time, though always more and more in favour of Israel. There is some emphasis in the triple repetition of the name of their enemy, Ja'in, king of Canaan.

CHAPTER V.—THE TRIUMPHAL SONG OF DEBORAH AND BARAK.

Before the usual announcement that the land had rest after Barak's victorious campaign, this time for forty years, ver. 31, there is recorded the song which Deborah and Barak sang, ver. 1. By the way in which their names are given, however, we are led to think that the song is properly Deborah's; and this opinion is confirmed by an examination of its contents, by the title of prophetess given to her, iv. 4 (compare Miriam, Ex. xv. 20, 21), and by the occurrence of other songs of females, Hannah and the Virgin Mary. The song, which in its commencement is partly formed on the model of the blessing of Moses (compare ver. 4 with Deut. xxxiii. 2), as in turn it has been a model to Ps. lxxviii. and to the prayer of Habakkuk, abounds in difficult words and expressions. The Authorised Version still holds a good place among the many which have been given; yet one more is offered, as the basis of any subsequent comments. No distribution into stanzas or sections can be made with confidence, but perhaps the following division may aid the reader in apprehending the sequence of thought and emotion:—

- I.—1. Ver. 2. For that they let [the] long hair go loose in Israel;¹
 For that [the] people willingly offered themselves,
 Bless ye Jehovah.
2. Ver. 3. Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes:
 I will sing, [even] I, unto Jehovah,
 I will make melody to² Jehovah the God of Israel.
- Ver. 4. Jehovah, when thou wentest forth out of Seir,
 When thou didst march out of the field of Edom,
 [The] earth trembled, [the] heavens also dropped,
 Yea, [the] clouds dropped water.

¹ Or, For that the leaders led in Israel.

² Or, Sing praise to.

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- Ver. 5. [The] mountains quaked¹ at the presence of Jehovah,
[Even] Sinai here at the presence of Jehovah the God of Israel.
3. Ver. 6. In the days of Shamgar, the son of Anath,
In the days of Jael,
[High] ways ceased [to be],
And travellers² walked in crooked ways.
- Ver. 7. Villages ceased in Israel,³ they ceased,
Until that I, Deborah, arose,
That I arose, a mother in Israel.
- Ver. 8. They choose new gods ;
Then [is] war in [the] gates :⁴
Is there a shield seen, or a spear,
Among forty thousand in Israel ?
- II.—1. Ver. 9. My heart [is] toward the lawgivers of Israel,
That offered themselves willingly among the people,
Bless ye Jehovah.
2. Ver. 10. Meditate,⁵ ye that ride on white asses,⁶
Ye that sit on rich carpets,
And ye that walk by the way.
- Ver. 11. [Far] from⁷ the voice of archers,⁸ amid places for drawing water,
There shall they rehearse the righteous acts of Jehovah,
The righteous acts toward his villages in Israel ;⁹
Then the people of Jehovah came down to the gates.
- III.—1. Ver. 12. Awake, awake, Deborah,
Awake, awake, utter¹⁰ a song.
Arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam,
2. Ver. 13. Then came down a remnant,¹¹ [the] people to [the] nobles.
Jehovah came down to me¹² among the mighty.
- Ver. 14. Out of Ephraim [came they down] whose root [is] in Amalek,
After thee, Benjamin, among thy peoples ;
Out of Machir came down lawgivers,
And out of Zebulun they that wield the rod of him that mustereth.¹³
- Ver. 15. And my princes in Issachar¹⁴ [were] with Deborah,
And [as] Issachar, so [was] Barak ;¹⁵

1 Or, flowed down,

2 Heb. *walkers of paths.*

3 Or, All rule ceased in Israel, it ceased.

4 Heb. *the war of the gates.*

5 Or, Talk.

6 Heb. *she-asses.*

7 Or, By.

8 Or, dividers [of the prey],

9 Or, of his rule in Israel.

10 Heb. *speak.*

11 Or, Come down, O remnant ; or, Let [the] remnant have dominion.

12 Or, Come down to me ; or, Let . . . have dominion for me.

13 Or, the sceptre of the scribe.

14 Or, the princes of Issachar.

15 Or, And Issachar [was] the basis of Barak.

 CHAP. V.—*Triumphal Song of Deborah and Barak.*

- Into the valley were they sent forth at his feet,¹
 By the watercourses of Reuben [there were] great resolves of heart.
3. Ver. 16. Why didst thou sit among the sheep-folds,
 To hear the pipings² of the flocks?
 At the watercourses of Reuben [there were] great searchings of heart.
- Ver. 17. Gilead abode beyond Jordan ;
 And Dan, why doth he sojourn in ships?
 Asher sat at the haven³ of [the] seas,
 And he abideth by his creeks.
- Ver. 18. Zebulun [was] a people [that] jeoparded their life unto the death.
 And [also] Naphtali, upon the heights of [the] field.
- IV.—1. Ver. 19. Kings came, they fought ;
 Then fought the kings of Canaan,
 In Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo ;
 They took no gain of money.
- Ver. 20. They fought from heaven ;
 The stars from their courses fought with Sisera.
- Ver. 21. [The] torrent Kishon swept them away,
 [That] ancient torrent, [the] torrent Kishon.
 My soul, tread thou down⁴ with⁵ strength.
- Ver. 22. Then were the horsehoofs broken⁶
 By [the] prancings,⁷ the prancings⁷ of their strong oncs.
2. Ver. 23. Curse ye Meroz, said the Angel of Jehovah,
 Curse ye continuously the inhabitants thereof ;
 Because they came not to the help of Jehovah,
 To the help of Jehovah among the mighty.
3. Ver. 24. By women will Jael be blessed,
 The wife of Heber the Kenite ;
 By women in the tent will she be blessed.
- Ver. 25. He asked water, she gave milk,
 She presented cream in a bowl for nobles.
- Ver. 26. [These] women will⁸ put her hand to the [tent] pin,
 And her right hand to the workman's hammer ;
 And she will hammer Sisera, shatter his head,
 And pierce and strike through his temples.
- Ver. 27. Between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay.
 Between her feet he bowed, he fell :
 Where he bowed, there he fell destroyed.
-

¹ Or, He was sent on foot into the valley.

³ Or, shore.

⁴ Or, thou treadst down.

⁶ Or, Then did the horsehoofs stamp,

Or, Ye women will.

² Heb. *whistlings*.

⁵ Or, strength.

⁷ Or, galloping.

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- V.—1. Ver. 28. Through the window she looked forth and cried out,
 [Even] the mother of Sisera through the lattice.
 'Why hath his chariot been so long in coming?
 Why have the wheels¹ of his chariots tarried?'
2. Ver. 29. Her wisest ladies answer her;
 Yea, she returneth answer to herself.²
- Ver. 30. 'Are they not finding, dividing the prey?
 A girl, two girls,³ to every man;
 Prey of divers colours to Sisera,
 Prey of divers colours of embroidery;
 Of divers colours of embroidery on both sides, on the necks of
 [the] prey.'⁴
3. Ver. 31. So shall all thine enemies perish, O Jehovah.
 But they that love him shall be as the going forth of the sun in
 his might,

Vers. 2-8. The introduction: blessing Jehovah for present grace imparted, ver. 2; summoning heathen kings to hear the hymn of triumph, ver. 3; recalling His old manifestation on behalf of Israel at the exodus, vers. 4, 5; and describing the misery, sin, and spiritlessness of Israel, till Deborah arose to be a spiritual mother. *For that they let the long hair go loose*, in ver. 2, seems the safest translation. The noun occurs in the singular only in Num. vi. 5, Ezek. xlv. 20; and in the plural only here and Deut. xxxii. 42, both times in the A. V. understood of avenging: but the kindred verb, which is also used here, is found in Lev. x. 6, xiii. 45, xxi. 10, Num. v. 18; in the A. V. it is understood to mean uncovering the hair, but it is letting it go loose. These long dishevelled locks, like the Nazarites, Num. vi. 5, are spoken of here either as indicating that God had granted a spirit of consecration to His people, making them practically a nation of Nazarites; or more generally as indicating freedom and strength, of which the Nazarites' long hair is supposed to have been an emblem. *The days of Shamgar and of Jael*, ver. 6, have been already noticed at iii. 31. 'Villages' in ver. 7, and again in ver. 11, is a most difficult word. On the whole, it is safer to adhere to Jewish tradition, which connects it with the word for unwallied or country villages, Deut. iii. 5, 1 Sam. vi. 18, Esther ix. 19, Ezek. xxxviii. 11, Zech. ii. 4; yet there is ancient authority for the marginal rendering

¹ Heb. *footsteps*.² Or, But she repeateth her words unto herself.³ Heb. *A womb, two wombs*.⁴ Or, for the necks that take [the] prey.

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to which modern scholars have often given the preference. *The forty thousand* in ver. 8 may be a round number, or may refer to the quota of soldiers furnished to Joshua by the tribes beyond Jordan, Josh. iv. 13; or to the quota set apart in the civil war with Benjamin, chap. xx. 2, 10; or may be, in an army fourfold that of Barak. Their unarmed state need not be exactly parallel to the disarmed state of Israel as described in 1 Sam. xiii. 19, 22: it might be owing to want of will as much as to want of power.—Vers. 9–11. **The universal praise offered by Israel to Jehovah:** beginning with what is nearly a repetition of ver. 2, in ver. 9; going on to summon all classes to an exercise which takes its rise in meditation, but which ends in speaking out, for both ideas are in the verb, ver. 10; and issuing in the free movement of the delivered people, and their grateful praises. Pure *white asses*, in ver. 10, were no doubt rare, so that riding on them was a mark of persons of rank or wealth; so rare must they have been, that some understood the adjective, which is peculiar, not of the animals, but of their brilliant saddle-cloths and saddles. The *rich carpets*, or robes, in the same verse (for the traditional rendering ‘in judgment’ seems now to be abandoned), are an indication of the same high rank or wealth; but they who sit at home are no more excused from praise and meditation than those who go abroad. Nor is the duty less incumbent on the mass of the common people, who are able to walk by the way, as they had not been in earlier unhappy days. *Far from the voice of archers*, in ver. 11, is as much as ‘delivered from it;’ but others understand the preposition as indicating the source from which the praises shall come, practically equivalent to our common use of ‘with’ or ‘by.’ The word rendered ‘archers’ does not occur again, and as it might be connected with a verb ‘to divide,’ the marginal rendering has the support of excellent scholars.—Vers. 12–18. **A renewed summons to praise, and a catalogue of the tribes who helped and who failed to help.** After the call to herself and Barak, ver. 12, the people are named as a whole, with Jehovah at their head, ver. 13; Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir (that is, Manasseh, Josh. xvii. 1, though many writers insist on excluding Manasseh beyond Jordan, which they include under Gilead, ver. 17), Zebulun, and Issachar, vers. 14, 15; but not Reuben, Gilead, Dan, or Asher, vers. 16, 17; yet, distinguished above all the rest, Naphtali as well as Zebulun, ver. 19. One feels surprised at no mention being made of Judah and Simeon in this list, and this

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silence will be noticed again in the case of Gideon's war. In these verses occur some of the translator's hardest difficulties. *Then came down a remnant*, in the first half of ver. 13, with a corresponding statement in the second half, that Jehovah came down, agrees well with the occurrence of this verb in ver. 11 and ver. 14; but Jewish tradition connects it with quite another verb, often applied to a conqueror having dominion, as in Balaam's prophecy, Num. xxiv. 19. *The people to the nobles* is the most literal rendering possible, and may mean that this remnant, having Jehovah at their head, as is next declared, multiplied and became a people, those who willingly offered themselves, vers. 2, 9. *Among the mighty* can quite well be rendered against the mighty; and the preposition is rendered 'against' in the A. V. at ver. 14 and ver. 23; but 'in' or 'among' is simpler. *Ephraim and Benjamin* are described perhaps geographically, Ephraim rooted in a land which Amalek had once occupied (xii. 15), and Benjamin in a land with a multitude of Canaanite races, as the very names of the Benjamite cities (Josh. xviii. 22, 23) indicate; others think rather of historical reminiscences of the Ephraimite Joshua first distinguishing himself against Amalek, and of Benjamin as having given to Israel the latest judge, Ehud, just before the age of backsliding. It is the more difficult to decide this point, because we are ignorant of the special allusions to Machir and Zebulun. *Reuben's case*, vers. 15, 16, was a sad instance of the unstable character of the tribe, of which Jacob had foretold, 'Thou shalt not excel.' With consummate skill we have Reuben first described among the assisting tribes with great resolutions; then by a sudden change, with great searchings of hearts (the two nouns in Hebrew very much alike), the resolve never being carried out, but the people lazily sitting down among their flocks, as if it were a time of peace. 'The divisions of Reuben' could not naturally be taken in any other than a geographical sense, the deep watercourses cutting through that hilly country.—Vers. 19–27. *The battle itself*: the Canaanite warriors, ver. 19; the heavenly forces against them, ver. 20, and co-operating natural forces on the earth, ver. 21; the rout, ver. 22; the curse of God on Meroz for not taking part, ver. 23; the blessing of women on Jael for the part she took, vers. 24–27. *Taanach and Megiddo*, ver. 19, are mentioned together at Josh. xii. 21; these cities had been sinfully spared by the Israelites, Josh. xvii. 11, Judg. i. 27; and the sin of Israel became one means of their

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punishment. 'They took no gain of money,' may mean that they were entirely unsuccessful, a sense more prominent in the rendering sometimes given, 'they took not a piece of money : ' but possibly it is, that they accepted no tribute money to let the people off ; or even that they fought for the love of fighting with Israel, to gratify their hatred and not their covetousness. How *the stars fought from their courses*, ver. 20, is not apparent : explanations thoroughly prosaic, falling stars, a shower of stones (as Josh. x. 11), or thoroughly poetical (comp. Ps. xviii. 7-16), alike involve the lesson that natural influences from above contributed to win the battle for Israel ; as we read next, ver. 21, of natural influences on earth, the swelling of the Kishon, which is known to rise rapidly and almost to an incredible height, and after such a flood treacherous quicksands towards the mouth add unspeakably to its dangers. There is much obscurity attaching to the epithet 'ancient : ' some ask how it was more ancient than other torrents ; some understand that it had attained to renown in early times, since the valley in which it runs has always been a favourite battle-field ; some venture on a doubtful translation, 'that torrent of battles.' 'Then were the horse-hoofs broken' gives a natural sense ; the rout of the enemy ; the prancings, or not improbably the galloppings, of their strong ones (a word entirely unconnected with 'the mighty' in vers. 13, 23, that is, the heroes), a name given again to war-horses by Jeremiah. Yet as the verb is always elsewhere used actively ('to hammer,' in ver. 26), perhaps here it is safer to render, 'the horse-hoofs stamped [the ground].' Meroz is a place known exclusively (like Chorazin in the New Testament) from the curse pronounced upon it. Jerome places it twelve Roman miles north of Sebaste or Samaria, but Mr. Tyrwhitt Drake finds it in Marassus (Marussus) on a knoll north of the Wadî Jâlûd, twice as far off, an hour and a half north of Beth-shean ; as others have done. The bitter curse is pronounced not for anything positive that Meroz had done, but simply for doing nothing in the day of action. And it is pronounced by the Angel of Jehovah, the invisible Captain of the host, Josh. v. 14 ; whether we suppose that he uttered it now, or whether it is the special application to Meroz of his standing curse on negligence, see at ii. 1, 2, 'By women shall Faal be blessed,' ver. 24, for having done so much, in contrast with these do-nothing men of Meroz ; and so effectually as to bring the honour to her which might have come to Barak, as Deborah had foretold, iv. 9 : though the praise accorded to her by these women

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in the tent is no proof that purer eyes would have failed to see gross sin mingling in her service done to Israel; see notes on iv. 18–22. ‘Blessed above women in the tent,’ as in the A. V., and generally by other translators, is a translation that cannot be rejected for merely grammatical reasons: but it gives a sense from which one revolts as unnatural (it is more than is said of the Virgin Mary, Luke i. 28); it misses the point of contrast between him who from heaven announces the cursed condition of Meroz doing nothing, and those who on earth will wish a blessing upon the intrepid and active Jael; and as it proceeds, it disregards the tenses used in the description of her act, and does violence to the plain rendering of the first verb in ver. 26. That verse describes how they will rehearse, ver. 11, and act over and over again with applause the terrible deed of Jael, overlooking the breach of hospitality and the deceit which it involved in their hatred of the licentious tyrant and their renewed sympathy with Israel recovered from idolatry and degradation.—**Vers. 28–31. The expectations of the enemy at home confounded:** the mother of Sisera wondering at the delay, ver. 28; the reply of her ladies, repulsive in its coarseness as well as its cruelty and pride, vers. 29, 30; and the confidence of the worshippers of Jehovah that, in spite of these hopes, it shall be the very opposite with all his enemies, as in Sisera’s case it proved to be. The latter half of ver. 29 is peculiar, and the authorities seem very much on an equality when they offer two interpretations diametrically opposite, as they suppose the mother of Sisera to be convinced or to remain unconvinced by the reply of her wisest ladies. *Embroidery*, in ver. 30, is the common and convenient rendering of the word: but it is properly a work of various colours, such as embroidery generally is, and it may include weaving as much as needlework, Ps. cxxxix. 15. The last words of ver. 30 are difficult, and it has been common to suppose a corruption of the text: yet, besides the rendering of the A. V. here given in the margin, it seems a natural interpretation that the prey, so far as it was rich clothing, might be used at Sisera’s pleasure to adorn the necks of those who became a living prey to him.

1. *What was pre-eminently disgraceful in the third servitude?*
2. *Of what earlier history are we reminded by the names of the oppressor and his city?*
3. *What is striking in Deborah’s position?*
4. *How far did Barak rely upon her, and with what result to himself?*

CHAP. VI.—VIII.—*Gideon.*

5. *What do we know of Heber and his wife?*
6. *How did Barak unite faith and the use of means?*
7. *How did Jael act?*
8. *What suppositions have been made to explain or justify her conduct?*
9. *Who is probably the author of the song in chap. V.?*
10. *What parallels to it are found in Scripture?*
11. *What are here proposed as the general divisions of the song?*

CHAPTER VI.—X. 5.

THE SECOND PERIOD OF SINNING AND RECOVERY.

CHAPTER VI.—VIII.—GIDEON.

Vers. 1-6. Relapse into sin, and consequent suffering. The old sinning habits reappeared, presumably when Deborah and Barak had grown old or had died: and the chastisement, though short, must have been of great severity. The Amalekites have already appeared among the oppressors of Israel, see on iii. 12-14. The Midianites, descended from Abraham by Keturah, Gen. xxv. 1-4, are yet apparently called Ishmaelites here at viii. 24, either from blood-relationship or from the similarity of their life and habits in the great desert east and south of Palestine: and we find them accompanied by 'the children of the east,' ver. 33, vii. 12, viii. 10. It is very likely that by crossing Jordan they entered the great valley of Jezreel (see ver. 33), and scoured the country as far to the south-west as Gaza; in like manner the Philistines and the children of Ammon are afterwards found acting together against Israel, x. 7-10. And these freebooters of the desert in all probability destroyed much more than they actually used for food.—**Vers. 7-10. The reproof from a prophet.** This time of sinning seems to have also had special spiritual privileges: for, besides Deborah, the only prophet mentioned in the Book of Judges is this man sent to quicken and deepen the workings of repentance in the minds of the people. **Vers. 11-24. The call of Gideon.** The man, the prophet, in ver. 7, now gives place to the great Angel of Jehovah, who makes his second appearance, to be a new turning-point in the spiritual history of Israel, as he had done at ii. 1-5. His real divinity is evinced by his actions here, as well as by the fact that he is named Jehovah in vers. 14, 16, 23. But it was unavoidable in the times of the Old Testament that there

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should be a mystery about the person of the Angel of the Covenant, and Gideon was not sure whether he was more than a common angel, or even a fellow-man ; thus he used an ambiguous word, in ver. 19, which might mean either a present to a man or an offering to God, expecting the result to decide the rank of his visitor, as it did, evincing him to be the God of Israel who had instituted their sacrifices, which ought still to be offered by the repenting people. And the two expressions rendered, 'Oh my Lord,' in ver. 13 and ver. 15, ought to be distinguished in accordance with the traditional Jewish reading ; the first, as to a man, 'Oh my lord,' and the second as to God, 'O Lord, I pray.' The call of Gideon, his diffidence, and the need for pressure and promises from God, remind us in some respects of the call of Moses in Ex. iii. and iv. *Ophrah of the Abiezrites*, ver. 11, is thus distinguished from Ophrah in Benjamin, Josh. xviii. 23, probably Ferâta, near Shechem, says Conder : it was in the western half-tribe of Manasseh, as indicated by the mention of Abiezer in Josh. xvii. 2, and Gideon's connections with the western tribes generally. The beating of the wheat indicated threshing on a small scale ; as the use of the wine-press (including the wine-vat), instead of the ordinary floor, indicated that this was done by stealth. *Rock* in ver. 20 and in ver. 21 (in ver. 26 it is scarcely an allowable translation) are different Hebrew words ; the latter suggests rather the whole mass of rock ; the former, a cliff or outstanding point of that solid mass. *Alas, O Lord Jehovah! For therefore have I seen the Angel of Jehovah face to face*, ver. 22. The fire from the rock at the touch of the staff convinced Gideon that this was the great Angel of the Covenant (compare the sacrifice in Lev. ix. 24, and other Divine appearances in fire) : and to see God 'face to face,' as Jacob did at Penuel, Gen. xxxii. 30, without dying, was against all expectation ; see also Gen. xvi. 13 ; Ex. xxxiii. 20. Hence the need for the assurance, in the next verse, that he was not to die. 'For therefore' is a phrase at which very many scholars and commentators take offence, rendering simply 'for,' or 'because,' or strangely uniting these as in the A. V. here, though it also retains the accurate translation : see the other instances, Gen. xviii. 5, xix. 8, xxxiii. 10, xxxviii. 26 ; Num. x. 31, xiv. 43 ; Jer. xxix. 28, xxxviii. 4. The force of the expression was more manifest to the godly Hebrew than sometimes to us, because he traced the purpose and the efficient working of God in every event ; in this verse it is as much as to say, 'For on this very account, to this very end, have I seen the Angel, that I

may bewail myself as one given over to death by the very glory of the Divine revelation made to me.' Yet it is by such a frame of mind that the saved sinner is made ready for special service to the cause of the holy God, Isa. vi. 5-8; Luke v. 8-10. *Jehovah-shalom*, ver. 24, that is, 'Jehovah [send] peace,' or 'Jehovah [is] peace,' the expression of his soul's experience: compare the name of the altar, Ex. xvii. 15. This altar seems not to have been the same as the one which he afterwards built for actual sacrifice: this may have been rather for a memorial of God's appearing to him, as the Eastern Tribes built an altar for memorial; Josh. xxii. 26, 27.—**Vers. 25-32. The altar of Baal thrown down, and the altar of Jehovah set up.** *Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old*, ver. 25, is a doubtful translation: for authorities are much divided between the renderings 'even' and 'and;' the latter on the whole is the simpler grammatically, yet does not derive any confirmation from the apparent contrast between the two bullocks in point of age, for 'young bullock' is incorrectly used to represent the very peculiar Hebrew phrase, 'bullock of the oxen;' and the difficulty in the sense is to know what to do with the first of the two bullocks when we have got it. The uncommon age of the animal sacrificed, seven years, may contain an allusion to the seven years' oppression from which Gideon was to deliver Israel. *The grove*, ver. 25, has been already explained at iii. 7. Gideon's own father is represented in this narrative as entangled in idolatry; though the action of his son, at once cautious and firm, changed his views and led him to renounce Baal and to cleave to Jehovah. No doubt the people at length followed his example; so that Gideon wrought the moral deliverance before he was sent to win the outward victory: and of this double work he had the pledge and memorial in his new name, Jerubbaal, 'Let Baal plead.' Possibly there was a tendency in Gideon to look too much for signs: if so, having already asked and obtained one to strengthen his own faith, ver. 17, it was now suitable that he should pass through a corresponding trial and become a sign for the help of others.—**Vers. 33-40. The war begun: Gideon's two signs.** The nations and their inroads have been noticed already at vers. 1-6. The importance of the crisis, and the fitness of Gideon for discharging the duty assigned to him in it, are made evident by the mention of the special gift of the Spirit of Jehovah, which by a bold figure of speech is said in the original to have clothed him; compare 1 Pet. v. 5. It is to be observed that here we have

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entered upon a second great period in the history of the judges, marked by the coming forth of the Angel of the Covenant, ver. 11, and the subsequent mission of the Spirit of Jehovah, ver. 34 : as the first period had been marked in the same way, chap. ii. 1-5, the Angel at Bochim, and chap. iii. 10, the Spirit of Jehovah coming upon Othniel. Thus equipped, like Othniel he went out to war ; and in doing so, like Ehud, iii. 27, he blew the trumpet, and it called together to him the hosts of Israel : beginning with his own nearest of kin, Abiezer, ver. 11, but widening out to 'all Manasseh' on both sides of Jordan, and as far as to the three northern tribes of Asher, Naphtali, and Zebulun. Issachar could scarcely be unrepresented, for the plain of Jezreel was very much in their territory ; nor was Ephraim, vii. 24. There was a better representation of the tribes, in this period of new spiritual life, than when the prophetess Deborah summoned them against Jabin and Sisera : though the absence of the great southern tribe of Judah, and its neighbour Simeon, on both occasions (see on chap. v. 12-18) speaks ill for the healing of old jealousies between north and south which had shown themselves so early as the time of Joshua, and which were the less excusable at present, when the ravages of the enemy reached a point in the extreme south-west like Gaza, ver. 4. Probably the revival spread, as Gideon's success increased : for there is no hint that any tribe was awaiting when the men of Israel asked him to rule over them, he and his descendants after him, viii. 22. *The double sign in connection with the fleece*, which he asked of God, is an illustration of that tendency in him to ask for signs, to which reference has been already made : and nothing could be more ingenious, nothing more satisfactory, than the alternate wetting by dew of the fleece and of the whole ground. Possibly he was led to use such boldness in repeated pleadings with God, by the example of Abraham's repeated requests when interceding for Sodom, Gen. xviii. 23-33. And he may have asked for the dew first to concentrate on the fleece, then to spread out over the ground, as he saw how the grace bestowed first upon himself, was spreading out over Israel.

—Chap. VII. 1-8. *The double trial after the double sign.* *The well of Harod*, not a mere dug well, but a fountain, supposed to be Ayin el Jem'ain or Ayin Jâlûd mentioned farther on, may have derived its name 'trembling' from the trembling persons spoken of in ver. 3 : perhaps it is 'the fountain which is in Jezreel,' beside which Israel pitched before the battle of Gilboa, 1 Sam. xxix. 1. *'Lest Israel vaunt themselves*

against me,' ver. 2, or 'glory over me,' as the phrase is rendered in Ex. viii. 9. If the gratification of Gideon's desire for a sign be regarded as bringing a trial after it, it is striking to notice how the double sign he asked and obtained was followed by a double trial, sifting his army till there was left only a ridiculous remnant, as men would have judged. But the eye of faith could see in it just the evidence required at the moment to prove that salvation is of Jehovah, who gave the commands Himself each time. *Mount Gilead*, in ver. 3, has occasioned much trouble to commentators, because Gideon and his army were at Jezreel, to the west of the Jordan, whereas the only Mount Gilead known to us is very well known indeed as the commanding central part of the high plateau to the east of the Jordan. Some have thought of a western mount of this name, beside the Ain Jâlûd, or fountain of Gilcad (as they conjecture), a mile and a half east from Zerîn or Jezreel, from which stream Jâlûd runs to the Jordan. Yet the weight of authority favours the rendering of an obscure verb, not 'depart early,' but 'make a circuit;' and in this case the meaning is not hard to discover. The two-thirds and more of the army who were fearful and trembling were to have the full benefit of the privilege conceded in the law of Moses, Deut. xx. 8; but they were to use it so as not needlessly to discourage their comrades: they were to make a circuit by Mount Gilead, not returning to their homes till they had crossed the Jordan, as if carrying out some military manoeuvre; and in point of fact their cowardice would be overruled for good, as they would be found already on the east side of Jordan when Gideon's victory, in the difficulties of winning which they would have no share, made him require large numbers of men to pursue the flying enemy. *The three hundred men that lapped* are manifestly brought before us chiefly in respect of the smallness of their number. Much has been sometimes made of the symbolical meaning of the lapping; but it is unsafe to venture further than this, that they were more upon the alert, and were content to allay their thirst more moderately and cautiously than the rest. There is a harshness in ver. 8, where the three hundred are called 'the people,' though we next read of Gideon sending away 'all Israel;' and an ancient reading, slightly varying the original text, is, 'And they took the victuals of the people in their hand.' But the authority for this is feeble; nor is the sense satisfactory, for what were the three hundred to do with the victuals of

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32,000? Why not understand that the people took their trumpets as well as their victuals, all the people, both the 300 that remained with Gideon, and the multitude that went away, yet who were not to go off as fugitives, but to deceive the enemy by keeping up their military order and discipline?—**Vers. 9–14. The dream to encourage Gideon.** Having stood these repeated tests without any failure in his faith, he was rewarded by the encouragement of a most satisfactory sign, and this was given to him by God unmasked. Dreams were often made use of in the elementary training of the Old Testament economy; and there are several instances in connection with heathens like this man, for example, Abimelech, Pharaoh, and Nebuchadnezzar, such a method of communication especially suiting their unenlightened and superstitious minds. The round cake of coarse barley bread represented Gideon whom they despised; yet it turned the tent upside down; whether we understand by the tent the very one in which the soldiers lay, or some distinguished one, like the royal tent, or whether we take it collectively for the whole of the tents in the camp.—**Vers. 15–22. The victory won by stratagem.** Gideon's feelings found immediate expression in worship; but his godliness made him none the less attentive to the details of work. His stratagem may seem rude and clumsy; but it suited his circumstances with a vast host of miscellaneous tribes assembled merely for plunder, most likely with little discipline, though we do read of a regular watch. They acknowledged only three watches in the night (comp. Ex. xiv. 24); whereas in the New Testament we read of four watches, when discipline had become more thorough. The torches were in the beginning entirely hidden within the pitchers, and all was dark; even after these were broken, the torches might give little light till they were waved; this action would add to the strangeness of the scene, and help on the panic and confusion. The watchword of Gideon's men varies somewhat in ver. 18 and ver. 20; many admit no difference, making the supplement which is found in the A. V. In 2 Chron. xx. 23, we have another memorable instance of mutual destruction on the part of the combined enemies of Israel. The direction, or perhaps the opposite directions, in which the vanquished hosts fled, ver. 22, cannot be determined with any accuracy. The only name that has been brought into connection with *Bethshittah* is *Shutta*, to the north of Mount Gilboa, fully five miles east of Jezreel

and as much north-west of the important Canaanite city Bethshean, now Beisân ; if this is the place sought for, one part of the host fled for the northern fords of Jordan. *Abel-meholah* (under the name Abel-maelai) is placed by the Onomasticon ten Roman miles south of Bethshean ; and what is called 'the border' of Abel-meholah is literally its shore or edge, as if on the bank of the Jordan ; and this might be Ayin Helweh, near where the Wady Mâleh meets the Jordan, the fugitives making for fords in the south. *Tabbath* is quite unknown ; so is *Zererath*, though it may be the same as Zeredah, 1 Kings xi. 26, or Zeredathah, 2 Chron. iv. 17, which is called Zarthan in 1 Kings vii. 46 : Conder thinks of Zahrah (fountain and mounds, three miles west of Beisân).—Chap. VII. 23—VIII. 3. **The victory won by the Ephraimites, and Gideon's deportment toward them.** The news of Gideon's brilliant exploit spread rapidly, and the men of Israel poured in from the central and northern tribes, to whom his messengers had gone, vi. 35, only Zebulun being here unmentioned ; but more than making up for this loss, the great tribe of Ephraim, at his invitation, took the fords of the Jordan (as in Ehud's time, iii. 28), and slew the two princes of the Midianites at places which bore their name. Curiously enough, Conder has found a sharp conical peak, Osh el Ghorab (the same word as Oreb, 'a raven'), three miles north of Jericho ; and Tuweil edh-Dhiâb (the same word as Zeeb, 'a wolf'), a wady and mound two miles north-west of it. *Bethbarah*, ver. 24, seems to have been a ford which the Ephraimites could naturally seize ; it is unknown, unless it be at the traditional site of the New Testament Bethabara near Kusr el Jehûd, east of Jericho. Conder found a ford, 'Abâra, 3½ miles east-north-east of Baisan (Bethshean), which he prefers. But others understand 'the waters,' which Ephraim was urged to take, to be tributaries of the Jordan, like the Wady Fâr'ah, where the enemy would be stopped in their flight southwards. From Isa. x. 26, we may infer that the great slaughter of Midian was on occasion of this victory won by the Ephraimites ; so little is said of it in this book which narrates the salvation of Israel at the hand of Jehovah, because from the Divine point of view the decisive victory had been Gideon's own. Flushed with their victory, and looking only at its outward political importance, when they met Gideon and brought him the heads of the two princes of Midian, they insulted him, and would have domineered over him, as probably they habitually domineered over the weak half-

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tribe of Manasseh. Modestly saying nothing of the real greatness of his own work, Gideon admitted the truth of what they claimed for themselves; and their excited spirits calmed down under the influence of his gentle words.—**Chap. VIII. 4-9. The treason of the men of Succoth and Penuel.** There is great difficulty in determining the geography of these places, more than a reader of the English Bible might suppose; for ver. 4 leaves it very uncertain whether Gideon had or had not crossed the Jordan when he came to Succoth. Conder, Tyrwhitt Drake, and others still seek for this town on the west side of the river, at a ruin Sâkût, eight miles south of Beisân, the ancient Bethshean. But since a Succoth in Jacob's history somewhat connected with Penuel like this one, was in this neighbourhood, and since a Succoth fell to the tribe of Gad, Josh. xiii. 27, it is perhaps better to identify it with Burckhardt's Sûkkôt north of the Wady Mûz, and some two miles more south than directly opposite to Beisân. Of the situation of Penuel we can only assert that it was south of the Jabbok, which is usually taken to be the Wady Zerka; see Gen. xxxii. 22-31. The punishment threatened by Gideon, and afterwards executed, has the appearance of violence and severity, or even of great cruelty; yet it were wholly to mistake his character if we imputed this to him immediately after what has been recorded of his dealings with the Ephraimites. We must certainly understand that in their conduct he saw what was unspeakably more serious than an insult to him, namely treachery to the commonwealth of Israel, and presumptuous sin in contemning the hosts of the representative of Israel's God, such sin as brought the curse on Meroz, v. 23, and such as at a considerably earlier time (though narrated in the end of this book) devoted the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead to utter destruction, xxi. 10; comp. also 1 Sam. xi. 7. For this was the critical period in his expedition, everything depended on following up his victory and making an end of those masses of destroyers; and his three hundred lappers of water were 'faint yet pursuing, so that a little discouragement or the refusal of a little help might ruin his hopes of success.—**Vers. 10-12. The complete success of Gideon.** The multitudes whose invasions had been compared to those of locusts, vi. 5, had also perished like locusts when their tyrannical rule came to an end; probably it was not in the pitched battles alone that 120,000 fell, but every Israelite family set free from the oppression of those seven years furnished executioners of

vengeance. The two remaining leaders are here called 'the two kings of Midian,' vers. 5, 12, 26, as Orcb and Zeeb had been called 'the two princes of Midian,' vii. 25; but we know nothing more of the relative position. In Josh. xiii. 21 we find the Midianites, whom Moses nearly extirpated, under five princes, but the Hebrew word is different from the one so translated here; and they are also there called 'dukes of Sihon,' perhaps more exactly vassal-kings of his. In striking the final blow at a spot where the fugitives reckoned themselves secure, Gideon appears to have surprised them by passing to a point in the desert to the north or east of the unknown Karkor, where they were entrenched; but our geographical knowledge is still so imperfect, and the statement so brief, that we can make no approach to certainty. If the Jogbehah here mentioned is the city rebuilt by the Gadites, Num. xxxii. 35, we must look farther south than we should expect from the mention of Nobah, whether on the strength of Num. xxxii. 42 we take this to be Kenath, now Kunawât, on the western slope of Mount Bashan (Jebel Haurân), or whether with Wilton we take it to be Nawa on the high road from Bethshean to Damascus, crossing the Jordan near the place where the Yarmûk falls into it. Taking this river to be the Jabbok, he traces Gideon's course very confidently into that wild rocky region where few conquerors have cared much to follow the desert tribes whom they defeated. Perhaps some Nobah farther south may yet be discovered: if not, Gideon's expedition must have spread over a wide extent of country, north and south, which is quite conceivable. Anyhow, the expression in the original, 'he terrified all the host,' ver. 12, is very suggestive.—**Vers. 13–21. The end of the war.** From this time there is a tendency to mark out Gideon's family as distinguished: he is styled 'Gideon the son of Joash,' vers. 13, 32, and 'Jerubbaal the son of Joash,' ver. 29. 'Before the sun was up,' ver. 13, is a very doubtful rendering: the old Jewish translation (the Chaldee Targum) renders, 'before the sun was down;' and recent scholars, following the Septuagint and the Syriac, render 'from the ascent of Heres,' some place unknown. The time or place is marked to give emphasis to the fact that he came upon Succoth unexpectedly. Reasons have already been given, on vers. 4–9, for the severity of the punishment inflicted. It is to be observed also that he gave an effective lesson to the whole men of Succoth ('made them to know') by this punishment of their princes and elders, the latter class perhaps being

70 or 72 out of the whole 77 ; and also that he was careful to have all their names written down beforehand by the young man whom he seized. To the men of Penuel he showed no mercy ; but the breaking down of their tower suggests that they offered a determined resistance to him, perhaps that their city was carried by assault ; to which opposition they may have been unwisely stirred up by the fate of Succoth. Finally, Gideon put to death the two kings, because on their own confession they had slain his own full brothers (for where polygamy exists, there is a peculiarly close tie uniting mothers' sons) at Tabor, either the mountain, iv. 6, or the neighbouring city, Josh. xix. 12, 22. He was the avenger of blood, bound to see them punished ; and in view of this family duty, or to lay on them no needless disgrace, he destined the blow to come from his eldest son, whom failing, it came from himself. It was only after their death that he removed their royal ornaments, whose moon-shape perhaps indicates an idolatrous origin or use. The language of the kings to him, ver. 18, implies that they recognised the family likeness of Gideon and their victims ; perhaps more specially they complimented him with the royal title, putting him on a level with themselves, and saying as it were, 'They were like thee, and like thy children, O king.'—**Vers. 22, 23. The offer of the kingdom to him.** Since Gideon was so like a king, the people whom he had saved may have been the more inclined to press on his acceptance the office of ruler, and they would have made it hereditary ; acting very much as their descendants did when they called on Samuel to give them a king, 1 Sam. viii. Gideon saw the spiritual revolution that was involved in this proposal, for Jehovah was their king, Ex. xv. 18, Num. xxiii. 21 ; and while he was convinced that this ought to be sufficient for them, he may also have cherished the conviction that such exalted rank was not likely to be an unmixed blessing to him and to his family. The incident recorded of his eldest son not slaying the Midianite kings perhaps indicates a want of vigorous character which Gideon would be certain to observe. Nevertheless the statement in ver. 28, that the land had rest 'forty years in the days of Gideon,' couples the peacefulness and prosperity of the country with the person of the judge, much more distinctly than any previous statement did ; and it is followed by still more definite statements, that 'Abimelech reigned,' or was prince, or captain, 'over Israel three years,' ix. 22, and that Tola 'judged Israel twenty and three

years,' the like being said of all the remaining judges. We are safe in inferring that a change was coming over the people; that they were painfully sensible of their disorganized condition, and yet not sensible of their own sinfulness which caused it, and of the spiritual nature of every effectual cure; and that their efforts were all in the secular direction of strengthening the central government, connecting this more than hitherto with the judge who saved them at any time, not without an inclination to make his office hereditary. We may be sure that Gideon exercised some functions of government all his days; and that a hereditary ruler was still desired by many, since at his death his son Abimelech took it for granted (apparently so did those to whom he spoke) that he was to be succeeded by one or other of his children, ix. 1-3.—Vers. 24-35. **The close of Gideon's history.** Though he resisted the offer of a throne, he fell into the error of meddling with the priestly office; a snare into which he may have been betrayed by the command, which he received and obeyed, to build an altar in his city of Ophrah, and offer on it a sacrifice to Jehovah. This isolated act, connected with his rescuing the people from the worship of Baal, and with the manifestation of the Angel of Jehovah to him (compare and contrast 1 Chron. xxi. 28, xxii. 1), was perhaps made the beginning of a system of sacrifices there; at all events, he prepared an ephod, the well-known high-priestly garment used in consulting God, Ex. xxviii. 6-30; 1 Sam. xxiii. 6, 9. Whether he meant no more than to have a memorial of the divinely-appointed ephod, and the way of approaching God by it, as the eastern tribes had built an altar merely for a memorial, Josh. xxii. 26-29, it is impossible to tell; even so, there was a serious risk that he might go farther than he intended. But it is an old opinion that the high priests at Shiloh had early lost the confidence of the people, and had sunk into insignificance; certainly they are never mentioned or referred to in the Book of Judges, after Aaron's grandson the illustrious Phinehas, xx. 28; and long before Gideon's time there had been a schismatical and even idolatrous priestly system set up by the tribe of Dan in the town to which they gave their patriarch's name, and this, too, arose out of an unlawful family sanctuary and its ephod, xvii. 5, xviii. 30, 31. There is no warrant whatever for imputing the same sin to Gideon; yet he did something which looked in that direction, possibly bringing the high priest from Shiloh to use his ephod at Ophrah, possibly using it himself. Even

if he himself escaped the more serious consequences, yet, ver. 27, all Israel went a-whoring after it there, and it became a snare to himself and his house, with evil lurking in it, and ere long bursting forth with lamentable results. The high priest's ephod, with all its attendant ornaments in the breastplate, and with its precious stones, must have been very costly; we need feel no surprise that Gideon laid out upon his ephod 1700 shekels of gold, or about 53 lb. avoirdupois; nor that so much gold was obtained from this vast multitude of the enemy, since the Arabs to this day manifest an extraordinary love for golden ornaments. Perhaps Gideon thought himself like Moses, when he received the contributions for the tabernacle, Ex. xxxv. 20-23, many of those also being the spoils taken from their oppressors; while the men of war who willingly responded to his request may have felt like their ancestors when they made a similar free-will offering after an earlier Midianite war, Num. xxxi. 48-50. *There were other dangers in Gideon's position, of which his polygamy is an evidence.* Even had he been king, the law of God against multiplying wives was explicit, Deut. xvii. 17: yet though he refused to be ruler, in those forty years of rest and prosperity, he must have assumed something of royal state in its worst oriental form, with a harem. And there is enough in the language of the original (comp. Nch. ix. 7; Dan. v. 12) to lead to the conjecture that the name Abimelech, 'A king's father,' was one which he gave to his concubine's son in addition to the name given to him originally, one of those epithets or descriptive names which were common among the Jews: if so, the lad was one of those spoilt children like Adonijah, 1 Kings i. 6, who brought misery and shame upon their families. Gideon himself died 'in a good old age,' an expression used elsewhere only of his father Abraham, Gen. xv. 15, xxv. 8, and of David, 1 Chron. xxix. 28; but his death was the signal for the renewed outbreak of all evil. It seems to have taken the form of open apostasy, substituting 'Baal of the covenant' as their covenant God instead of Jehovah; though possibly there was an attempt to combine the worship of the two. And when the people did not remember Jehovah their deliverer, no surprise need be felt at their thankless forgetfulness of his earthly instrument and representative, whose two names seem united into one at ver. 35, as if to recal and combine all that he had procured for Israel both of temporal and of spiritual blessings.

CHAP. IX.—*Abimelech.*

1. *Who now chastised the sinning Israelites?*
2. *What special religious privileges were enjoyed even at this time of sinning?*
3. *What doubt was in Gideon's mind as to the person who spoke to him, and how was it removed?*
4. *Through what trial in his own family was his faith called to pass, and how did it issue?*
5. *How is Gideon's mission marked out as the commencement of the second great period in the history of the Judges? To what extent were the tribes united in supporting him?*
6. *What was the double sign which he asked and obtained?*
7. *What double trial befel him? And what unexpected encouragement followed?*
8. *By what stratagem did he gain the first battle?*
9. *How did he act toward the tribe of Ephraim?*
10. *How did he deal with the men of Succoth and Penuel, and why should he have been so severe?*
11. *What great change was coming over the minds of the people in regard to the form of their government?*
12. *How was Gideon disposed toward this?*
13. *Into what great mistake did he fall latterly?*
14. *How did Israel act toward him and his family?*

CHAPTER IX.—ABIMELECH.

Vers. 1-6. **He obtains the kingdom.** He followed the course habitually taken by men like him: he sowed the seeds of suspicion and jealousy, he accused his brothers of aiming at sovereignty, he appealed to personal feelings in the men of Shechem, and probably of the whole tribe of Ephraim through them, and he obtained money from the idol temple of the new covenant-god to hire assassins, by whom his seventy brothers (perhaps sixty-nine without Jotham, according to viii. 30) were to be murdered for a shekel a head: slaying them on one stone suggests something like a public execution. *The men of Shechem*, ver. 2, and often throughout the chapter, is rendered by some, 'the lords of Shechem,' but on insufficient grounds. The expression may mean strictly, 'the owners of Shechem,' those who had each a property or holding; but practically it is just 'the men of Shechem,' as is shown by the interchange of the rarer and commoner expression in the original at vers. 46 and 49 of this narrative, and elsewhere. *Light persons*, ver.

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4, is also expressed by a rare word, much the same as that used of Reuben, Gen. xlix. 4, 'Unstable as water,' with no weight or solid character of their own. *The house of Millo*, distinguished from the men of Shechem, are commonly thought to be the men of the tower of Shechem, its citadel, though this is a mere conjecture; but Millo is very naturally explained to be a strong wall, built double and filled up between with rubbish; and so there was a Millo at Jerusalem, 2 Sam. v. 9, etc. The daring ambition of Abimelech and those who abetted him is seen in their proceeding to make him king, we may suppose according to the expectation of the Ephraimites that they should take the lead of all Israel, who at this time were united in following their god Baal-berith, as they had been in going a-whoring after Gideon's ephod, and by their desire for a king over them. And an incidental evidence of their success is the emphasis which Jotham lays upon all the trees uniting on the bramble, ver. 14; a more direct evidence is the statement, ver. 22, that he reigned three years over Israel. To give the greater solemnity or popularity to their proceeding, they made him king in Shechem, at that oak tree (for 'plain' is a mistranslation) which had become sacred and endeared in the memory of all Israelites by Joshua's covenant with the people there, Josh. xxiv. 26, 27. There is doubt as to the precise translation, 'oak of the pillar,' or 'oak of the monument;' but the name in any case is most naturally understood to refer to that great stone which Joshua then set up there.—Vers. 7–21. *Jotham's parable.* Though this is the name so long applied that it may be difficult now to effect a change, it is manifestly incorrect. A parable has to do with the kingdom of God and the workings of grace; and though it uses natural objects for illustration, it never transgresses the limits of actual occurrences. But this is a fable, in which there is no hesitation about making trees or animals speak, and which has for its purpose only moral lessons in the sphere of natural life. Yet it is true that a fable in the mouth of a godly Israelite would present some points of contact with a parable, especially as Abimelech's ambition invaded the province of the true though invisible King of Israel. This is the most ancient fable known: and its beauty and completeness have made it very familiar to all readers of the Bible, for which reason there is little need of comment, if we recollect the fundamental truth, that Israel had as little need of a king as had the trees. It is enough to say that the olive tree, the fig tree, and the vine were at once the

commonest and the most valuable fruit trees of Palestine; that the trees refuse to be promoted, a singular word, to move hither and thither, with which in this connection may be compared the English word 'sway;' that a bramble, or perhaps a thorn bush, though useless to give shelter, might be very mischievous in tearing whatever came against it; and that the conflagration in which the thorns were burned up and put out of the way (2 Sam. xxiii. 6, 7) might very readily spread to other objects, as Jotham threatened that Abimelech and the men of Shechem would be mutually destructive. Yet, as his father taught the men of Succoth by punishing only their princes and elders, so here it was hinted that mercy would teach a lesson to all Israel from the fate which would be confined to those who had been most guilty. *Mount Gerizim*, ver. 7, rises steeply on the south side of Shechem, opposite to Mount Ebal, see at Josh. viii. 30-35; Jotham would easily find a position from which he would be well heard without falling into the hands of his enemies. It is impossible to say where Beer was, ver. 22. Some identify it with Beeroth, the Hivite city assigned to Benjamin, Josh. ix. 17, xviii. 25; others, following the Onomasticon, with a ruined village, el-Biréh, eight Roman miles north of Eleutheropolis, now Beit-jibrin: but as Beer means a 'well,' it would be a common name, and we might seek for it anywhere if only out of the way of Abimelech, as far as Beer-sheba itself, comp. 1 Kings xix. 3.—**Vers. 22-29. The quarrel between Abimelech and the Shechemites.** The alliance between them, based on no principle, and cemented only by crime and fancied interest, soon became dissolved by the righteous providence of God, who can inflict judgment on men in the working of their own evil passions, or can intensify this by permitting evil spirits to carry out their own malignant purposes, ver. 23; 1 Sam. xvi. 14, 15; 1 Kings xxii. 20-23. Perhaps Abimelech was the more guilty party: but the Shechemites seem to have been the first to deal treacherously, ver. 23, as against him, and lawlessly against their brethren, for whom they laid wait on the tops of the two mountains between which Shechem lay. The A. V. is not justified in making all this take place only after three years, during which Abimelech acted as prince over Israel: it may have begun very much earlier. Nor is the word 'reigned' an exact translation; he was a tyrant who had seized on the supreme power. Nothing is told us of this Gaal, but perhaps he was of the remnant of the Canaanites, 'the men of Hamor, the father of

Shechem,' ver. 28, Gen. xxxiv. 2, 6, whom he advised the Shechemites to serve. The heathen worship of Baal could not be considered thoroughly established, so long as the prince of the country was the son of him that pled with Baal; nor would Shechem be right till it had reverted to its old independence and had a ruler of its own, such as Abimelech only pretended to be, ver. 2. And Gaal, in whom the Shechemites now trusted, offered himself to be their leader. All this was said at a drunken gathering in honour of their idol, which was an imitation of a service of praise instituted in the law of Moses, if we judge by the use here of a word which occurs again only in Lev. xix. 24.—**Vers. 30–49. The ruin of the Shechemites.** The history is so plain as scarcely to need comment. Zebul, the captain or prince of the city, faithful to Abimelech, stealthily called his attention to what Gaal was doing, urging on his project with the pressing earnestness of a besieger: 'fortify,' in ver. 31, is a rendering nowhere else given to a common word. His advice was to lay an ambuscade and 'set upon' the city, ver. 33, a verb which is rendered 'rushed forward' and 'ran' in ver. 44: the strict meaning in all cases is 'to spread out.' Gaal, who had been confident from the beginning, was deceived into continued security, and then was taunted by Zebul; and having been defeated, he seems to have lost the favour of the Shechemites, so that Zebul could expel him from the city. The Shechemites themselves were perhaps so blinded as to fancy that the expulsion of Gaal would set everything right between Abimelech and themselves; at least, their going out to the field, ver. 42, may have been for peaceful labour and not for war. In any case, he soon manifested his revengeful purpose; and having taken the city, he sowed it with salt, giving it up to barrenness and desolation, Job xxxix. 6; Ps. cvii. 34 (margin). The geography of this passage is obscure: the 'middle of the land,' ver. 37, ought perhaps to be 'the height of the land;' the oak (not the plain) of Meonenim, the augurs' or enchanters' oak, ver. 37, may perhaps be the oak of the monument or pillar, ver. 6, or it may have had its name from Jacob hiding the strange gods of his company and their earrings under the oak which is by Shechem, Gen. xxxv. 4; and Arumah, ver. 41, was plainly not far from Shechem, and is identified with Tormah by those who think of a proper name in ver. 31. The final catastrophe, vers. 46–49, was the miserable death which overtook the men of the tower of Shechem, conjectured to be the house of Millo in ver. 6. It is very difficult to determine

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the proper meaning of the word rendered 'hold' in vers. 46 and 49 : but the people seem to have entered into it at least as much in hope of protection from their god Berith, or covenant god, as with the intention of making a military defence. There can be no doubt that this god Berith is connected with Baal-berith, viii. 33, ix. 4 ; though the absence of the name Baal has led some to think that the worshippers wished not entirely to lose hold of Jehovah as their God, perhaps to unite Jehovah and Baal, and to be in covenant with both. Mount Zalmon, or Salmon, is mentioned again only in Ps. lxxviii. 14 : its situation has not been identified.—Vers. 50-57. **The retribution on Abimelech.** The vengeance which he had wreaked upon Shechem, he intended also for Thebez, a town placed by the Onomasticon thirteen Roman miles from Neapolis (Shechem) on the road to Beth-Shean, or Beisân ; which is therefore the modern Tûbâs, twelve miles E.N.E. of Shechem. One might infer from this that the son considered himself the lawful successor of his father in the government of Israel, and meant to punish these two cities as Succoth and Penuel had been punished for their rebellion. But his utter failure, his death by the hand of a woman (like Sisera, iv. 9), and his miserable effort to escape by suicide from this disgrace to a bold warrior, were the tokens in providence that he wanted the moral and spiritual qualities of Gideon. And his personal ruin, together with the immediately resulting collapse of the government which he had established over Israel, marked the fulfilment of Jotham's curse. It is mere ignorance of old English which in many copies of the Bible changed 'alto brake,' that is, 'altogether brake,' into 'all to break' in ver. 53.

 CHAPTER X. 1-5.—THE PEACEFUL ADMINISTRATIONS AFTER
 ABIMELECH'S.

Vers. 1, 2. Tola. Abimelech's tyranny would have been impossible had not Israel become deeply corrupted : and when that tyrant had established himself, his rule was at least as mischievous as a period of servitude to heathens and foreigners. A judge was therefore needed to 'save' Israel, see note on ii. 16 : and as it is there said that Jehovah raised up judges which saved them, so Tola is said here to have risen up to save them. The absence of all details is no proof that his work was unimportant : there might be no striking victories over enemies on the field of battle, but there was a successful

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war with evil maintained for twenty-three years. Tola is the only judge whose family history is held to be of such importance that both his father and his father's father are named: himself a man of Issachar, his own and his father's name already occur in the earliest registers of this tribe, Gen. xlv. 13; Num. xxvi. 23. But though a man of Issachar, he was the judge of Israel, and he took up his residence outside of his own tribe, in Shamir of Mount Ephraim, a place not identified. Now that the judges were more distinctly holders of a consolidated authority during their lifetime according to what has been said on viii. 22, 23, we find their place of burial mentioned, a public funeral having in all probability been given to them, such as we read of in history of the good kings. He was buried in Shamir, in which he had lived, as Gideon had been buried in Ophrah: see viii. 32, the first passage where this burying is mentioned.—Vers. 3-5.

Jair. His administration followed that of Tola, and lasted only one year less; so that the land enjoyed forty-five years of blessed rest under these two judges who 'arose' successively. Jair's was also a name already known in the tribe to which we may suppose him to have belonged, the eastern half-tribe of Manasseh; and Havoth-jair, 'the small towns of Jair,' had been a name given long ago to cities in Argob by their conqueror under Moses, Deut. iii. 14, which in the days of Solomon, at least, were twice as many as in the days of this judge, 1 Kings iv. 13; see also 1 Chron. ii. 22, 23. In the original there is a play upon words between the cities and the colts ridden by his sons. This one thing told of Jair calls up visions of patriarchal family happiness and peacefulness, and of magnificence accompanying his administration which carried back the recollections of the people to the splendours of those days in which Israel first took possession of the land, and imposed their own names upon its cities; yet the number of his sons almost certainly indicates the degenerate practice of polygamy, as in Gideon's case, viii. 30. Camon, his place of burial, is called by Josephus a city of Gilead, and is perhaps Camoun, a place noticed by the sacred geographer, Reland, as beside Pella and Gefrun: whereas the Onomasticon makes it to be Cammon, a village in the great plain of Jezreel, six Roman miles north from Legio, now Lejjun, usually identified with Megiddo.

1. *How did Abimelech attain supreme power over Israel?*

2. *What was the meaning of Jotham's parable?*

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3. *What is the difference between a parable and a fable? Which is this properly?*
4. *How did Jotham's curse begin to make itself felt?*
5. *How was it completely accomplished?*
6. *What work needed to be done by the civil judges after Abimelech?*
7. *In what respect are we told more of Tola than of any other judge?*
8. *What does the account of Jair recall to our minds?*

 CHAPTER X. 6-XII.

THE THIRD PERIOD OF SINNING AND RECOVERY.

CHAPTER X. 6-18.—THE RENEWED SIN AND SUFFERING.

Vers. 6-9. The depth of the corruption and severity of the chastisement. The idolatry and evil-doing seem to have been more than usually provoking, as if forty-five years of prosperous administration under Tola and Jair had been the inlet to evil more markedly than any earlier period of rest; all the more so, because it had been preceded for forty-three years more of freedom from any foreign oppression. The evil took every possible shape from surrounding temptations; not merely the Baalim and the Ashtaroth (see ii. 13, iii. 7), but also the gods of the nations on every side of Canaan. Seven are mentioned in ver. 6: and it is the more probable that there is a significance in this as the sacred or complete number, because again seven nations are named in vers. 11, 12, as those from whom Jehovah had saved them, though not exactly the number which might most readily have occurred to us on reading the first six chapters of the Book of Judges. This deep degeneracy was punished by a specially severe agency, two hostile nations from opposite quarters, acting in concert against Israel, the Philistines on the south-west and the Ammonites on the east: compare Isa. ix. 12, 'the Syrians before and the Philistines behind; and they shall devour Israel with open mouth.' The crushing oppression is emphasized by the combination of two expressive verbs in ver. 8, rendered elsewhere to dash in pieces and to crush. And though this was most felt that year in which the alliance was first formed against Israel, yet it lasted for eighteen years, the children of Ammon apparently taking the lead, and acting with greatest severity against the tribes nearest them, on the east of Jordan, who had been specially prosperous in Jair's days, as the Ammonites may have known to their cost; yet passing over to the western tribes, 'the house of Ephraim,'

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perhaps including more than their own tribe, and Benjamin, and even the powerful tribe of Judah in the south-west; just as in the case related at vi. 4.—Vers. 10-16. **The repentance under the Divine expostulation.** As the account of their sin is unusually full, so is this account of their repentance, which was made the deeper and the more satisfactory because Jehovah probed their corruption as He expostulated with them and sent them for help to the gods whom they had chosen in preference to Him. This had been done already in the song of Moses, Deut. xxxii. 37, 38. It looks like a spontaneous return of the people under His chastening hand, probably on occasion of some of their national meetings at His tabernacle: if so, these messages to them might have been delivered by the high priest. Yet the priests do not take any part in the work of reformation as recorded at any time in this book: the analogy of ii. 1-5, vi. 11-24, xiii. 3-23, points rather to a manifestation of the Angel of the Covenant, followed by the gift of the Holy Spirit, the appointed instrument of salvation, xi. 29, as in those three cases. see also Ex. xxiii. 21, and Isa. lxiii. 9-11, where the tenderness of the great Angel is expressed much as in ver. 16 here; the expression is characteristic in the Hebrew, 'his soul was shortened for the misery of Israel,' as Israel's soul had been on account of their hardships in the wilderness, Num. xxi. 4. There are peculiarities in the list of nations from whom Israel had been saved, vers. 11, 12, as has been noticed; and there is an abrupt change of construction between the two verses. Israel had been saved from Egypt, of course, by the ten plagues and the miracle at the Red Sea; and from the Amorites, including perhaps the whole nations of Canaan, whom the unbelieving spies and indeed the whole congregation, except Caleb and Joshua, expected to swallow them up, Num. xiii., xiv., but who had melted away before Joshua, and left their land for a possession to Israel. The Ammonites and the Philistines, who were now unitedly oppressing Israel, had on earlier occasions been among their oppressors, iii. 13, 31, overcome by Ehud and Shamgar; yet, as they stand associated with the Egyptians and Amorites, if there is any regard to the order of time, it is just possible there may be a reference to the Israelites under Moses having been restrained from coming into conflict with these powerful nations, Ex. xiii. 17; Deut. ii. 19. The Zidonians are generally supposed to have been associated with the northern Canaanites under Jabin, overcome by Deborah and Barak;

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and the Amalekites were the oldest and most embittered foes of Israel, Ex. xvii. 8-16, as they had taken their place among those whom Gideon destroyed, vi. 3; a verse in which 'the children of the east' are mentioned, the Beduin Arabs, among whom may be ranked the Maonites, mentioned only here, unless they be the same as the Mehunims in 2 Chron. xxvi. 7, and possibly in 1 Chron. iv. 41, where the Hebrew word is doubtfully translated 'habitations.' But an old reading, found in the best copies of the Septuagint Version, is 'Midian' instead of 'Maon'; if this be correct, as many critics now suppose, the reference to Gideon is all the plainer.—**Vers. 17, 18. The crisis.** The children of Ammon were called together and encamped in Gilead, from which the more warlike of the Israelites may have been expelled and forced to seek shelter among the western tribes. The children of Israel, now repentant and restored to Jehovah's favour, were gathered together and encamped opposite to them in Mizpah. And 'the people, the princes of Gilead,' that is, the princes representing the people, the portion which had suffered most severely, and whose business it was to take the lead, as in earlier cases (ch. iv. 6, vi. 34, 35), announced their conviction that a leader was now the sole want, and that they should acknowledge as their head, whatever others might do, the man who came forward and supplied this want. At xi. 11 there will be a better opportunity for considering the geographical question about Mizpah.

CHAPTER XI. 1-33.—THE DELIVERANCE BY JEPHTHAH.

Vers. 1-3. His past history. Jephthah belonged to the region specially scourged by the Ammonite oppression; and the sin of his parents was visited on him by his brothers, confirmed by the judicial act of the elders, ver. 7, whose use of language borrowed from Gen. xxi. 10 indicates that they made a precedent of the expulsion of Ishmael from Abraham's house. The land of Tob has not been satisfactorily identified; yet see Ishtob, in the margin 'the men of Tob,' 2 Sam. x. 6, 8; and also 1 Macc. v. 13; 2 Macc. xii. 17. His followers were not a good class; but as in the case of David, when he too was driven from his home, this may have been more the misfortune than the fault of Jephthah, whose intimate knowledge and skilful use of the events in the past history of Israel favour the idea that he was a careful student of the then existing word of God. Indeed, he would have been felt by the revived people to be quite unsuited

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for their purpose, had he not been an ardent follower of Jehovah, see x. 10-16.—Vers. 4-11. His call to rule and deliver his people. The negotiations are recorded so graphically that little needs be said in explanation. The date in ver. 4 is too indeterminate to fix anything; only see x. 8. The elders of Gilead, acting for the people, saw in Jephthah the only man for the emergency, and they entreated him to come to the rescue, engaging solemnly not only to revoke the sentence by which he had suffered, but also to make him their head and 'captain,' vers. 6, 11. This last is certainly an imperfect rendering of a word which may indeed be applied to a military chief, Josh. x. 24, but which in all other cases is rendered 'guide,' Prov. vi. 7; or 'prince,' Prov. xxv. 15; Dan xi. 18; Micah iii. 1, 9; or 'ruler,' Isa. i. 10, iii. 6, 7, xxii. 3. It included all rule, civil and military, yet perhaps giving prominence to judicial duties; and Jephthah was invited to be everything that a judge of Israel could be. Before consenting, he needed to be assured that the people were in sympathy with himself; and only when it was plain that they were at one with him in serving Jehovah heartily, did he consent to lead them. And all this was ratified by solemn worship before Jehovah in Mizpah. The text does not determine whether this was with or without sacrifices; but these would be natural in such a critical moment, and especially if Mizpah was a great meeting-place for Jehovah and His people. Mizpah, ver. 11 (so it ought to be spelt, not Mizpeh), is usually supposed to be Mizpeh in Gilead, ver. 29, which received its name, 'the watch-tower' (Mizpah), from the parting words of Laban and Jacob, Gen. xxxi. 48, 49; already named at Josh. xiii. 26, it has been supposed to be Ramoth Gilead, the modern Salt on the south-eastern side of the lofty mountain Jebel Osh'a. But we are led to think of a different Mizpah in x. 17, and here at ver. 11, because Gilead is not added as a part of its name, contrast ver. 29. By far the best known Mizpah was the city of Benjamin, Josh. xviii. 26, which had already become famous in the early days of the Judges (though the account stands at the end of the book) as the place of meeting for the tribes in the civil war with Benjamin; when the ark was brought near it, as to the seat of war, and the great high priest Phinehas ministered before it on that eventful occasion, xx. 1, 18-23, xxi. 5, 8. As it is said there that 'all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation assembled as one man from Dan even to Beersheba, with

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the land of Gilead unto Jehovah in Mizpah,' we need not look for any other gathering-place than this at x. 17, 18 (compare Samuel's gathering the people to this Mizpah when Saul was to be made king, 1 Sam. x. 17), especially as the preceding verses make it plain that it was the whole tribes who assembled, not merely the eastern tribes, as is often said; nor need we look for any other place in which Jephthah spake all his words before Jehovah when he was installed as judge of Israel. Nor is there any reason to deny that this Mizpah in Benjamin was the place where he set up his house, ver. 34; for previously he had no house either among the eastern or the western tribes, but dwelt in the land of Tob, ver. 3. He needed a house in the central territory of Israel, if he was to govern it, as we do find him chastising the great tribe of Ephraim for disobedience. It was this western Mizpah to which Samuel made stated circuits, 1 Sam. vii. 16. This is the opinion of Eusebius and Jerome in the *Onomasticon*, though at present it is not in favour.—

Vers. 12-28. Unsuccessful negotiations with the king of the Ammonites. The justification pled by the Ammonites was that the land of Gilead was really theirs, having been seized unrighteously by Israel in the time of Moses. The reply of Jephthah, resting on a very careful survey of the facts, as narrated in Num. xx. and xxi., and in Deut. ii. and iii., was that the land had no doubt once belonged to the children of Lot, but that it had been lost by them to Sihon the Amorite king before Moses came to it; that Israel had no thought of touching it, having indeed received strict injunctions from Jehovah not to meddle with the inheritance of the children of Lot, and aiming only at a quiet entrance into the land of Canaan to the west of Jordan; that the Amorites under Sihon forced Moses to fight, and were utterly destroyed, when their land rightfully fell to Israel; and that if there had been any truth in the plea of the king of the Ammonites, it would have been put forward three centuries earlier. In these negotiations the neighbouring nations Moab and Ammon, having both sprung from Lot, and having much in common, are regarded both by the Ammonite king and by Jephthah as practically one people: and thus Chemosh is called the god of Ammon, though elsewhere he is called the god of Moab. The accuracy of Jephthah's knowledge and the soundness of his judgment appear from his whole treatment of the history; this ought to correct the very erroneous estimate of him as an ignorant and

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careless man. We owe to him the express mention of an embassy sent to Moab from Moses, while still in the desert to the south-west of Edom, ver. 18; whereas in Num. xx. 14-21 we have only the embassy to Edom recorded. It is not wonderful that Moses has not recorded it; for when Edom had refused permission to Israel to go through the land, the embassy to Moab became a matter of no importance to the Mosaic history, though it was very important indeed to Jephthah's argument, as evincing that all care was taken to secure if possible a peaceful and friendly march.—**Vers. 29-33. Victory given to Jephthah by Jehovah.** Jephthah was fitted for his work by the Spirit of Jehovah coming on him, as already on Othniel and on Gideon, iii. 10, vi. 34. On the geographical question connected with Mizpeh here and at ver. 34, see on ver. 11. It is scarcely possible to say more as to the geography till the situation of Minnith and 'the plain of the vineyards' can be determined. The Onomasticon speaks of Mannith as being four Roman miles from Esbus (Heshbon) towards Philadelphia, that is, Rabbah the capital of Ammon, now Ammán. And the latter is generally taken to be a proper name, Abel Cheramim, which the Onomasticon places six or seven miles from Philadelphia. The terms of Jephthah's vow may better be discussed in connection with the narrative of its fulfilment. His victory and its consequence, the liberation of Israel, are mentioned in terms already used in the narrative of similar deliverances.—**Vers. 34-40. Jephthah's vow.** The prevalent opinion in the Christian Church, the Fathers agreeing in this with Josephus and with other ancient Jewish authorities, has been that Jephthah made a vow to sacrifice to Jehovah whatever first came out of his house, leaving it to Providence to determine whether this should be an animal or his daughter; hoping that it would not be she, yet prepared to give her up to death if she was the first to come out. And so tragic a narrative has commended itself to poetical and sentimental minds, till any other opinion has been thought to do violence to the text. A closer examination leads one to notice that the text says nothing of his putting her to death, strange and all-important as so terrible an act would have been; nor does it say that it was precisely the first creature which came out of his house whose life was to be sacrificed, nor does it encourage the notion that Jephthah tried a game at hazard with so high a stake as the life of his only child. On the contrary, it speaks twice

of her virginity (vers. 37, 38, see also ver. 39), not of her death: and of her going with her companions to bewail this; whereas on the common view she might rather have stayed at home and devoted her last days to her father, into whose plans she entered without hesitation. Nor is there any justification for the rendering 'lament' in ver. 40: had the writer meant to express this idea, he had a common word, which he had already used twice, 'bewail,' in vers 37, 38. The verb he has employed is so rare that it occurs again only once in this very book, v. 11, where it is well enough translated 'rehearse,' with the implication that this was done by way of praising. In that passage, however, the construction is different, 'There shall they rehearse the mighty acts of Jehovah:' whereas here there is a preposition introduced which leads necessarily to the translation 'rehearse to her,' unless it be 'rehearse concerning her.' In this latter case it would mean to celebrate: and one does not see why she should be celebrated unless her father's self-denial was also an object of celebration; nor indeed how so horrible a deed could be celebrated at all, from the remembrance of which every Israelite would rather have shrunk with horror, compare 2 Kings iii. 27. The language of the vow, vers. 30, 31, naturally points to a human being: and Jephthah's deliberate intention was to sacrifice to Jehovah the person who came out of his house to meet him, he being prepared to dedicate to Him that which was most precious of all that he had, if he were first made the instrument of saving Israel. At the same time, the vow was perhaps expressed in such general terms as to intimate that Jehovah might accept the will for the deed, and so order the course of events as to spare him this trial, as when he provided a lamb for a burnt-offering instead of Isaac. But if the deliberate intention of Jephthah was to include his daughter within the sweep of his vow, or even to have her first in his conception of its meaning, it is incredible that his plan was to put her to death upon the altar. The horrible practice of human sacrifices was indeed well known to the heathen nations around Israel—to the Ammonites, for instance, with whom Jephthah was at war: but it was against the whole spirit as well as the express terms of the law of Moses, with which we have seen that Jephthah was well acquainted, and to obey which the Israelites were now returning under his guidance during a blessed season of revived religion. Indeed it was only at rare intervals, when they sank most deeply,

that they borrowed from the heathen this abominable rite, from which the human heart revolts: yet it is manifestly this vow of Jephthah's and the fulfilment of it which make him a characteristic person, selected for notice in the roll of Hebrew worthies conspicuous for their faith, in Heb. xi. 32-34. Nor, in truth, had Jephthah been such a man as Herod the Tetrarch, ignorant of God, yet feeling himself entrapped by an oath or vow which he had made, could he have been ignorant of the fact that male victims were invariably demanded for burnt-offerings by the law of Moses, and females never, Lev. i. 3, 10. Nor is such an expression ever to be found in the case of actual sacrifices on the altar as that in Jephthah's vow, 'He shall surely be Jehovah's, and I will offer him up for a burnt-offering:' a sacrifice was brought to Jehovah, not because it belonged to Him already, but on the contrary because it belonged to the offerer up to the moment in which he offered it. On the other hand, we read of persons who were taken to be His, like the first-born, Num. iii. 12, 13; but there was a provision for such persons being redeemed. And very instructive is the case of the Levites, Num. viii. 10-16, who were given to be His, and who were offered to Him as an offering, the children of Israel first putting their hands on them as they did on the sacrifices they offered: but these Levites in turn laid their hands upon the heads of two bullocks who were substituted for them as a burnt-offering and a sin-offering. A metaphorical sacrifice of persons to Jehovah was an idea which their worship would make early and easily intelligible to the Israelites, as it is found in common use among their psalmists and prophets; it very probably was familiar to them from the first, owing to the symbolical sacrifice of Isaac as a burnt-offering ('By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac,' Heb. xi. 17), to which the language of Jephthah's vow makes a manifest allusion. Indeed, there were many cases of vows by which persons were consecrated to the service of Jehovah: so much so, that there was a regular provision in the law for the manner in which they were to be redeemed, Lev. xxvii. 1-8. But on account of the solemnity of the case, Jephthah felt that this vow of his would dedicate his daughter irrevocably, so that he could not redeem her: and this absolute surrender of her for ever may well have been the idea to be conveyed by speaking of her as a burnt-offering, since the burnt-offering was wholly Jehovah's: it was laid upon His altar, and nothing of it

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came back to the worshipper. It is some lifelong surrender of his only child to the service of Jehovah which alone explains the closing words of the chapter. The daughters of Israel went yearly—probably to the sacred tabernacle—to rehearse her praises to the daughter of Jephthah four days in a year. And this might explain the custom or ordinance in Israel, of which there is no trace elsewhere: it would last while she lived, and die out when she died, as in the margin of the English Bible it is said, ‘They went to talk with her.’ But perhaps it is better to adhere to the division of verses handed down by Jewish tradition, and placing a full stop at the end of ver. 39, to connect the last clause with what precedes: ‘Her father, who did to her his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man; and it was a custom in Israel.’ If so, the reference would be to the case of the women who assembled by troops at the door of the tabernacle, Ex. xxxviii. 8 (margin), 1 Sam. ii. 22, for whose wants it would be necessary to make such provision as was made by the deaconesses in the early Christian churches of the East. These female attendants would occupy a menial position like that of the males who were hewers of wood and drawers of water to the sanctuary, see on Josh. ix. 23–27. And whereas in heathen temples, women in such an office were habitually of a degraded class, in the worship of Jehovah they must be models of purity; and further, to be of much use, they must be free from the law of a husband, either widows like Anna, Luke ii. 36–38, or virgins like Jephthah’s daughter. The vow of Jephthah was therefore to give up all hope of family happiness with his only child, and to consecrate her specially and irrevocably to humble work in the house of Jehovah. And to this she yielded herself as meekly as Isaac had yielded himself to be a sacrifice; though she was fixed down to this lot just because she had come forth to meet her father in the fulness of her joy at seeing him victorious, by the Divine help, over the enemies of his country and his God. Her coming out with timbrels and dances reminds us of Miriam, Ex. xv. 20, and of the women on occasion of Saul and David triumphing over the Philistines, 1 Sam. xviii. 6, 7.

CHAPTER XII.—THE REST FROM EXTERNAL OPPRESSION.

Vers. 1–7. Jephthah’s administration. The powerful tribe of Ephraim, ready to act like a single man (Jephthah uses the singular ‘thou,’ where

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the English had 'ye,' in ver. 3), were 'called together,' an expression often used of gathering in reply to a summons, as is also another almost identical with it in Hebrew, vi. 34, etc. Their purpose was to vent their ill-will upon him, and to show what contempt was felt for him by the leading tribe. Instead of 'northward,' ver. 1, we may equally well use a proper name, 'toward Zaphon,' which is mentioned among the cities of Gad, Josh. xiii. 27. They 'passed over' rather than 'went' thither over the Jordan to the eastern territory, as they blamed Jephthah for having done, no doubt when he went off from Mizpah with his eager Gileadites, while the Ephraimites lingered behind: contrast the situation under Barak and Deborah, v. 14, 17. Perhaps they expected Jephthah to be as gentle with them as Gideon had been, viii. 1-3; but he acted with extraordinary severity, either from a difference of natural temperament, or more probably from an insight (by the Spirit resting on him) into their traitorous condition, coming against him with arms in their hand, and making brutal threats like the Philistines, xiv. 15, which demanded such a terrible vindication of the central authority as had been already given in the case of the tribe of Benjamin and in that of the city of Jabesh Gilead, chaps. xx. and xxi., and again in the case of Succoth and Penuel, viii. 6-8, 14-17. A civil war is more easily begun than ended: and though Jephthah individually is not charged with any of the cruelty here practised on the Ephraimites, we see how bitter were the feelings of his warriors. Besides the sin of Ephraim against the judge of Israel, there was their foolish contempt for the Gileadites—if we adhere to the A. V. in the rendering of the latter part of ver. 4, which is very obscure—over whom they claimed a right to exercise some control, as if the whole house of Joseph concentrated its honour and authority in them, while the eastern portion of Manasseh was looked upon as a settlement of fugitives from the more favoured west. Perhaps the whole of the eastern tribes were looked down upon by that larger part of the people which occupied the true land of Canaan, see Josh. xxii. 24-28. The reproach was not founded on fact; but the Ephraimites themselves soon became fugitives by a terrible retributive providence. Observe the unfavourable view given of the habitual conduct of Ephraim in Ps. lxxviii. 9-11. 'Shibboleth' means either an ear of corn or a flood of waters: in the latter sense it would be a very natural word to pronounce at the moment; but whatever it meant, the pronunciation of the word

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betrayed the birth-place of the speakers. In former times of salvation from heathen oppressors, Israel had destroyed them at fords like these, iii. 28, vii. 24: but now it was a domestic enemy, alienated brethren. Thenceforward the rule of Jephthah over Israel (1 Sam. xii. 11) would meet with no opposition: but it did not last long. When he died it was his beloved cities of Gilead which seem to have taken the charge of burying him, and to have recorded this epitaph, as it were, that his body lay with them, the individual spot being left unnamed.—Vers. 8–15. **Three peaceful administrations.** Jephthah's victory over the enemies of Israel, together with the revival of religion among the people, were followed by twenty-five years of peace under three judges, like the forty-five years under two judges after Gideon: even the evils occasioned by Abimelech's intervening tyranny, and the civil war occasioned by him, find a certain analogy in the misconduct of the Ephraimites and Jephthah's vengeance on them, which made the quiet rule of the succeeding judges specially suitable and valuable. The large families and patriarchal glories of Ibzan and Abdon may also recall what was said of Jair in x. 4. Nothing else is told of them except the place of their burial, as in the case of Gideon and the succeeding judges. All these three judges who came after Jephthah belonged to the western tribes, which is natural, considering their superior numbers and influence. The first was from Bethlehem, which has been causelessly supposed by some to be the town in Zebulun which is named in Josh. xix. 15, a place never mentioned elsewhere; there is nothing to lead us not to think of Bethlehem in the tribe of Judah, already well known in the history of the people, Judg. xix. 1; Ruth i. 1. Indeed, if the northern Bethlehem had been meant, this judge would have been a Zebulunite like his successor, and we should have expected the fact to be stated in both cases alike. Judah now furnished a judge to Israel for the first time since the case of Othniel. Zebulun furnished the next. Finally one came out of Ephraim, which Jephthah had humbled, but had not cast out of the Hebrew commonwealth. Aijalon, where Elon was buried, may have its name preserved in the ruined place Jallûn, ten miles east from Akka, one and a half miles south-south-west of Mejdél Kerûm. And Pirathon (see 2 Sam. xxiii. 30) is supposed to be the village Fer'ata, nearly six miles west-south-west from Nablûs (Shechem): or, if this be Ophrah, perhaps Fer'on, also west of Shechem

 CHAP. XIII. 2-25.—*The Birth and Calling of the Deliverer.*

1. *What marks this as a specially sinful period? And what specially severe agency was employed to chastise Israel?*
2. *How was the confession of the people met?*
3. *What was the resolution of the princes of Gilead?*
4. *What do we know of Jephthah's early history and character?*
5. *Did he and the elders of Gilead come easily to terms?*
6. *What impression does he make on us by his negotiations with the king of the Ammonites?*
7. *What gives peculiar interest to Jephthah's victory?*
8. *How has his vow often been understood?*
9. *Name some reasons for a different understanding of it?*
10. *What sad event afterwards marked the administration of Jephthah?*
11. *Of what are we reminded in the history of the three peaceful judges?*

 CHAPTERS XIII.—XVI.

THE FOURTH PERIOD OF SINNING AND RECOVERY.

CHAPTER XIII. 1.—THE RENEWED SINNING.

This and its consequences are related in the language already used at iii. 7, 12, etc. By most writers this sinning and the subjection to the Philistines are identified with what is recorded at x. 6, 7, where it is said that Jehovah sold Israel into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon: the latter part of this punishment and the deliverance from it by Jephthah being first described at length, and the former part of it being reserved till now. But there are differences throughout in the language of these two passages which are rather against this identification. In itself such an identification supposes a manner of narrating events unlike anything else in the book: nor is there anything to recommend it except a supposed solution of a chronological difficulty, the 480 years from the Exodus to the building of Solomon's temple, 1 Kings vi. 1, with the additional difficulty of 40 and 450 and 40 years to the death of Saul, Acts xiii. 18-21.

CHAPTER XIII. 2-25.—THE BIRTH AND CALLING OF THE DELIVERER.

Vers. 2-7. The announcement to his mother. Zorah was a town at first assigned to Judah, but afterwards transferred to Dan (see Josh. xv. 33, xix. 41; in both places named along with Eshtaol, as here, ver. 25), on the western slopes of the Judcan hills. The childlessness of the parents

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made them suitable organs for the Divine working in the gift of a child to Israel, Ps. cxiii. 9; compare the case of the parents of Samuel and of John the Baptist: Manoah and his wife are not said to have been aged, yet they had apparently given up hope of having a family. The tribe of Dan was not one which could have been expected to furnish a saviour to Israel, considering their cowardice before the doomed nations, i. 34, and their bad pre-eminence in idolatry, chap. xviii.: in fact, the address of the great Angel, vers. 5, 7, is in part identical with his address to the outcast Hagar, Gen. xvi. 11 (as the original shows better than a translation), on occasion of his earliest recorded appearance to this perishing woman. The sovereign grace which chose the judge and saviour did not fail to fit him for his work: he was to be a Nazarite, one separated from his brethren for God's service, and brought as near as possible to the level of the priests; see Num. vi. 1-8. Nay, he was to be a Nazarite for life; and his mother was to be under the same or a similar rule from the announcement of his birth until he was born, if not longer. In these respects his consecration goes beyond that of Jephthah's daughter. Yet, notwithstanding these initial advantages, he was to do no more than 'begin' to save Israel, ver. 5: so deep had they now sunk, as never hitherto. All this the woman immediately reported to her husband, just as she acted, ver. 10, when the Angel came a second time at the entreaty of Manoah.—**Vers. 8-14. The instructions given to the two parents.** There is every appearance of godliness about this couple, whatever might be the measure of their knowledge; especially there is their wish to be taught themselves, and to go hand in hand in the right training of their son. This is not lost even if the marginal rendering be preferred at ver. 12: for 'the manner of the child' (Luke i. 66) and 'his work' implied care on their part to make him ready.—**Vers. 15-23. The recognition of the Angel as he departed.** There are striking points of resemblance between this appearance of the Angel, with the attendant sacrifice, and that to Gideon, vi. 11-24 (on which passage see the notes): for instance, the hesitation as to the rank of the messenger (contrast the end of ver. 16 and of ver. 21), the consequent hesitation between making a feast and offering a sacrifice, the discovery of the true dignity of the Angel in connection with the flame on the altar, and the fear on account of having seen God, which was, however, set aside by his wife, who rightly interpreted the gracious dealings of Jehovah with them. But, as in Gideon's and other cases, the doubt

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appears greater than it really was, owing to the mistranslation 'an Angel (correctly, the Angel) of Jehovah,' vers. 16, 21. The peculiarity of this interview is Manoah's question, 'What is thy name?' like Jacob's, Gen. xxxii. 29; though the reply almost gives the information it seems to refuse. The usage of the Hebrew language requires the marginal rendering 'Wonderful' in ver. 18, very nearly the same as in Isa. ix. 6; and to this there is manifest reference when it is said in the next verse that the Angel did wondrously.—**Vers. 24, 25. The promise fulfilled.** It is not said that the name of the child was fixed by the Angel, though this is not unlikely. Nor is the meaning of the name easily determined: the commonest and most obvious explanation is 'solar,' something relating to the sun; though the explanation 'strong' is given by Josephus and is still defended by good scholars. Yet this may have been simply a testimony to the sense attached to the name; as the last words of the song of Deborah are, 'So shall all Thine enemies perish, O Jehovah, but they that love Him shall be as the going forth of the sun in his might,' v. 31. That Samson did love Jehovah, and was beloved by him, is implied in the language, 'The child grew, and Jehovah blessed him; and the Spirit of Jehovah began to move him at times:' compare what is said of Samuel, 1 Sam. ii. 26; and of the Baptist, Luke i. 80. It may therefore be understood like the descriptive name, 'Beloved of Jehovah,' given to Solomon at his birth by the prophet Nathan, 2 Sam. xii. 24, 25, Nehem. xiii. 26, as an inspired declaration at the beginning of the history of Samson and of Solomon, that they were servants of God, each called to do a special work for Him, and upheld in doing it, in spite of very humbling evidences of gross inconsistency, which were as hurtful to themselves as they were dishonouring to Him. It is to be observed in this the fourth case of the great Angel of the Covenant appearing for the help of the covenant people, followed by the working of the Spirit (ii. 1 and iii. 10, vi. 11 and 34, x. 11 and xi. 29, xiii. 3 and 25), that the Angel appeared only to the parents of Samson, not to himself: but he was united to them in a very special manner as a Nazarite from his birth, by a consecration which his mother shared with him. And yet, instead of the quiet equable working of grace which might have been expected in such a one, as exemplified in the life of Isaac, the heir of the promises from his birth, the working of the Spirit on Samson was fitful and violent, the bubbling of an intermittent spring in contrast to the steady out-

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flow of rivers of living water, John vii. 38, 39. The peculiar Hebrew word is not unhappily paraphrased in our Version, 'to move him at times.' And it is instructive that wherever else this verb occurs (it so happens always in a passive or reflexive form), Gen. xli. 8, Ps. lxxvii. 4, Dan. ii. 1, 3, it is rendered 'to be troubled.'

This description of the violent and intermittent movement of Samson by the Spirit of God is in striking contrast to the quiet resting and abiding of this Spirit on Messiah, the true Servant of Jehovah, in whom was realized the idea of the Israel of God, Isa. xi. 2, xlii. 1, 2. Samson is a fair specimen of Israel as they appear in their whole history, with a high calling from God, separated from the womb, trained under special promises, manifestly clothed with strength from heaven as Balaam testified, Num. xxiii. 21-24, xxiv. 8, 9, and thus accomplishing objects which seemed to the worldly eye unattainable, and performing feats which seemed incredible, Deut. xxxii. 30, 42; yet making failures which left them to be a reproach and a laughing-stock to the heathen round about. There are stranger things in Samson's miracles than in any other recorded in Scripture: but this is simply because he occupies a spiritual position so much lower than Moses and Elijah and Elisha, and the apostles. Yet these miracles of his have nothing of the emptiness and absurdity which characterize legendary miracles, though at times we feel as if there was a danger of this; precisely as the miracle-worker was in danger of sacrificing the spiritual to the outward, and even to the worldly and the fleshly. This was seen most sadly when he permitted his hair to be cut off, and so threw away the symbol of his life-long consecration to Jehovah: yet from this he was recovered, though in a melancholy way, as Israel in exile and mixed up with the heathen was in a small poor measure brought back to the land of promise as the covenant people. It is unnecessary to notice the idle attempts at a parallel between the exploits of Samson and those of Hercules or other heroes in classical fables. And it must never be forgotten that the strength of Samson is traced up immediately and always to the working of the Spirit of Jehovah, never to any gigantic or otherwise remarkable conformation of his bodily frame.

CHAPTER XIV.—THE COMMENCEMENT OF SAMSON'S WORK.

Vers. 1-4. His purpose of marriage. *Timnath*, or Timnathah, see Josh. xv. 10 and xix. 43. Like Zorah and Eshtaol, it was assigned

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first to Judah, then to Dan; but perhaps it never was taken from the Philistines. The law of Moses did not expressly forbid marriage with the Philistines, as it did with the seven doomed Canaanite nations, Ex. xxxiv. 11-16, Deut. vii. 1-4; nor was there even an indirect prohibition, as in the case of the Ammonites and Moabites, Deut. xxiii. 3. But an intelligent Israelite with a tender conscience might have seen that the Philistines were vastly changed from their friendly attitude in the days of the patriarchs, and that they were now practically one with the Canaanites (see Josh. xiii. 1-6), especially now that they ruled over Israel, ver. 4, xv. 11: and Samson, as a Nazarite, ought to have been a pattern Israelite. He, however, did not see this, even when directed to it by his godly parents, ver. 3: and it is one of the unsatisfactory features of his moral character that there was a want of frankness towards them or of community of feeling with them, vers. 6, 9, 16, which naturally led on to a similar distance between him and his espoused wife in the ill-assorted and unblest marriage which he made. Nor does it appear that his mother went to the marriage (contrast ver. 10 with ver. 5), though his parents must have yielded so far to his settled wishes. In this somewhat low moral and spiritual state, in which Samson is to be pitied as well as blamed, because there seems to have been none in Israel who had a fellow-feeling with him and with whom he could work for the salvation of his people, it need excite no surprise to read that Jehovah was guiding him unconsciously, and in a way that a more spiritual man would scarcely have been guided, to an occasion against the Philistines, ver. 4. It is a great mystery how the pure and holy God thus carries out His purposes amid the evil plans and actings of men, but Scripture affirms the fact to be so: see 1 Kings xii. 15 and 2 Chron. xi. 4.—

Vers. 5-9. His victory over the lion. This preliminary encounter, like David's, 1 Sam. xvii. 34-37, awakened in him the knowledge of slumbering powers, and suggested to him a coming struggle with more serious foes. The verb rendered 'came mightily' (though 'mightily' is oftener omitted) is used of the Spirit of Jehovah acting in and through Samson here, and ver. 19, and xv. 14; as also in the case of another man of violent and erratic courses, King Saul, 1 Sam. x. 6, 10, xi. 6, xvi. 13, xviii. 10, in this last case, however, the subject being 'the evil from God.' It often has the meaning 'to prosper,' which may be associated with *coming mightily*. And the circumstance is noted as if it were instructive, perhaps because it impressed

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Samson and led him to construct his riddle, that bees sought the shelter they need in the carcase of the very lion with which he had been engaged in a struggle for his life, and that from this he derived strength and pleasure, as he took the honey and ate it. Honey and milk are the products for which the land was celebrated, Ex. iii. 8, etc. : and if the Spirit guided Israel in a conflict with their oppressors, this would restore the enjoyment of that which God had promised to their fathers. Besides the natural word for 'carcase' in the end of ver. 8 and in ver. 9, there is another word so rendered in the beginning of ver. 8, which is literally 'ruin : ' he turned aside to see the fall or ruin of the lion. Numberless stories are related of singular places in which bees have swarmed and made honey : it is likely that this carcase was quickly dried up by the heat of the sun, so that it has been compared to a mummy.—**Vers. 10-14. The marriage feast and the riddle.** We may be sure that the feast was after the usual fashion in families of some means. It lasted a whole week of seven days, which suited heathens better than observers of the Sabbath. It was at the expense of the bridegroom, as in some other cases, for instance John ii. 9, 10. The companions of the bridegroom were selected for him by the men of Timnath, perhaps because the Israelites did not like it and had not accompanied Samson : and the number, thirty, is so large as to suggest that an effort was made to do him special honour. At such times of feasting it was common to introduce riddles and other similar exercises of ingenuity. The particular form which these assume is determined by some of the subtlest laws of mind, in reference to the habits of thinking and feeling which prevail at any time in any individual country : no doubt Samson's riddle suited his company, or they would have been loud enough in their complaints.—**Vers. 15-20. The breach with the Philistines.** Two currents now ran adversely to Samson's peace. From the first day till the seventh his wife wept before him and reproached him for want of affection, because he had not told her the riddle. The first three days, again, his Philistine companions had tried in vain to find it out : and, whatever they and she may have done during the next three days, on the seventh day they insisted that she should extract the secret from him, on pain of a cruel death to her and her father's house. Under these combined influences she so increased her urgency as to learn the secret, but she achieved this success at the expense of sacrificing all future claims on her husband's regard : and this he published in his

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witty reply to those who pretended to have discovered the answer by the exercise of their own powers of mind. The Spirit of Jehovah repeating that influence which had moved him to slay the lion, moved him to furnish the promised payment by smiting thirty of the men of Ashkelon, a well-known important Philistine city towards the south, on the sea-coast, see Josh. xiii. 3. Some think it was military garments which he took, since the word used for 'spoil' in ver. 19 occurs again only in 2 Sam. ii. 21, where it is translated 'armour:' as if he found the men going out to some attack upon Israel, and anticipated them and overcame them. Anyhow, this ill-assorted marriage was at an end, and Samson had become the inveterate enemy of the Philistines, and had commenced the career which was to be terminated only by his death. We are not required to judge his act, to justify it any more than the first slaughter of an Egyptian by Moses, Ex. ii. 12. No doubt he felt himself grievously wronged as an individual, and he also believed his nation to be wronged by the whole nation of the Philistines. The train had been laid and was ready to explode: the light was applied when his betrothed wife and her friends were guilty of this treachery towards him.

1. *What has been supposed regarding the date of this subjection to the Philistines?*
2. *Wherein consisted the improbability of the saviour of Israel springing from the tribe of Dan?*
3. *What special qualifications were his to be?*
4. *Mention points of resemblance between the appearance of the great Angel to Samson's parents and to Gideon?*
5. *What peculiar phrase is used to describe the action of the Spirit of the Lord upon Samson?*
6. *What difference does this emphasize between Samson and the Messiah?*
7. *What is to be said of Samson's marriage?*
8. *How was his friendship with the Philistines broken off?*
9. *What was the miracle which awoke in him the knowledge of his power and the desire to use it?*

CHAPTER XV.—SAMSON'S WORK AT ITS BEST.

Vers. 1-5. Revenge for the loss of his wife. The language of the father-in-law is an apology for a wrong done, and an attempt at compensation, which shows that Samson's conduct was not considered at all inexcusable in the circumstances. Samson's reply, ver. 3, admits that his conduct had been at least liable to be misunderstood, but

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according to the probable translation in the margin, affirms that this time it should be blameless. He scorned to take compensation from the man whose daughter he had loved and wedded, but he regarded him as a tool of the Philistines, whose hatred and oppression of him and his people Israel he would therefore punish. Several parallels to this stratagem of his have been adduced; and the binding of two foxes together would make it impossible for them to retreat into their holes, nay, would tend to make their movements more continuous and more erratic. The foxes in this history were probably jackals, a species closely allied to the common fox, but gregarious in their habits; they are even now abundant in what was the land of the Philistines. In catching and starting them, Samson need not be supposed to have acted all alone without assistance.—**Vers. 5-8. The revenge of the Philistines, and the counter-revenge of Samson.** He had risen above personal wrongs, and looked at the relations subsisting between Israel and the Philistines; the Philistines did the reverse, and though his wife and her father were of their own nation, they burned them with fire, thus carrying out their cruel threat, xiv. 15, to escape from which she had proved false to her husband's trust. If this baseness and cruelty indicated their intended mode of acting, Samson resolved he would take vengeance in such a way as might arrest it, and the slaughter he inflicted was undoubtedly terrible; there is, however, uncertainty about the precise meaning of 'smiting hip and thigh.' After this victory he attempted nothing more, but lived in retirement in the cleft (not top) of a rock, awaiting the course of Providence. It was not a healthy life for him who should have saved Israel; but what could he do with a people so sunken and unsympathetic as the following verses exhibit them? Conder believes that he has found Etam in Beit 'Atâb, a village on a rugged knoll, about five miles south-east of Surah (Zorah), separated from it by the great valley of Surâr (Sorek).—**Vers. 9-13. Israel casting off their judge and saviour.** This is the lowest point of degradation which had yet been reached by the people, since the time of their slavery in Egypt. 'This Moses, whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer,' Acts vii. 35. Nor does a parallel occur again until the rejection of the true Saviour, John xix. 15. Even here we see the nobleness and truthfulness of Samson, when he stood all alone, intent only on this, that his brethren should not sin so deeply as to

take his life; for while life lasted, he believed that Jehovah had work for him.—**Vers. 14–17. The crowning victory.** The Philistines in Lehi shouted against him, that is, as they met him, thinking that he was safe in their hands, and not knowing that the same influence of the Spirit which had moved him mightily before, xiv. 6, 19, was about to repeat the movement with greater results than hitherto. The new (literally, fresh or moist, with the living juices not yet dried up out of it) jaw-bone of an ass has furnished abundant material for the jests of wittlings; but the first thing his hands found, the only thing perhaps they could have found there, became a weapon even more deadly to his foes than Shamgar's ox-goad had been, iii. 31. Samson's own witty sayings cannot have justice in a translation, as has been already remarked of his riddle: there is a play upon words here, the same Hebrew term being used to express 'a heap' and 'an ass.' The name which he gave to the place, Ramath-lehi, ver. 17, can be rendered 'the casting away of the jaw-bone,' only by altering the vowels in the original; but 'the lifting up, or the exaltation, of the jaw-bone,' is really more suitable, and needs no such alteration. Yet perhaps best of all is the retention of so common a proper name as Ramah or Ramath, which means 'a high place,' when this would be Ramath-lehi, yet with a reference to the double meaning of Lehi, ver. 19, Ramah of the jaw-bone.—**Vers. 18, 19. Samson's own need and deliverance.** His wonderful victory, the salvation which Jehovah by the hand of His servant granted to Israel, was unrecognised and unimproved by them; perhaps, as in the days of Moses, they would have preferred to remain enslaved. And in the very hour of victory their saviour might himself have died of thirst, had not a spring of water been called forth by the prayer of the abstemious Nazarite, for which again he gave public and lasting praise to the Lord whom he served. Maktesh, the Hebrew word for 'a hollow place,' is used for 'a mortar' in the only other text where it occurs, Prov. xxvii. 22; and thus we find it as the proper name of probably a mortar-like hollow near Jerusalem, Zeph. i. 11. There is no doubt good authority amongst the ancient translators for the rendering in the text of the A. V.; but it is so strangely unsuitable, and so like a result of a diseased love for multiplying miracles, that it is now almost unanimously rejected, and the marginal rendering is taken, 'the hollow place that is in Lehi.' Lehi may possibly have been a name already in existence, the place being called 'the jaw-

CHAP. XVI.—*Samson's Backsliding and Captivity.*

bone,' from the shape of its hills; as many places bear a name derived from the resemblance of their outline to some part of the human frame: and if so, it was a remarkable coincidence, in which the pious would recognise the hand of God, that a place with this name should be the scene of the victory with the jaw-bone. But we should rather say that the place received the name in consequence of his exploit, and that Lehi occurs in vers. 9, 14, by a convenient anticipation. In fact, since Samson called on Jehovah, the covenant God of Israel, ver. 18, whereas the cleaving of the hollow place is attributed simply to the Deity (Elohim) in ver. 19, it may be that this cleaving was a natural process, as it might readily be, if any convulsion of the nature of an earthquake assisted him in obtaining the victory, whose details are passed over in silence; comp. 1 Sam. xiv. 15.—**Ver. 20. Samson's administration.** Nothing whatever is told us of it, except its length, and the melancholy qualification that it was 'in the days of the Philistines.' Whether he did more or less as a judge, the people were to blame for leaving him alone,—we certainly have no reason to think they gave him support,—and in consequence he only 'began to save Israel out of the hand of the Philistines,' xiii. 5, who never relaxed their grasp, xiii. 1, until the day of his death and their own sore disaster. The site of Lehi is unknown, though old traditions connect it with a fountain beside Eletheropolis or Beit-Jibrin.

CHAPTER XVI.—SAMSON'S BACKSLIDING, CAPTIVITY,
REPENTANCE, AND DEATH.

Vers. 1-3. His sin and danger at Gaza. This chapter makes manifest Samson's besetting sin, and throws back light upon his first unhappy step, when he insisted on marrying a Philistine; he must have his desires gratified, though religious and moral obstacles stood in the way. It was very natural for his Philistine enemies to believe that he was in their power, and to take measures to secure him in the morning; but he roused himself from his sensuality at midnight, and transformed the source of danger into a means of triumph. The power entrusted to him was sufficient to accomplish this (contrast the apostle's escape in a basket, 2 Cor. xi. 32, 33); and the removal of the gates to the mount before the capital of Judah was a trophy of his victory such as other conquerors have been known to erect. The phrase 'before Hebron' is, however, very inde-

CHAP. XVI.—*Samson's Repentance and Death.*

finite ; and it is possible that the traditional site of the hill is the true one, el Muntâr, less than a mile south-south-east of the town ; so Conder.—**Vers. 4–22. His terrible fall.** His evil-doing now became more thoroughly presumptuous and deliberate, and the consequences were more awful, without any suggestion from his insulted Lord to rouse him to a sense of his sin and danger. The valley (literally, torrent-bed, the modern Wady) of Sorek is commonly connected with a vine bearing this name ; but the preferable Hebrew reading of the proper name, Shorek, does not favour this etymology. The valley used generally to be placed far south, between Ashkelon and Gaza. Recent explorers generally agree to give it a more northerly position, the Wady Surâr, the great drain of the western Judean hills, almost from Hebron to Yabneh and the sea ; on the north side of it stand the ruins of Zorah. Delilah was presumably a woman of loose reputation ; and she accomplished in Samson for the five lords of the Philistines (see Josh. xiii. 3) what the Midianite women accomplished in Israel (whom Samson represented) for Balaam and Balak. Three times she endeavoured to learn the secret of his strength in order to ruin him ; but he put her off with lies. The fourth time, perhaps conjecturing that he was coming nearer to the secret when he mentioned his hair, or perhaps seeing tokens of his being worn out, she made a more desperate and exhausting attack, vers. 15, 16, and he shamefully revealed to her his Nazarite dedication. This time she did begin to afflict him, as she shaved off the holy locks which were the sign and seal of his consecration ; and ere he knew, his strength had departed from him because Jehovah had departed. The last stage of degradation was reached, the outward consequences of his spiritual fall, when his eyes were put out, as those of the last king of Judah were, and he was brought down to the city in which he had sinned, and yet been wonderfully saved, not long before ; and having been there chained up in prison, he was set to the task of grinding at the mill, such as was assigned to the meanest hand-maids, Ex. xi. 5. One thing remains to be noted, that in his deepest humiliation the grace of his Lord did not desert him ; for no other interpretation can be put upon the mention of his hair beginning to grow again, ver. 22, as if the invitation came to him to remember his Nazarite vow. The rendering, ‘*after* he was shaven,’ is perhaps inadequate ; the original conveys a hint that this was immediately

CHAP. XVI.—*Samson's Burial.*

after, or at all events, that he was not long left to pine in prison. — Vers. 28–31. His recovery, glorious death, and burial. Dagon, the fish god (regarding whom and his temple at Ashdod, see 1 Sam. v., and see also 1 Chron. x. 10), was the national idol of the Philistines, the antagonist of the God of Israel; and so the honour of ruining Samson is attributed to him, in the spirit of what is said, Deut. xxxii. 27. The cruel mockery of their fallen enemy finds many parallels, especially in the history of heathen nations; and it may be an indication of a softened spirit, that he humbled himself to this, although it may equally well have been an assumed submissive demeanour to throw his oppressors off their guard. The prayer which he offered has all the appearance of true devotion (compare it with his prayer in an earlier case of extremity, xv. 18), and its peculiarity is to be explained and defended by the exceptional circumstances in which he was placed. From his birth he had been not his own, but under a special vow of dedication to Jehovah for the good of his country; his life, however, had to a large extent been wasted by him; and now he perceived a call in Providence to sacrifice the dregs of it for the glory of God and the good of his country, of which he was the rightful head till the day of his death, ver. 31. Had he been mistaken in the step he took, he would scarcely have received back his strength for this final effort. The construction of the house cannot be exactly determined. In some way the place in which the people sat was supported principally by two pillars; for instance, they may have sat in a sloping gallery, while Samson played before them in the arena beneath, until he retired for rest to the space underneath them and out of sight, where he laid hold of these pillars and brought the house to ruin. His prayer, at the end of ver. 28, may certainly be translated, ‘that I may be avenged of the Philistines for one of my two eyes;’ but the expression is very odd, though the meaning would probably be, ‘that I may take vengeance, however inadequately.’ There is a tragic grandeur in the decline and fall of the Hebrew republic, when the last of the ordinary judges gave himself up to die for the redemption of his country. Perhaps we should understand the statement at the end of ver. 30, not so much of the number of persons slain by him as of their social and political importance, the whole 3000 belonging to the *elite* of the people. And a kind of public funeral attested the work which he had accomplished by his death,

Appendices to the History of the Judges.

and secured for his body that it should come to the sepulchres of his fathers, and not lie with the uncircumcised whom he had slain. The completeness of Samson's dying victory is evinced by this funeral; no opposition having been attempted by the men of Gaza and the other Philistines, who would gladly have used their enemy when dead as ill as they had used him while in life, if they had had the power, if we may judge by their meanness and cruelty, xv. 6.

1. *How did Samson take vengeance on the Philistines for the final loss of his wife?*
2. *Why should he have lived solitary in the rock of Etam instead of saving Israel?*
3. *What was the great sin of Israel in regard to him?*
4. *What was singular in his victory over the Philistines? And in his own need and its supply?*
5. *Wherein was his judging Israel different from that of all the other judges?*
6. *How did he bring about his own ruin?*
7. *What last effort did he make for the good of his country?*
8. *Had he a right to make it?*

APPENDIX TO THE BOOK OF JUDGES.

PROPERLY speaking, there are two appendices to the history of the Book of Judges, one in chap. xvii. and xviii., the other in chap. xix.-xxi. Both refer to an early period, probably as early as the age of Othniel; for in xx. 28 we find that the high priest was Phinehas the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron; and in that second appendix, Dan appears as the northern extremity of Israel, xx. 1, while the origin of Dan is given in xviii. 29. Also in Samson's history we read of the camp of Dan, or Mahaneh-Dan, xiii. 25, a place named from an event narrated in xviii. 12. They are placed at the end of the book, so as not to interrupt the thread of the connected history; since they have not to do with any individual judge, but rather are meant to illustrate the moral and spiritual weakness of the Hebrew commonwealth without a king. For 'in those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes,' xvii. 6; see also xviii. 1, xix. 1, and especially xxi. 25. There is mention made of

 CHAP. XVII.—*Micah's Sin.*

Bethlehem-judah in both appendices, xvii. 9, xix. 1, 18 (the earliest mention of it in Scripture, unless it was once named in Josh. xv. between ver. 59 and ver. 60), not improbably with an allusion to this city as the native place of David and his royal line. The two narratives reveal to us the nature of the evils which were at work disastrously all through the age of the judges: partly spiritual evils in breaking off from the worship which Jehovah had instituted at Shiloh; partly moral evils in copying the abominations of the Canaanites, to both of which there were strong impulses from within the heart of fallen man.

 CHAPTERS XVII., XVIII.

FIRST APPENDIX.—MICAH'S IMAGE AND THE IDOLATRY OF THE DANITES.

CHAPTER XVII.—MICAH'S SIN.

Vers. 1-6. Its beginning. Secret tendencies to forsake the God of their fathers had been detected and denounced by Joshua, xxiv. 23; and see in this book, ii. 1-5, 11-13. This widow and her son exemplified the working of the evil leaven, though the narrative is too short to enable us to speak confidently of the steps in the process. It may be conjectured that they had been left in a state of comparative wealth, and that avarice and covetousness had eaten out the roots of true godliness from their hearts. The son had appropriated the money somehow and for some purpose: but appalled by his mother's adjurations, he restored it, when she substituted a blessing on him for the curse she had invoked, and announced the dedication of the money (whether as a resolution in the past, or as now taken for the first time, is not decided by her language) to the service of God. It is to be noted, however, that if she dedicated it, she kept nine out of the eleven hundred shekels for her own use; and that the two hundred which she gave up were for a religious purpose which was expressly forbidden in the law, Ex. xx. 23, Deut. xxvii. 15, however agreeable to the practices of corrupt religions. The graven and molten image formed one whole, which is therefore spoken of in the singular, not in the plural, according to the exact rendering, 'and it was,' at the end of ver. 4; the mutual relation of the two has been differently explained, but the graven

CHAP. XVIII.—*Micah's Sin punished by the Danites.*

image seems to have been the more important part, so that it alone is named at xviii. 20, 31. Micah set up 'a house of gods,' or rather 'a house of God,' a rival to the lawful sanctuary for Israel at Shiloh, within the territory of Ephraim, to which tribe apparently he belonged: but his spiritual blindness was such that he did not reckon himself a deserter from the worship of Jehovah, see ver. 13. The language might bear the interpretation that he had this private temple already before his mother gave him the image. At all events, along with it he had a fully-equipped service, modelled in general after the pattern at the lawful sanctuary, yet with idolatrous peculiarities to suit his own taste and that of others as degenerate as himself, see ver. 6: he had an ephod, the sacred dress worn by the officiating priest, especially when consulting God, as seen in ch. xviii., 1 Sam. xxiii. 2-9, and teraphim, those mysterious little figures, brought by Rachel into Jacob's household, kept up by Michal, David's wife, and appearing even after the return from Babylon, Zech. x. 2, household gods whose worship was somehow tolerated by people who ought to have known the folly and sinfulness of such superstition, but which were also connected with heathen consultation and divining, Ezek. xxi. 21.

—Vers. 7-13. **His sin in its full development and success.** The one thing which Micah felt to be a defect in his arrangements was that there was no rightful priest to countenance his unlawful worship; he had merely one of his own sons to fill this office, against the express words of the law, Num. xviii. 7. This defect he now saw his way to remove, when a vagabond Levite came in his way, one who had broken loose from his regular place and his appointed work, and who was ready for any occupation that offered itself. Tempted by the proposal to become the priest of this little temple, and to become 'a father' to Micah's household, he accepted the terms: and albeit the remuneration was paltry, he was kindly treated, like one of Micah's own sons. And Micah held this to be an evidence that his conduct had the approval of Jehovah; although an ordinary Levite had no right to act as a priest, yet he had unquestionably succeeded so far in securing a Levitical minister.

CHAPTER XVIII.—HIS SIN PUNISHED BY THE DANITES,
WHO MADE IT THEIR OWN.

Vers. 1-6. Mission from the tribe of Dan. Dan alone of the tribes of Israel was split up into two portions, in order to find sufficient

 CHAP. XVIII.—*Micah's Sin punished by the Danites.*

territory in a way to which the double portion of Manasseh is not analogous: and it can scarcely be thought that their conduct was in accordance with the revealed will of God. Rather their want of faith made them suffer at the hands of their heathen neighbours, i. 34, and led to the expedition of which we read here, as a scheme for relief. Zorah and Eshtaol, vers. 2, 8, 11, were afterwards famous as the haunts of Samson's childhood, xiii. 25, near that 'camp of Dan,' which is at ver. 12 mentioned in the Hebrew form of the name Mahaneh Dan, behind Kirjath-jearim (Josh. ix. 17), so named on account of this expedition. The five spies sent out by the tribe of Dan (after the example of the twelve tribes in Num. xiii.) recognised the voice of the vagabond Levite; and learning his priestly pretensions to divination, asked to know their fortune, and received a sufficiently indefinite reply. Observe, however, that they asked counsel of God, ver. 5, using the general name for Deity; whereas the priest ventured to reply in the name of Jehovah.—**Vers. 7-10. The report of the spies.** They penetrated to the northern extremity of Canaan: for the geography, see at vers. 27, 28. They examined the country minutely, and found it most desirable: at the same time the people would be easily conquered, for they lived in fancied security, and (as the obscure clause in the middle of ver. 7 probably intimates) there was no one in possession of supreme power and holding it with an armed force such as could put the invaders or other ill-doers to shame or do them any injury. So they returned and urged that an expedition should be despatched immediately.—**Vers. 11-26. Micah robbed of his god.** The expedition was planned, and it started: compare the account of one by the Simeonites in Hezekiah's time, 1 Chron. iv. 39-43: everything being done in an orderly manner, and with official authority, 'the family of the Danites,' ver. 11, claiming to act as 'a tribe,' ver. 19. The history is plainly and vividly recorded: the appeal by the five spies to the superstitious religiousness of their companions, the preoccupation of the Levite's attention by the six hundred, while the five men went into the house (namely, the little temple) and took the objects of worship; the appeal to the priest's ambition and covetousness, his ready compliance, however ungrateful this might be to Micah, and the unavailing grief and efforts of that poor man when he found that his gods (or his god, either rendering being quite admissible) were carried off by a lawless band of men too strong for him to resist.—**Vers. 27-31. The conquest of Laish, henceforth named**

Dan, and the establishment of idolatry there. The expedition proceeded successfully, and terminated as the spies foretold that it would. By universal consent, Laish, henceforth called Dan, is the ruin Tell-el-Kâdy, to the north of the swamp above the Bahr-el-Hûleh, or waters of Merom (Josh. xi. 5); Kâdy in Arabic, and Dan in Hebrew, meaning 'a judge.' Here was the more westerly of the two sources of the Jordan (as commonly reckoned and not counting the really longest of them), the other being some three miles farther east, at Baniâs, called in Matt. xvi. 13, Cæsarea Philippi. Beth-rehob, or Rehob, is unknown: see at Josh. xix. 28, 30. In the short account of this transaction at Josh. xix. 47, the original name is said to have been Leshem. The alteration to Dan, after the name of their ancestor, was in agreement with a common practice, of which Moses records examples in the conquest of the land east of Jordan, Num. xxxii. 38, 41, 42. It may well be questioned whether this expedition had the favour of the true God upon either its plan or its execution: it was an expedition from mere worldly motives, which resulted in breaking up the unity of the tribe of Dan, perhaps at the expense of the tribe of Naphtali in respect of territory; and it was consummated in idolatrous pollution of the people, so that what had begun lawlessly with the family of Micah now established itself in one of the tribes, and was so perpetuated as to encourage Jeroboam, 'who made Israel to sin' in the execution of his revolutionary projects, 1 Kings xii. 29, 30. This inseparable bad association with Dan may have led to the exclusion of the tribe from the lists of families in the Old Testament Church, as recorded in 1 Chron., and from the symbolic lists in the New Testament Church, Rev. vii. 4-8. A special element in their guilt, though at the time it might be regarded as a special blessing upon their course of procedure, was the fact that this worship, in rivalry of that in Shiloh under the priests of the house of Aaron, was under a priest who was son of Gershom the son of Moses (Ex. ii. 22; 1 Chron. xxiii. 14, 15), according to an ancient reading now very generally adopted, which seems to lie concealed under the disguised Jewish reading Manasseh, ver. 30, according to the testimony of eminent Jewish authorities themselves. The length of time that this worship continued is supposed by many recent writers to have been till the Assyrian captivity, 2 Kings xv. 29 or xvii. 6. But it is incredible that this public idolatry by a tribe subsisted during the administration of Samuel and under Kings

 CHAP. XVIII.—*Micah's Sin punished by the Danites.*

David and Solomon ; see for instance 1 Chron. xiii. 5 ; 1 Kings viii. 65 : nor would Jeroboam have set up priests from any class whom he could get at Dan, if he had found priests of the line of Moses actually executing their office according to a custom rooted for centuries in the affections of the people of the district. The mutual relation of the two last verses has been a little differently understood by different writers : but there is hardly room for doubt that they refer to the same period and the same point of time, and that the end of this false worship was when a spirit of deep repentance was poured out on the whole nation under Samuel's guidance, after the terrible catastrophe which put an end to the worship of God's house at Shiloh, 1 Sam. v. 1 and vii. 2. Moved by these strong considerations, some writers have boldly conjectured to read the end of ver. 30, 'until the day of the exile of the ark,' instead of 'the exile of the land.' But this is dangerous procedure, and it is unnecessary. 'The land' was the special form under which the promises were made to the fathers : and 'the exile of the land,' a strange expression which occurs nowhere else, could suggest to a godly Israelite nothing else than that the presence of Jehovah was gone, without which the physically unaltered soil was a foreign place : it had lost that which made Canaan 'the glory of all lands,' Ezek. xx. 6, Ps. lxxxv. 9, when 'the glory was gone into exile from Israel, for the ark of God was taken,' 1 Sam. iv. 22.

1. *To what period in the history of the Judges do the two appendices seem to belong ?*
 2. *Why should these histories have been thrown into the form of an appendix ?*
 3. *How was Micah's house of God set up and equipped ?*
 4. *How did he come to think that his arrangements were made complete ?*
 5. *What connection had the Danites with Micah's priest ?*
 6. *For whom did the priest choose to exercise his ministry ?*
 7. *What success attended the Danite expedition ?*
 8. *What leads us to doubt if it had the approval of God ?*
 9. *How long did the priesthood at Dan continue ?*
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CHAPTERS XIX.—XXI.

SECOND APPENDIX.—THE ABOMINABLE CRIME AT GIBEAH, THE
RUIN OF THE TRIBE OF BENJAMIN, AND THE MEANS TAKEN
FOR ITS RECOVERY.

CHAPTER XIX.—THE CRIME ITSELF.

Vers. 1-3. The persons. This new instance of ill-regulated life in Israel again concerned a Levite, who, like Micah's Levite, had a connection with Bethlehem-judah, yet only by marriage. The woman was a concubine, or secondary wife; so that this professed servant of God gave an example to the people of taking that indulgence which was in some sense tolerated under the law of Moses, but which never could be otherwise than opposed to the original law of marriage, and injurious to the character and happiness of all who practised it. Whatever led him to take this woman, her conduct brought disgrace upon herself, and to some extent on him. Yet he went in search of her, and made overtures of reconciliation to her, apparently without any evidence of repentance on her part: and these overtures were gladly accepted by her and her father.—**Vers. 4-14. The journey homeward.** The hospitality of the father was extraordinary, and apparently not wise or well timed, leading the reader to suppose that he was eager in any way to secure the goodwill of his son-in-law, though the approach to him seems to have been exclusively through lavish and protracted entertainments: and in the end the departure was strikingly precipitate, in contrast with the delays by which it had been hindered unduly. But starting late on an afternoon, they got no farther than Jerusalem, then chiefly known by its other name, Jebus or Jebusi, as the chief city of the alien Jebusites, see i. 21. And his true Israelite feelings, such as a Levite might be expected to cherish, shrank from needless mingling with these doomed heathen, so that he pushed forward, perhaps as far again, endeavouring to reach the Benjamite city Ramah, or at least Gibeah, as to which see Josh. xviii. 25, 28. The going down of the sun, and the short twilight in that latitude, compelled him to stop short at Gibeah, the nearer of the two.—**Vers. 15-21. The hospitality enjoyed in Gibeah.** The 'street' of the city might perhaps be more exactly rendered 'the wide place,' the market-place and

centre of the little town, where every one might see the travellers, and where some person might be expected to take notice of them and exercise hospitality towards them: though no one actually did this but an old man, himself a stranger from Mount Ephraim. To him the Levite explained that he was not in absolute need, however agreeable such kindness might be, and however natural such respect and attention might be to one whose official-occupation was to walk with, or be conversant about, the house of Jehovah (if this be the true rendering of the words in ver. 18, as very probably it is), and so to be the companion of Jehovah Himself who walked in that tent and tabernacle, 2 Sam. vii. 6. But the old man pressed him to come to his house, and would take no denial, perhaps because he knew the vile character of the people, so soon to manifest itself. Already the language reminds us of Gen. xix.; as the narrative proceeds, this is more and more the case.—**Vers. 22-30. The outrageous crime, and the action taken by the Levite.** The language of Gen. xix. is copied, because the conduct of the men of Gibeah is so like that of the men of Sodom: the moral degradation of Israel was thus to be brought out vividly, so that Gibeah of Benjamin was unspeakably worse than the Levite had cause to fear the Jebusite city would have been. Only, in Sodom the whole population took part in the outrage, and appear to have been alike depraved: all that could as yet be said against the men of Gibeah was, that they did not restrain the guilty persons among them who are called 'sons of Belial,' ver. 22, that is, 'sons of worthlessness,' though in later usage Belial became a name for the wicked one. It was unnecessary to vary the rendering at the end of ver. 24 from that in ver. 23, for in the original it is both times 'folly:' this word is applied to such vile conduct, not only here, xx. 6, 10, but so early as Gen. xxxiv. 7, Deut. xxii. 21, and elsewhere. It is impossible to say whether these sons of Belial were drunk so as not to know what they were doing, or whimsical in their wicked moods so as not to care; anyhow, the beginning and the middle of ver. 25 represent them as inconsistent in their behaviour, unless they were bent upon some diabolical inversion of the laws of hospitality, and would perpetrate their outrage only upon strangers. It is obviously implied in ver. 28 that the poor sufferer (innocent in respect of these people, whatever she had been before, ver. 2) lost her life through their brutal conduct; and in xx. 4, 5, it is directly stated that she was murdered. The

CHAP. XX.—*The Crime avenged.*

husband's horrible act of cutting her body in pieces, ver. 29, is detailed in language used to describe the cutting of the sacrifices into pieces: and he may have had this in his mind when he sent these mutilated remains throughout all the borders of Israel, to force the people to consider the atrocity of which the men of Gibeah had been guilty. There is no serious error in the English Version of ver. 30: yet the Hebrew naturally expresses not the result here stated as a fact, but the purpose of producing this result, 'and it shall be that all who see it shall say,' etc.

CHAPTER XX.—THE CRIME AVENGED.

Vers. 1, 2. The gathering of the tribes. The verb used in ver. 1 implies not a miscellaneous gathering, but, as became the regularly constituted 'assembly of the people of God,' an orderly assembly regularly convened, possibly by Phinehas the high priest, ver. 28, and the elders that outlived Joshua, ii. 7, the chief of the people, according to the picturesque Hebrew expression, 'the corners of all the people,' as 1 Sam. xiv. 38; Isa. xix. 13; Zech. x. 4. The phrase 'from Dan to Beersheba,' that is, from north to south, occurs here for the first time, indicating that Laish had by this time been taken by the Danites, xviii. 29. The express mention of the land of Gilead, as well as the solitary exception (afterwards discovered) of Jabesh Gilead, xxi. 9, prove that the whole tribes were represented. In the days of the Exodus the men of war were about 600,000 (Num. i., xxvi.), here they appear at 400,000, to which must be added the 26,700 of Benjamin, ver. 15. The falling off may be attributable to natural causes, to the difference between being all together in the camp under Moses, and having to come from every part of Canaan. This Mizpeh, more correctly Mizpah, at which they met (see reasons given at chap. xi. 11 for taking that place also to be Mizpah in Benjamin, or Mizpeh, Josh. xviii. 26), is usually identified with Neby Samwîl, four and a half miles north-west of Jerusalem. Its name, 'the watch-tower,' justified by its high position, about 2935 feet above the sea, and commanding an unrivalled view of the surrounding country, made it eminently suitable as the meeting-place of the tribes within the territory of Benjamin, three miles west of Gibeah, if this be Tuleil (or Tell) el Fâl. Besides, apart from the immediate chance of war, it stood on neutral ground between the two great tribes of Ephraim and Judah, within little Benjamin, and near the

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tribe of Dan : it had therefore great advantages for being a central meeting-place. It is a mere fancy, however, that a rival service to that of Shiloh had been established here : the people are said to have been assembled 'unto the LORD in Mizpah ;' but that was because they came as 'the assembly of the people of God,' ver. 2, entitled to expect His presence in the midst of them when they met in solemn convocation to execute His will.—**Vers. 3–11. The investigation and resolution.** The Benjamites seem not to have presented themselves among their brethren : but they had notice of the meeting, whatever were their motives for staying away. The Levite was questioned and gave his account of the criminal proceedings, quite as in chap. xix., unless we think that he inferred too much when he alleged an intention of killing him, ver. 5. The words 'lewdness and folly' are technical words in the law of Moses : 'folly' has been noticed already, xix. 23 ; and 'lewdness' is properly some horrible contrivance, feebly translated 'wickedness' at Lev. xviii. 17, xix. 29, xx. 14. The people were impelled by one common feeling, and would not return home till they had executed vengeance on the evil-doers : and if the absence of Benjamin indicated a disposition in the tribe to screen those individuals, all means must be adopted for carrying on the holy war with decision, whether determining by lot who were to go on active service, ver. 9, or whether setting apart a large proportion, one-tenth, for the commissariat, ver. 10. In this verse and ver. 33 the town is named Geba, which is in Hebrew the masculine, as Gibeah is the feminine form of the word which means 'a hill :' some have thought of the Geba mentioned elsewhere, Josh. xviii. 24, now Jeb'a, nearly two miles east of Ramah (er Râm), or of el Jib, fully a mile north of Neby Samwîl.—**Vers. 12, 13. The proposal to Benjamin and its rejection.** Very rarely is 'tribe' used otherwise than for one of the twelve tribes : but here the 'tribes' of Benjamin are spoken of, as in 1 Sam. ix. 21, though the English Version does not show it. To them the message is sent to give up the guilty persons in Gibeah, that by putting them to death they might put away evil from Israel, according to the rule laid down for such cases in Deut. xvii. 12 : 'putting away the evil' is, however, an inadequate translation, for the verb implies extermination, as when diseased flesh is burned out. This sending to ask the Benjamites about the evil done among them, before going to war with them, was in strict accordance with the precedent in Josh. xxii. 13, when Phinehas, now the high priest, was one of the deputies :

but the result was very different, for Benjamin refused to give up the guilty persons.—**Vers. 14–16. The preparation for war on the part of Benjamin.** They seem to have been desperate in their presumption, or perhaps they thought that union and boldness would make the tribes hesitate to execute their purpose. The left-handed men of Benjamin remind us of Ehud, iii. 15; and 1 Chron. xii. 2 mentions Benjamites skilled in using both hands for war.—**Vers. 17–23. The first attack and its results.** There was no help for it now, and the civil war began. The only question was, who should take the first place; and when they asked of God, Jehovah (with an emphasis on this word perhaps showing that the questioners had a defective conception of Him with whom they had to do) gave the post of honour and danger to Judah, as at i. 1, 2. The English Version of ver. 18 can scarcely be correct when it says they went up to ‘the house of God,’ and again at ver. 26; for some particular place is meant, ver. 27, where the ark of God then was: the word ought to have been left untranslated, Bethel (see Gen. xxviii. 17, 19), and so at xxi. 2, since we find an altar had to be erected there, ver. 4. Bethel, now Beitin, Josh. xviii. 22, might be six or seven miles from Gibeah, and fully seven north-north-east of Mizpah. We are not informed why the ark was there then. It might be to keep up the national unity, and to win Benjamin back, by reviving sentiments connected with the memory of the patriarchs at that place, which lay within the tribe of Benjamin; or, to have the ark beside the army in time of war, as was repeatedly the practice, 1 Sam. iv. 3, xiv. 18, 2 Sam. xi. 11—passages from which we may infer that this was usual; in addition to this, it has been conjectured that the ark had been there in an important military enterprise by Benjamin which resulted in the taking of Bethel, i. 22–26, and that it might not yet have been taken home again. The united tribes reckoned themselves sure of victory, and must therefore have been proportionally much depressed by their serious defeat: and they returned to the presence of Jehovah, weeping and asking direction from him. This time they put the question, which before they seem to have thought unnecessary, whether they should go up at all against their brother; and in the use of this tender name there is some evidence that affliction had softened their hearts.—**Vers. 24–29. The second attack and its results.** With an express command to renew the struggle, the united tribes must have been the more confounded and depressed by their second defeat: on those two days they had

lost 40,000 men, a tenth part of their whole number, while the Benjamite loss must have been trifling, since out of 26,700, ver. 15, we read of 25,000 or 25,100 falling and 600 escaping in the third engagement, vers. 44-47 and 35. No wonder that in these circumstances they returned to Bethel, and at the ark (see note on ver. 18) poured out their grief and their confession of sin before Jehovah, as Joshua had done after the repulse at Ai, Josh. vii. 6, when Phinehas might be present as he was here. Weeping and sacrificing are spoken of together at ii. 4, 5, and again in this history at xxi. 2-4; the sacrifices consisting of the two great kinds, burnt-offerings and peace-offerings. And here for the first time in Israelite history there is mention made of fasting, which often comes up afterwards, 1 Sam. vii. 6, etc., although the practice may have already existed, and certainly became linked on to the affliction of their souls on the day of atonement, Lev. xxiii. 27, 29, which at length came to be called the 'fast,' Acts xxvii. 9. All this marks as much advance upon their religious attainments recorded at ver. 23 as that does upon the record at ver. 18: and the expression, 'all the children of Israel and all the people went up and came to Bethel,' may imply a singularly full gathering of the nation, not only of the men of war, but also of multitudes besides, the aged and the young and the women, comp. Josh. viii. 35. It often happens that the church is dealt with thus: judgment begins at the house of God, which is severely chastened for what the world might consider little things, that it may be a fit instrument in the Lord's hand for some work of righteousness. There is no reason to doubt that the war against Benjamin was just and necessary: yet before carrying it on successfully, Israel must be chastened for sins of their own, for instance their connivance at the image-worship of the Danites, and must learn in what a spirit of meekness and self-renunciation they had to discharge their terrible duty.—**Vers. 30-34. The vain confidence of the Benjamites.** It is scarcely needful to say that 'the third day,' ver. 30, did not follow immediately on 'the second day,' ver. 24, nor that immediately upon 'the first day,' ver. 22: on the contrary, the humiliation before God and the arrangements for a stratagem certainly occupied some time. Now, as ver. 26 reminds us of Joshua's humbling himself before Jehovah, Josh. vii. 6, so does the narrative of the ambush and its success remind us of Joshua's subsequent success against Ai as recorded in Josh. viii.; and there is even the same appearance of repetition or gathering up the narrative

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shortly. That was a recorded instance of deserved defeat being changed into a victory, an instructive event in which some of the present warriors had probably taken part. The object of the Israelites was to draw out the Benjamites from Gibeah along two roads, one towards Bethel (mistranslated 'the house of God,' ver. 31) and one towards Gibeah in the field, perhaps an outlying dependency of the city of the hill, as its name indicated: in this attempt they were quite successful. *Baal-Tamar*, ver. 33, is unknown: and 'the meadows' of Gibeah, or Geba, are by some authorities read 'the cave of Geba,' while a Jewish tradition points to the meaning that Gibeah had been left bare or exposed by the confident pursuit undertaken by the Benjamites, who had no notion of danger till the evil was near them, ver. 34, or, in the vivid language of the original, till the evil was touching them, as again at ver. 41.—**Vers. 35-48. The ruin of the Benjamites.** The resemblance to the narrative in Josh. viii. becomes more and more striking. In ver. 37, 'drew themselves along' is the most probable rendering of a term already occurring at iv. 6 in the description of a military movement. In ver. 40 two different words have been rendered 'flame' on insufficient grounds: the marginal rendering of the second is to be preferred, and the first is rather 'cloud,' or 'beacon,' than 'flame,' being literally a 'lifting up.' In the latter part of ver. 42 the construction is doubtful, so that the meaning may either be that the Benjamites came out from their cities in full force, only to perish; or, that they fled beyond the limits of their own territory, and met with death at whatever city of Israel they approached. Their total loss in this final struggle is given at ver. 35, or the particulars of it in vers. 44-46; as to the numbers, see on vers. 24-29. Gidom, in ver. 45, is unknown; but the name of the rock, Rimmon, appears little changed in Rummôn, a suitable place of refuge, three and a half miles east from Bethel.¹ Again the translation is difficult at the middle of ver. 48: instead of 'the men of every city,' which is certainly a paraphrase, some critics change the traditional vowels, and render 'the city of men,' as the exact translation is in Deut. ii. 34, iii. 6; others render 'every city utterly, even to the cattle,' etc.

¹ But if Gibeah be Jeb'a, there is the more to say for a recent conjecture that the place of refuge was a cave, large, well concealed, and difficult of access, in the rocks of the upper part of the Wady Suweinît, between Jeb'a and Muckmâs (the ancient Michmash).

CHAPTER XXI.—THE CONTRIVANCES FOR THE RESTORATION OF BENJAMIN.

Vers. 1-4. The deep distress on account of Benjamin. The people felt that though the war was right, the spirit in which it had been waged, and the extremity to which it had been carried, were wholly indefensible; and light may have been thrown back on their own two defeats in the beginning, as a necessary discipline. The humiliation and seeking after God appears more marked than on either of the earlier occasions, xx. 23, 26. A temporary suspension of the rights of hospitality and intermarriage might have been justifiable; but what could be said for treating a brother tribe as if they had been doomed Canaanites? A newly-built altar must witness their repentance toward God and man.—**Vers. 5-12. Wives provided from another rebellious population.** If wives were to be obtained anywhere for Benjamin, it must be among those who had not taken the oath to abstain from giving them: and as all the assembly (the word is the same as in ver. 8, and ought not to have been altered to 'congregation,' which represents a different word in vers. 10 and 16) had taken this oath, such persons could be found only among absentees; who had brought themselves under the curse of the great oath (not 'a great oath,' ver. 5, but the oath devoting to destruction, ver. 11) by neglecting the call to come to the help of Jehovah, and to the work of His people, chap. v. 23, viii. 14, 17; 1 Sam. xi. 7; Ezra x. 8. The only defaulters were the citizens of Jabesh Gilead, a town chiefly known to us by this history, and again by its deliverance in the reign of Saul, and its consequent attachment to him, 1 Sam. xi., xxxi. 11-13: its site has not been determined, except that it lay six Roman miles to the east of Pella, and it is supposed to be represented by the ruin Deir, on the southern brow of Wady Yâbîs, in the direction towards Gerasa. The sentence went forth to devote it to accursed destruction, the virgins alone being spared; and the execution of it was committed to a body of 12,000 picked men: we should have said 1000 from each tribe had not Benjamin been wanting: in both these particulars the narrative resembles that of the destruction of the Midianites in Num. xxxi. 3-7, 17, 18, on occasion of an expedition in which Phinehas, who was now high priest, took part. These troops returned with their captives, not, however, to Mizpah or to Bethel, but to Shiloh, to which the ark

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must now have come home after the conclusion of the war. The expression in ver. 12, 'Shiloh which is in the land of Canaan,' already occurs in Josh. xxii. 9.—**Vers. 13–15. The reconciliation.** The ambassadors of peace were no doubt received willingly by the remnant of the tribe of Benjamin,—all the more so that these wives, for two-thirds of the surviving warriors, were a pledge of earnestness and affection. The feelings of the other tribes towards Benjamin were now those of real repentance, though they held to the belief that the breach had been the doing of Jehovah, just as in 2 Sam. v. 20, vi. 8.—**Vers. 16–18. The case of the brother dying childless.** The difficulty remained apparently insurmountable, Whence are the other two hundred to be provided with wives? The last clause of ver. 17 is founded on Deut. xxv. 6: from which circumstance it is plain that the case of this handful of men who had escaped the sword, but who would soon die out from the effects of the oath which forbade intermarriage, and so would leave one of the twelve tribes extinct, seemed parallel to the case of the man who died childless. To prevent the extinction of his family, a special provision had the Divine sanction, though it was inconsistent with the ordinary law of marriage: much more, certainly, it must be according to the will of God that extraordinary means should be employed if necessary to preserve seed to the tribe of Benjamin.—**Vers. 19–25. The contrivance for supplying the wives still needed, and the happy issue.** The tribes had now returned to Shiloh, ver. 12, and they naturally thought of some scheme, in which there would be no individual responsibility, such as might be carried out at one of the three great feasts when all Israel assembled before Jehovah in Shiloh. Such a yearly visit is noticed also in the history of Samuel, 1 Sam. i. 3, 21, ii. 19, where 'the yearly sacrifice' is probably the Passover, in many respects the most outstanding of the three feasts, and the one which took Joseph and Mary every year to Jerusalem, Luke ii. 41: it may have been so here also, comp. Ex. xxiii. 18 and xxxiv. 25. Lebonah, never mentioned except at ver. 19, is identified with a village, Lubban, having an appearance of antiquity, situated on the mountain slope of a Wady of the same name, three miles west or north-west of Shiloh: as might be expected from the description here, on some of the hillsides thereabouts this gathering before Jehovah took place, at which 'the daughters of Shiloh' came out to dance, perhaps as those did whom Miriam the prophetess led, Ex. xv. 20.

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There is difficulty in giving an exact translation of the explanatory and apologising statement which the elders of the congregation were to offer to the complaining relatives: it might be paraphrased, 'Kindly give these maidens, we do not say to those men, but to us; because we needed to provide a wife for each man, and we have not taken these wives by any worse violence than this snatching them away from their dances.' From ver. 24 it appears that the military discipline of the congregation was kept up till everything had been happily adjusted; and the other tribes went back to their several families and inheritances only when Benjamin did the same. Nevertheless, there was sore want felt of a central authority, such as that of a king.

1. *What brought the Levite and his wife to Gibeah?*
2. *What horrible wickedness is recalled to memory by the conduct of the men of Gibeah?*
3. *What did the Levite do with his murdered wife?*
4. *How did the children of Israel act in this emergency?*
5. *What was the conduct of the tribe of Benjamin?*
6. *What is noticeable in the position of the ark at this time?*
7. *What Divine directions did the Israelites ask and obtain?*
8. *What reverses did they suffer, and why?*
9. *Mention points of resemblance between this narrative and that of the taking of Ai by Joshua.*
10. *What were the feelings of the united tribes after the overthrow of Benjamin, and how did these manifest themselves?*
11. *How were wives found for the mass of the survivors?*
12. *What peculiar law seems to have been thought of as suggesting the right to use special means for helping Benjamin?*
13. *How were the rest of the Benjamites finally provided for?*

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