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Books of Joshua and Judges

(Josh 1:1—Judg 21:25)

For many, the books of Joshua (Hebrew: *Yehoshu'a*) and Judges (Hebrew: *Shofetim*) tell how miraculous military victories confirmed the Hebrews' faith in Yahweh. Nonetheless, archaeology cannot confirm that there were Hebrews in Syria-Palestine when the walls of Jericho came tumbling down. Furthermore, the genocides that took place during the Crusades, during the conquest of the Americas, and during World War II have made Jews, Christians, and Muslims painfully aware how easily any reading of the Bible that understands God to be authorizing the faithful to kill their enemies can be misused.

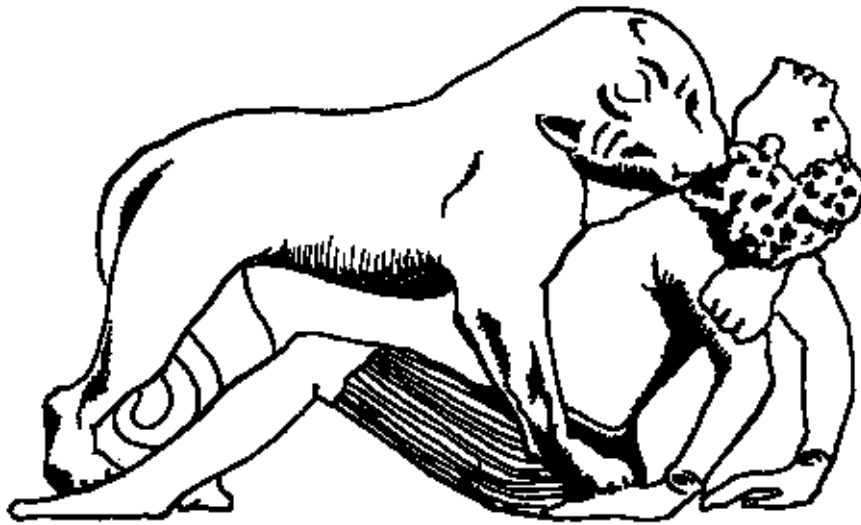
The events of Joshua and Judges are set in the Iron Age (1200–1000 B.C.E.) after the empires of Egypt, Hatti, and Mycenae collapsed. This political vacuum made it possible for smaller regional cultures like ancient Israel to begin their struggles for independence. The time when these events take place, however, is not the same as the time when these stories were told. The events took place between 1200 and 1000 B.C.E., but the versions of these stories in the Bible today developed after 721 B.C.E., when the Assyrians destroyed the Hebrew state of Israel and its capital city of Samaria. During this period, Josiah, a young ruler of the Hebrew state of Judah, which had miraculously survived the Assyrian invasion of Syria-Palestine, was crowned king of Judah at the age of eight, after his father's assassination. His reign lasted thirty-one years (640–609 B.C.E.). His name used the same three Hebrews letters as the name “Joshua,” and he considered himself to be Joshua reborn. Josiah was a warrior-king whose soldiers campaigned from Jerusalem and Jericho in the east into the former territories of Judah in the west. Consequently, the Bible portrays Joshua conquering the same land (2 Kgs 23:19; 2 Chr 34:6).

The Assyrian empire, which had previously dominated Syria-Palestine, was in decline, making the changes that characterized Josiah's reign possible. Josiah carried

out domestic reforms as well. Following the discovery of a scroll containing traditions preserved in the book of Deuteronomy, Josiah rededicated the royal temple as the state sanctuary. He began celebrating Passover as a state holiday, and decommissioned all the other regional sanctuaries of Yahweh throughout Judah. The traditions in the books of Joshua-Judges developed in this climate of nationalism, when any household that challenged Josiah's reforms was labeled a traitor, a "Canaanite," or a "prostitute" by Josiah's royal prophets. Josiah polarized Judah. Fatalism spread. There was little tolerance for diversity. Josiah's fervor led him to a martyr's death at Megiddo while trying to block Pharaoh Neco II (610–595 B.C.E.) from reinforcing the Assyrians who were retreating from the Babylonians (2 Kgs 22:1–23:30).

Judah's self-searching continued after the death of Josiah and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.E. Some of the people of Judah who were deported by the Babylonians began to reread the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and Samuel-Kings from a point of view that scholars today call the "Deuteronomist's History." This reading charged that it was not Yahweh who had failed to protect the land from its enemies, but the people of Yahweh who had failed to obey the Covenant between Yahweh and Israel. If the people had kept the covenant, the land would have remained in the hands of the Hebrews. If, from the days of Joshua onward, the Hebrews had put to death all those who did not worship Yahweh in Jerusalem, the land would have survived. Only when one people worshiped one God in one place would the land and children that Yahweh promised Abraham and Sarah be safe from their enemies. Until the time of Josiah, no such tradition of conformity had existed in ancient Israel. The Hebrews had worshiped Yahweh throughout the land at sanctuaries from Dan to Beersheba. Yet the exclusiveness of the Deuteronomist's History characterizes the books of Joshua and Judges today.

The traditions in the books of Joshua and Judges are companions to those in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers (Exod 1:7—Num 27:11) and in the book of Deuteronomy (Num 27:12—Deut 34:12). The setting where these traditions developed, however, may be more liturgical than military. These traditions may say more about worship than about war. They may not celebrate wars of liberation from Egypt and wars of the conquest of Syria-Palestine. They may be traditions that celebrate Yahweh as the divine patron of the Hebrews, whom the book of Exodus remembers for blessing the Hebrews with children, and whom the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Judges remember for blessing them with land.



Lion Slays a Man
(Nimrud 900–700 B.C.E.; ivory 10 x 10 cm)

Covenant between Yahweh and Israel

(Josh 1:1-18)

The book of Joshua opens with a covenant entitling the Hebrews in Gilead to cross the Jordan River and settle in the land west of the river (Josh 1:1-18). Gilead is the Bible belt of early Israel. Hard-liners like Elijah came from this heartland (1 Kgs 17:1). This covenant between Yahweh and Israel is parallel to a covenant between Yahweh and Abraham (Gen 11:27—12:8). The people that Yahweh creates in the books of Genesis and Exodus are endowed with land in the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Judges.

Joshua immediately executes his commission by granting land to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh (Josh 1:10-18). This simple transfer of title with which the book of Joshua opens is elaborately detailed in the land grants with which it closes (Josh 12:1—19:51). Ancestor stories and hero stories survey the land (Josh 2:1—12:24). Genealogies identify the tracts assigned to each household (Josh 13:1—21:45).

The Hebrews take possession of the land for which they had not labored, and villages that they had not built, and settle in them. They eat the fruits of their vineyards and olive groves that they did not plant (Josh 22:1—24:33). This land is not the prize of conquest; it is the gift of Yahweh.

The third-day motif in the covenant further emphasizes that the Hebrews' settlement in the land west of the river is the work of Yahweh, and not their work. The third day is

the day of Yahweh (Gen 40:13-20; 42:17-18; Exod 19:10-16; 2 Kgs 18:9-10). It is the day on which Yahweh draws life from death, cosmos from chaos, freedom from slavery.

Story of Rahab as Host

(Josh 2:1-24 + 6:22-25)

A Story of Rahab as Host begins when Joshua dispatches two warriors from Shittim on a reconnaissance mission. The destination of the warriors is not Jericho, but simply “the land” (Josh 2:24). They go directly to the house of a woman named Rahab. She greets these strangers with hospitality, in contrast to the ruler of the city, who will threaten them with violence. Almost immediately the ruler of the land sends soldiers to question Rahab about collaborating with Joshua’s warriors. The story ends when she rescues the two warriors with cleverness and courage.

The characters in the story play roles in a society shaped by the tributary economics of Egypt at the end of the Late Bronze period (1400–1200 B.C.E.). Egypt stationed governors and military detachments, like the soldiers who interrogate Rahab, in Syria-Palestine to represent its interests. These governors leased the land to rulers, like the monarch in the story, to harvest raw materials like flax and to produce manufactured goods like rope for Egypt. Surrounding trade centers, like the city in the story, were villages of farmers and herders, like the household of Rahab. Governors set quotas of goods and services for each village. Representatives of these villages, like Rahab, lived in cities to protect their goods in transit.

The political reforms of Pharaoh Akhenaten (1364–1347 B.C.E.) plunged Egypt into economic turmoil. Egypt recalled its governors and soldiers from Syria-Palestine. Those Egyptian officials who remained were powerless to harvest and process raw materials. Households began to abandon their villages and pioneer new ones in the hills above the Jordan River. Some, like Joshua and his warriors, became raiders who attacked caravans moving to and from trade centers. Officials filled diplomatic pouches to Akhenaten’s government at Amarna with urgent appeals for help. These letters describe conditions similar to those in the books of Joshua and Judges (Fig. 29).

References to flax and rope in the story may suggest that the household of Rahab made rope from flax for Egypt. Wild flax is a delicate plant with beautiful blue flowers and is native to Syria-Palestine. As early as 5000 B.C.E., farmers began domesticating the first of some two hundred species eventually used throughout the world of the Bible for linseed oil, fodder, cloth, and rope. The Gezer Almanac (see Fig. 2) assigns a month for harvesting flax. Farmers pulled the stalks when the seeds were ripe and dried them. Refiners pressed the seeds to extract linseed oil. The dregs became animal fodder. After

soaking the stalks to ret, or loosen, the outer fibers, they spread them on rooftops to dry. Weavers hackled, or combed, the fibers from the inner core and spun them into thread. The short, tangled fibers left over from the combing were tow (Judg 16:9), which made a coarse yarn. Flax and wool were the standard fibers used to weave clothing until the development of cotton.

“Rahab” is a nickname that praises Yahweh for enlarging a household (1 Chr 23:17; 24:21). Nevertheless, the opening episode introduces Rahab as a prostitute. Joshua’s warriors may have gone to her house to have sex, but the relationship between the warriors and the woman may be much more sophisticated. The story contrasts Rahab’s shameful title and honorable actions with the honorable title and shameful actions of Joshua. It uses a label like “prostitute” for Rahab in its crisis in order to refute it in the denouement. With the exception of this label of shame, the story treats Rahab with honor throughout. Even though Rahab subverts the male establishments of both Joshua and the ruler of the land, her behavior is neither prohibited nor scandalous, like the behavior of Ruth (Ruth 3:1-18), of Tamar (Gen 38:1-30), or of Bathsheba (1 Kgs 1:5-53). The story contains no demurs insisting that Rahab is not a suitable candidate for her mission. In the books of Samuel-Kings, Jesse apologizes: “here remains yet the youngest, but behold he is keeping the sheep” (1 Sam 16:11). In the book of Jeremiah, the prophet demurs: “Yahweh, our Creator, I do not know how to speak” (Jer 1:6). Not one character in this Story of Rahab, however, apologizes that she is only a prostitute.

Letter 244:1-30

Pharaoh, ruler of the heavens and earth

From: Biridiya, governor of Megiddo

I am your slave, and I renew my covenant with you as my pharaoh by bowing before you seven times seven times.

Pharaoh should know that, since he recalled his archers to Egypt, Labayu, the governor of Shechem, has not stopped raiding the land of Megiddo. The people of Megiddo cannot leave the city to shear your sheep for fear of Labayu’s soldiers.

Because you have not replaced the archers, Labayu is now strong enough to attack the city of Megiddo itself. If Pharaoh does not reinforce the city, Labayu will capture it.

The people of Megiddo are already suffering from hunger and disease. I beg Pharaoh to send 150 soldiers to protect Megiddo from Labayu or he will certainly capture the city.

Figure 29 Amarna Letters (Matthews and Benjamin 1997: 138)

Later biblical and rabbinical traditions also treat Rahab with honor. The books of Ezra-Nehemiah-Chronicles (1 Chr 2:10) honor Rahab as the mother of Boaz. Respect for Rahab continues in the earliest translations and commentaries. Early Jewish translations of the Bible into the Aramaic language, which are called “Targumim,” translate the Hebrew word for “prostitute” into Aramaic as “innkeeper.” Rabbis like Rashi argue that Rahab is a “grocer.” The Letter to the Hebrews honors her as a woman of faith (Heb. 11:31). The rabbis celebrate Rahab as one of the four most beautiful women in the world. The Talmud has Joshua marry Rahab, so that, ironically, he masters Syria-Palestine only to be mastered by Syria-Palestine’s most engaging woman. At least eight of their descendants were prophets of the stature of Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Huldah (*b. Meg.* 15a).

The time when the Story of Rahab as Host was told may offer one explanation for the contrast between her title and her actions. Like many of these traditions about Joshua, who lived at the end of the Late Bronze period, this story developed during the reign of Josiah. Josiah called all the people of Judah to the temple to renew the covenant (2 Kgs 23:21--23; 2 Chr 35:1-19); consequently, the book of Joshua portrays Joshua calling the Hebrews to the sanctuary at Shechem to renew their covenant with Yahweh (Josh 24:1-28). The household of Rahab considered the temple in Jerusalem as little more than a royal chapel, so may have continued to worship Yahweh at the Gilgal sanctuary of Jericho. Josiah and the household of David could go up to the temple to tell the stories of the great works that Yahweh did in Jerusalem, but the household of Rahab would go to Gilgal to tell the stories of the great works that Yahweh did at Jericho. Consequently, Josiah’s prophets labeled Rahab a prostitute, not because of the work she did in the Late Bronze period, but because of the political position that her household took in the Iron Age (2 Kgs 9:22; Isa 23:16-17; Nah 3:4). She is a prostitute because her household was in political exile in the days of Josiah. A similar use of the terms appears in a Trial of Samaria in the book of Micah (Mic 1:2-7), which does not indict Samaria for failing to prosecute women and men who engage in sexual intercourse for a living. The trial indicts the state for negotiating covenants for trade and military assistance that provided luxury for a few and poverty for many. Micah parodies the titles of the women, whose marriages ratified these state covenants, by labeling them “prostitutes,” and the goods and services that Samaria enjoyed from the covenants as “the wages of prostitutes.” Therefore, it was not the household of Joshua in early Israel that labeled Rahab a prostitute, but the household of Josiah during the final days of the monarchy in Judah.

In contrast to the other traditions in the book of Joshua, Rahab, and not Joshua and his warriors, is the protagonist in the story. Even more unusual, in contrast to Rahab who is wise, the story casts Joshua and his warriors as fools. The tradition celebrates Rahab as more faithful to Yahweh than Joshua and his warriors, and as a better warrior. She also outwits the ruler of the land and his soldiers.

Joshua has seen all the powerful events that Yahweh has brought about at the Red Sea and east of the Jordan Valley. Rahab has only heard about these great works. Yet Joshua is doubting, while Rahab is believing. Joshua sees, and does not believe. Rahab only hears, but believes. When Yahweh commissions Joshua to take the land, the appropriate response is for him to go and take the land. Instead Joshua sends out a reconnaissance mission. Today military science requires reconnaissance, but *herem* war in the world of the Bible forbids it. Reconnaissance missions determine the strength of the enemy, which in *herem* war is irrelevant. Warriors are expected to go into *herem* war at a disadvantage in order to highlight the victory as divine rather than human. To prepare for *herem* war, a chief like Joshua may use prophets (1 Kgs 22:5), divination (2 Kgs 13:15), necromancy (1 Sam 28:6), and the ephod with its urim and thummim (1 Sam 30:7-8; 1 Sam 28:6), but not reconnaissance. Reconnaissance characterizes warriors as petty (Num 13:1—14:15), cowardly (Deut 1:19-46), greedy (Judg 1:22-26), and heretical (Judg 18:1-31). Going into battle against a superior opponent is an act of faith that highlights the victory as Yahweh's, not Israel's. Jerubbaal (Gideon) twice reduces the size of the tribe mustered to defend Israel against the Midianites (Judg 7:1-8:28). Likewise, Deuteronomy (Deut 13:13-19) assumes that the size of a city convicted of treason is of no consequence to the punitive expedition ordered against it.

Rahab has all of the military skills that Joshua lacks. Joshua personally selects the messengers to gather intelligence for him, yet they are so incompetent that the soldiers of the land detect them immediately. Rahab is a master of combat tactics. She is an expert in designing safe houses. She knows how to use camouflage and to distribute misinformation. She knows all the commando tactics necessary to scale down the walls of a city, and just how to avoid the soldiers who patrol the border along the Jordan River.

Rahab is also more faithful to Yahweh than Joshua is. She has no doubts that Yahweh will conquer the land. Therefore, she asks his warriors to spare her household when Yahweh sweeps through the city as Yahweh swept through Egypt slaying their firstborn (Exod 12:23). Like the Hebrews who celebrated their first Passover from slavery in Egypt by marking their doors with lamb's blood, Rahab celebrates the Passover of her household by marking her window with a blood-red rope (Josh 2:18; 6:25). Finally, Rahab is more powerful than the ruler of the land, who considers her both ambitious and capable of overthrowing him. He had her under surveillance. His soldiers also respect Rahab, and obey her orders to search for the messengers outside the walls.

The crisis episode (Josh 2:1) condenses the actions that appear in most hospitality stories (Gen 18:1-15; 19:1-22; Judg 19:1-30; 2 Sam 17:15-22). The commission that Joshua gives to the messengers now almost completely eclipses Rahab's actions. Since Joshua is not the protagonist, it would be better to read the commission simply as a clause that modifies the strangers to whom Rahab offers hospitality: "two warriors, whom Joshua ben Nun dispatched from a sacred grove of eucalyptus trees with

the orders: 'Go and scout the land,' approached the gates of the land at sundown disguised as messengers. Rahab the prostitute saw them coming, and went to meet them. She bowed to the ground and said, 'Please, gentlemen, come to my house. Wash your feet and spend the night. Then you may rise early and go on your way' (Josh 2:1).

The climax (Josh 2:2-7) reports the shrewdness with which Rahab defends the warriors. The Bible regularly celebrates the shrewdness with which Israel's ancestors outwit foreign rulers. Abraham shrewdly outwits Pharaoh (Gen 12:9—13:1) and the ruler of Gerar (Gen 20:1-18). Isaac outwits a Philistine ruler (Gen 26:1-11). This story casts Rahab as being as shrewd as Abraham or Isaac.

There are two episodes in the denouement (Josh 2:8-24). One recounts the Covenant between Yahweh and Rahab (Josh 2:8-14), the other her celebration of Passover (Josh 2:15-24). The first episode reports Rahab's profession of faith (Deut 25:5-9). She ratifies two basic articles of Israel's creed: it is Yahweh who gives Israel land (Josh 2:8-9) and it is Yahweh who sets Israel free (Josh 2:10). Her vocabulary is almost all taken from Deuteronomy, which was the basis of Josiah's reform (Deut 6:21-23; 26:5-10). She also promises to help Joshua capture the land (Josh 2:12-13). Joshua's warriors react by granting Rahab and her household amnesty (Josh 2:14).

In the second episode of the denouement Rahab exercises her obligations as a covenant partner of Yahweh by helping Joshua's warriors escape (Josh 2:15-16). They reaffirm their promise of amnesty for her household (Josh 2:17-24). This episode uses prolepsis, which arranges events according to importance, not chronology. Rahab lets the warriors down by a rope (Josh 2:15) before negotiating a covenant with them (Josh 2:16-18). Chronologically, she would have negotiated with Joshua's warriors before lowering them over the city wall.

The point of the story is to remind its audience that Rahab is not a renegade; she is the mother of a household. The household of Rahab snapped up Josiah's label of "prostitute" and used this story to refute it (2 Kgs 23:7). How can an ancestor like Sarah (Gen 12:9—13:1), Tamar (Gen 38:1-30), Shiphrah and Puah (Exod 1:12-21), the daughter of Levi (Exod 2:1-10), and Miriam (Exod 15:20-21) be a prostitute? How can a chief like Deborah (Judg 4:1—5:31), who delivers her household from its enemies, be a prostitute?

The story warns the household of Josiah to remember that the hospitality that earned the household of Rahab honor in early Israel should not be taken away by someone whose own ancestors were its beneficiaries. The household of Rahab retains the label in introducing its ancestor Rahab, to question how a household that did not betray Joshua could betray Josiah. Without the hospitality, the military skill, and the unconditional faith of Rahab, the warriors of Joshua would have died in the gates of the land. The household of Rahab, in fact, is not a prostitute, but a covenant partner. Her household is hospitable, not hostile, to both Joshua and Josiah. To protect the warriors of Joshua, Rahab defies the orders of the ruler of the land, tricks his soldiers, and then uses one of her household's own flax ropes to help the warriors escape.

The Story of Rahab as Host was told to defend her household against a new Joshua, named “Josiah,” who tried to excommunicate it for continuing to worship Yahweh outside Jerusalem. The cruel irony that the household of Rahab had welcomed as strangers those whose descendants were trying to exterminate it may have led the household to question the value of hospitality as a means of survival. The story reminded the household that the same Yahweh who delivered it once from Joshua, will would deliver it again from Josiah. By contrasting Rahab’s gracious hospitality, outstanding military skill, and profound faith in Yahweh with Joshua’s questioning faith and bungling strategy, the storytellers certified that her household should not be exterminated, but continue to enjoy all the rights and privileges of a covenant partner in early Israel.

The Story of Rahab as Host introduces the books of Joshua and Judges to emphasize that the Hebrews conquer the land by accepting hospitality from Rahab. She hears what Yahweh has done for the Hebrews, and negotiates a covenant of her own with Yahweh for land and children. The Hebrews join the inhabitants of the land in overthrowing the monarchs who oppress them. The story creates a stark contrast between the violence of a Joshua and the other chiefs, who exterminate strangers, and the hospitality of a Rahab and her household, who welcome them. The land belongs, not to the powerful like Joshua and his warriors who conquer its inhabitants, but to the powerless like Rahab and her household who welcome strangers with hospitality.

Inauguration of Joshua at Jericho

(Josh 5:13—6:27)

The Bible sets the inauguration of Joshua (Josh 5:13–6:27) at Jericho. Jericho is an oasis in the Jordan River Valley some 840 feet below sea level and twenty miles north of the Dead Sea. In contrast with the Hills of Galilee, which average forty inches of rainfall a year, and with the Hills of Samaria, which average about thirty inches of rainfall a year, and with Jerusalem, which averages twenty-four inches, and with Beth-shan, which averages thirteen inches, Jericho receives only six inches of rainfall a year.

Jericho was founded on a site where two fault lines cut deep into the hill country, creating two east–west highways running between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan Valley. One route, called the Beth-horon Pass, ran through the Valley of Ajalon near Jerusalem; the other ran near Gibeah and Michmash. What draws the telling of the inauguration of Joshua to Jericho is not only its strategic location, but also its standing as a threshold separating chaos from cosmos. Jericho was the place where the world began, where cosmos was created. Therefore Jericho was the site where Joshua was inaugurated to teach the people of Yahweh to live in the land of Yahweh without cities like Jericho. Cities were the legacy of the pharaohs and the work of slaves. A thousand years after

the days of Joshua, the people of Qumran still renewed their covenant with Yahweh by crossing the Jordan River and processing around its Jericho's ruins.

Generation after generation left marks at Jericho. Mesolithic pioneers occupied the site in 8000 B.C.E. during the Natufian era. Neolithic engineers fortified Jericho with a massive wall, tower, and dry moat between 8500 and 4300 B.C.E. Early Bronze settlers occupied the site from 2900 to 2300 B.C.E. Hyksos warriors established a battle camp at Jericho fortified with a sloping glacis and mud-brick wall in 1750–1560 B.C.E. Hezekiah (726–697 B.C.E.) and Simon (142–134 B.C.E.) were the last kings of Judah to rebuild it (Judg 3:13; 2 Sam 10:5; 1 Chr 19:5). Despite Jericho's long history, however, the site was uninhabited as often as inhabited. Jericho was a ghost town from 4000 to 2900 B.C.E., from 2300 to 1750 B.C.E., from 1560 to 716 B.C.E., and from 587 to 142 B.C.E. The existing ruins at Jericho and Ai, Jericho's sister city, date from the Early Bronze period (3300–2000 B.C.E.) or the Middle Bronze period (2000–1550 B.C.E.). As yet, there is no archaeological evidence for a city or a destruction layer at either site after 1200 B.C.E. (Fig. 30).

Kathleen Kenyon (1906–78) of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem was the most accomplished archaeologist to excavate Jericho (1952–58). For her, Jericho was a strongly fortified Hyksos city during the Middle Bronze period. Like the Hebrews, the Hyksos were a Semitic people. They ruled an empire that stretched from Avaris near Cairo today to the Carmel Mountains near Haifa. Their city at Jericho was destroyed more than 250 years before Joshua, and remained abandoned until 716 B.C.E., when Hezekiah rebuilt it. More than one explanation has been offered to reconcile the destruction of Jericho described in the book of Joshua with the lack of solid archaeological evidence that a city existed at the site in the days of Joshua.

Perhaps the traditions describing the conquest of Jericho and Ai (Joshua 1–9) are not battle reports, but explanations of the ruins that the Hebrews found at Jericho and at Ai. Since this proposal was first suggested, anthropologists have shown that storytellers do use striking natural phenomena and human ruins familiar to their audiences to punctuate stories, but they do not tell stories just to explain natural phenomena and human ruins.

Perhaps Jericho's Late Bronze-period city may still lie beneath a section of the tell that has not yet been excavated. No excavations have been conducted at Jericho since those directed by Kathleen Kenyon, who excavated only a small portion of the site.

Perhaps the city that Joshua conquered may have been completely eroded by Syria-Palestine's winter rains. There was a real city at the site when the Hebrew villages appeared in the area, but all trace of that city has vanished.

Perhaps the people whom Joshua conquered in the Late Bronze period were living behind Middle Bronze-period walls. They did not build their own walls in the Late Bronze period, but simply recycled those from an earlier period.

Charles Warren (1867–68) dug three thirty-foot shafts into the tell and determined that the 70-foot high, 10-acre mound (1200 N-S x 600 E-W feet) was artificial, not natural.

Ernst Sellin and Carl Watzinger (1907–09, 1911) mapped the Middle Bronze period (1600 B.C.E.) retaining wall, 15 feet high, at the base of the tell.

Using a pottery chronology now considered faulty, **John Gartstang** (1930–36) dated mud-brick wall and city at stratum iv to the Late Bronze period and their destruction to Joshua (1400–1380 B.C.E.).

Kathleen Kenyon (1952–58), whose reports were finally published in 1981–83, dug three trenches on N, W, and S sides of the tell, dated the tower (25 feet diam., 25 feet high) to Neolithic period (7000 B.C.E.), mud-brick wall (6.5 feet wide, 12 feet high) and 40-degree glacis to the Early Bronze period, but mud-brick wall and city at stratum iv to the Middle Bronze period (1350 B.C.E.) because there was no Mycenaean pottery associated with either.

Bryant G. Wood (“Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho? A New Look at the Archaeological Evidence,” *BAR* 16 [March/Apr: 1990]: 44–57) did not excavate Jericho, but restudied Kenyon’s records, and argues that:

- 1) 20 strata, 3 major destructions, 12 minor destructions cannot be assigned to only 100 years (1650–1550 B.C.E.);
- 2) there is Late Bronze–period local pottery in Garstang’s and Kenyon’s finds;
- 3) Jericho is not on a trade route, hence would not import Late Bronze–period Mycenaean pottery like Megiddo and Gezer;
- 4) Kenyon excavated an ordinary neighborhood where imported Mycenaean pottery would not occur;
- 5) Kenyon excavated only two 26-foot x 26-foot squares, which provides too little data to be conclusive;
- 6) Hyksos retreating from Egypt would not have destroyed Jericho, which was their own city;
- 7) Egyptians did not pursue Hyksos north of Sharuhin in the Negeb;
- 8) Egyptians always attacked before harvest, and six bushels of wheat recovered indicate city fell after harvest;
- 9) continuous scarab record in tombs from the Middle Bronze period through the Late Bronze period (1800–1400 B.C.E.) indicates a Late Bronze–period city did exist

and concludes that:

- 1) a landslide caused by a Late Bronze–period (1400 B.C.E.!) earthquake blocked Jordan;
- 2) an earthquake collapsed the Late Bronze–period mud-brick wall, which tumbled across retaining wall;
- 3) the Hebrews used rubble as a ladder to enter the city;
- 4) spontaneous fires caused by collapsing buildings destroyed the city.

Figure 30 Jericho’s Archaeological Record

Perhaps the “Jericho” in these traditions may originally have been “Bethel,” which, like Ai, was also a sister city of Jericho. There is clear evidence for Bethel’s destruction in the Late Bronze period, and storytellers may eventually have transferred the battle of Bethel to the more famous Jericho.

Perhaps Kenyon simply overlooked evidence for a city at Jericho during the Late Bronze period. There may be locally made Late Bronze pottery among Kenyon’s finds, even though there is no Late Bronze–period pottery imported from Mycenae. There may also be scarab seals from the Late Bronze period among the grave goods that Kenyon recovered. Burned grain recovered from the excavation may show that Jericho fell quickly and not after a prolonged siege. An earthquake may have created a landslide that held back the waters of the Jordan and tumbled the city’s main mud-brick wall, providing a ramp down from the top of the tell across its glacis and retaining wall. The Hebrews may have climbed up this ramp into the city set ablaze when roofs collapsed into cooking fires.

The interpretation here, however, assumes that it was the ruins of Jericho, and not a living city, that inspired the Inauguration of Joshua at Jericho. The ruins of its lofty tower and massive walls were monuments to the affluence and organization of the peoples who once lived at Jericho. Like others who came on these ruins, the Hebrews were awestruck. The ruins made the Hebrews wonder why Yahweh allowed this great city to be destroyed, and whether or not they should rebuild it.

The Hebrews had good reasons to rebuild Jericho. Rebuilding the city would be an act of stewardship. They would be repairing the land that Yahweh had willed to them. Normally, heirs were expected to take immediate possession of their testator’s estates in order to begin payment of the agreed annuity or sacrifices. Rebuilding Jericho would also allow the Hebrews to enjoy its affluence. Jericho was an economic gold mine. Obviously, the founders of Jericho knew how to make a good living in this land, and the Hebrews wanted to imitate them. The Hebrews hoped Jericho could make Israel as rich as their predecessors on the site.

The Inauguration of Joshua at Jericho reflects the idealism of early Israel. The Hebrews who built their villages in the hills above Jericho were survivors of the great slave empires of Egypt, Hatti, and Mycenae. Cities were the hallmark of these empires. While most cultures in the world of the Bible looked on cities as great accomplishments, the clan of Joshua considered cities to be monuments to slavery. Hence, the Hebrews created a village culture, not a city culture. To prevent slavery, early Israel prohibited not only cities, but monarchs, taxes, and soldiers as well. Life in early Israel would be simple, but it would be free.

Interdicts similar to the one placed on Jericho in the Inauguration of Joshua at Jericho also appear in a tradition about Babel (Gen 11:1-90) and a tradition in the book of Deuteronomy (Deut 6:10-19). To rebuild Jericho would return the Hebrews to the slavery from which Yahweh had delivered them. Cities and slavery were the antithesis of

being Hebrew. The Inauguration of Joshua warns the Hebrews not to rebuild Jericho, but to leave the city in ruins, and off-limits, as a reminder that only in a land without cities can they remain free.

Crisis Episode

(Josh 5:13)

The Inauguration of Joshua at Jericho (Josh 5:13—6:27) follows the same pattern as the Inauguration of Marduk in the *Enuma Elish* Stories from Mesopotamia (Fig. 31). Just as the divine assembly of Babylon inaugurates Marduk to confront Tiamat, Yahweh inaugurates Joshua to confront Jericho. Inauguration stories identify candidates to the community and authorize their use of power. These stories defend leaders against charges of ambition by portraying them as simply following the commission of their divine patrons. Inaugurations regularly open with candidates pursuing ordinary tasks.

When the book of Joshua opens, the Hebrews are east of the Jordan River. Some are content, even proud, to remain there. They have no desire to cross the frontier into the unexplored land to the west. Yahweh interrupts this peaceful existence and inaugurates Joshua to lead the Hebrews into a new world. When the inauguration opens, Joshua is on guard duty at the perimeter of the Hebrew camp. Yahweh approaches the camp as a warrior responding to a call to arms (1 Sam 13:2; 22:7; 24:3; 2 Sam 6:1). The intention of the theophany is to attract the attention of a candidate and to lure the candidate into the presence of Yahweh. The armed warrior attracts the attention of Joshua, just as the burning bush attracts the attention of Moses at Mt. Horeb (Exod 3:3). Joshua challenges the warrior to identify himself: “Are you for us, or for our enemies?” (Josh 5:13) The warrior answers, “Neither!” (Josh 5:14), which is a characteristic refusal of Yahweh to identify himself on demand. Only Yahweh asks questions. “At ease!” would be a better translation of Yahweh’s refusal to give the password.

The prohibition of images of Yahweh (Deut 5:8-10) in an iconoclastic culture like ancient Israel imposes restraints on any theophany in the Bible, which technically can never be an image of Yahweh. Therefore, inaugurations regularly introduce Yahweh vaguely as a “messenger” (Exod 3:2) or a “man from the household of our Creator” (Judg 13:6). In the Inauguration of Abraham at Mt. Moriah (Gen 21:33—22:19), a messenger speaks to Abraham twice (Gen 22:10+15), before Yahweh speaks to him (Gen 22:16). In the Inauguration of Moses at Mt. Horeb (Exod 2:23—4:23), a messenger appears (Exod 3:2), before Yahweh speaks (Exod 3:6). Although the Annunciation to the Wife of Manoah (Judg 13:1-25) never formally introduces Manoah and his wife to the “man from our Creator,” only Yahweh hears prayers (Judg 13:9), eats sacrifices (Judg 13:15-16), and refuses to give the candidate a name (Judg 13:17-18). The motif of Yahweh as a warrior with the a fiery sword

inauguration story crisis (Josh 5:13)

When Joshua appeared at Jericho, a warrior suddenly approached him with his sword drawn. Joshua challenged the stranger: "Friend or foe?"

inauguration story climax (Josh 5:14)

The warrior answered: "At ease! I am Yahweh, commander of the divine warriors. I am with you." Joshua fell to his knees, touching his forehead to the ground. "Your word is my command!" Yahweh Sabaoth ordered Joshua: "Take off your sandals. You are standing on holy ground." So Joshua removed his sandals.

inauguration story denouement: a creation story (Josh 6:1-27)

Jericho was unable to muster soldiers or assemble elders before the Israelites. Then Yahweh said to Joshua, "I have delivered Jericho with its ruler and all its warriors to you. Your warriors should circle the city in procession once a day for six consecutive days. Seven priests should walk in procession with their trumpets in front of the ark of Yahweh. On the seventh day, walk in processions around the city seven times. Order the priests to blow their trumpets and the warriors to shout their battle cry: 'Yahweh is Lord!' In response, the walls of the city will prostrate before the procession of warriors walking one behind the other."

So Joshua, the son of Nun, ordered the priests to shoulder the ark, and assigned seven priests with trumpets to lead it out of the camp. He ordered the warriors to circle the city in procession in front of the ark, and they carried out Joshua's orders. Seven priests blowing their trumpets led the ark of Yahweh out of the camp with warriors walking both in front of the ark and behind it. Although the priests blew their trumpets continuously, Joshua had ordered the warriors not to shout their battle cry until he gave the word. On **the first day**, the ark circled the city only once before returning to camp for the night. At dawn, Joshua ordered the priests to shoulder the ark, and assigned seven priests blowing their trumpets continuously to lead it out of the camp with warriors walking both in front of the ark and behind it. On **the second day**, they circled the city only once before returning to camp for the night. On **six consecutive days**, they repeated the ritual.

At dawn on **the seventh day**, they walked in procession around the city, in the same order, a total of seven times. It was only on the seventh day that they circled the city seven times. On the seventh time, when the priests had blown their trumpets, Joshua gave the word to the warriors: "Shout: 'Yahweh has delivered the city into our hands!' Sacrifice the city and everything in it to Yahweh. Spare only the household of Rahab the prostitute because she spared our warriors. Bring nothing from the sacrifice back to the camp. Plunder taken from a sacrifice contaminates everything it touches. Deposit the silver, gold, and bronze and iron from the sacrifice directly into the treasury of Yahweh." The warriors shouted their battle

(continued)

cry as soon as the priests blew their trumpets. In response, the walls of the city prostrated before the procession of warriors walking one behind the other. They sacrificed the entire city to Yahweh, men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and asses. Joshua ordered the warriors who had scouted the land: "Deliver the household of Rahab the prostitute as you swore to her you would do!" The warriors who had scouted the land delivered Rahab, her father, mother, brothers, and their slaves, and brought them to the perimeter of the camp. They offered the city as a sacrifice and deposited all the silver, gold, bronze, and iron directly into the treasury of Yahweh. Nonetheless, they spared the household of Rahab the prostitute, who are still Israelites to this day, because she spared the warriors Joshua sent to scout Jericho. Joshua placed the city under interdict: "Cursed be the ruler who rebuilds this city, Jericho. At the cost of his firstborn shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates." Yahweh was with Joshua, he was honored throughout the land.

Figure e 31 Inauguration of Joshua at Jericho (Josh 5:13—6:27)

at the boundary between the old world and the new world also appears in the Story of Adam and Eve as Farmers and Child-bearers, where Yahweh stations "the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the Tree of Life" (Gen 3:24). Yahweh also appears as a warrior in the books of Samuel-Kings (2 Sam 24:16-17; 2 Kgs 19:35; 1 Chr 21:16) and in a Trial of David (2 Sam 24:16-17). The warrior who confronts David is armed only with a raised hand, but as in the Inauguration of Joshua at Jericho, the target of this warrior's commission is a city. Yahweh talks with David about the city of Jerusalem, and with Joshua about the city of Jericho.

What takes place at this threshold will determine the future of Israel. Jericho is a sacred center and Yahweh guards its threshold with a fiery sword. Joshua must use competence and courage to deal with the guardian. Once across the threshold, the candidate is endowed with the wisdom of the sacred center by this guardian. To seize this wisdom, the candidate must challenge the guardian. Only by crossing the established boundaries, only by provoking the guardian's destructive power, can the candidate obtain the guardian's constructive power, which will allow the Hebrews to pass over into a new world. To cross the threshold, candidates must develop the discipline to deny the senses that limit them to the known world, and acquire a sense of the unknown new world. Armed with the confidence of this new sense, candidates confront the guardian without fear and lead their households forward. The Labor of Moses and Zipporah against Yahweh (Exod 4:24-26) and the Labor of Jacob against Yahweh (Gen 32:23-33) are parallel stories told about ancestors crossing a frontier to undertake a divine mission.

Climax Episode

(Josh 5:14)

In the standard inauguration stories, Yahweh greets candidates formally by calling their name twice: "Moses! Moses!" (Exod 3:4). Once addressed, candidates realize they are in the presence of Yahweh. Instead of calling Joshua by name, however, Yahweh addresses him Joshua as his commander in chief: "At ease, I am Yahweh, commander of the divine warriors" (Josh 5:14).

Joshua, like candidates in other inauguration stories, prostrates himself. His posture is a demurral that demonstrates his lack of ambition and argues that he will take possession of Jericho only in obedience and not in a selfish quest for power. With both physical and verbal demurrals candidates promise to serve the community, not dominate it. Candidates in inauguration traditions are reluctant messengers.

Yahweh often responds to the demurrals of candidates with the promise: "I am with you." This promise appears at both the beginning of the Inauguration of Joshua at Jericho when the warrior says to Joshua: "as commander of the army of Yahweh I have now come" (Josh 5:14), and at the end when the story confirms that "Yahweh was with Joshua" (Josh 6:27).

Yahweh often stays the transfer of a candidate from the human plane to the divine plane with the words "Fear not!" The delay allows candidates to carry out a divine mission. Here Yahweh delays Joshua's transfer by teaching him the protocol for an audience with his divine patron. He tells Joshua to remove his sandals, which will prevent the holiness of Yahweh from transfiguring him into a risk for the Hebrews when he returns to the camp.

Denouement Episode

(Josh 6:1-27)

Joshua is now prepared to receive his divine commission. Standard commissions use a command (Exod 3:8-10), a decalogue (Deut 5:6-21), or a covenant. This commission, however, is a creation story like the Enuma Elish stories that developed in Mesopotamia, and the Stories of the Heavens and the Earth in the book of Genesis (Gen 1:1--2:4). "When on high" are the opening words of the Enuma Elish stories (Enuma I:1), and a good example of the standard opening words for creation stories. Likewise, "When Joshua appeared before Jericho" better translates the opening words of this inauguration. When the messenger of Yahweh appears, a radical change is imminent (Gen 39:5; Exod 12:13; 1 Sam 5:9; 7:13; 12:15).

Sterility affidavits are the standard crisis episodes in creation stories. They certify that when the creator begins to create, there is nothing but chaos.

The sterility affidavit of the creation story: “all who went out of the gate of his city” (Gen 34:24) and “all who went in at the gate of his city” (Gen 23:8-10) identify the two most important groups of men. As early as the culture of Sumer, cities were governed by warriors and elders. In the Stories of Gilgamesh, both the elders and the warriors commission him to declare war on Kish. Here in the Inauguration of Joshua, there are no warriors to protect Jericho from its enemies, and there are no elders to resolve disputes among its households. The city is as lifeless as the chaos before which Yahweh stands in the Stories of the Heavens and the Earth.

The climax episode in the creation story is a cosmogony. Yahweh directs Joshua to celebrate the end of the old world of Jericho and the beginning of the new world of Israel. This liturgy contains a series of rubrics describing what is to be done and what is to be said. For six days, the Hebrews are to walk in procession around Jericho once a day. On the seventh day, they are to process around the city seven times. These seven days of processions parallel the seven days of creation in the Stories of the Heavens and the Earth. This liturgy, however, does not draw cosmos from chaos, but returns cosmos to chaos. It is a reversed ritual that inverts the creative process.

Although some words in the liturgy do carry military connotations, they also carry liturgical connotations. For example, the same Hebrew word can mean “the army” or “the people of Yahweh” (Josh 6:8). Likewise, to carry the ark of the covenant was as much an act of war as an act of worship. In battle, the ark was a rallying point for warriors separated from their detachments. In worship, the ark was the pedestal of Yahweh toward which the congregation directed its attention.

The walls of Jericho are the divine patron of the city. They prostrate themselves, which signals that the old world of Jericho has come to an end, and acknowledges that Yahweh is the new divine patron of this land (Josh 6:20). The walls are to remain prostrate and the city is placed under interdict to remind the Hebrews that the old world of monarchs and taxes and soldiers and cities and slaves has ended. The Hebrews draw a circle as they dance with the ark around the ruin, creating a forbidden zone where only Yahweh may enter.

Othniel Delivers Israel from Aram

(Judg 3:7-11)

The book of Judges (Judg 1:1—21:25) contains a wonderful cycle of hero stories. Like all stories, hero stories have crisis, climax, and denouement episodes. Unlike most stories,

which develop action with description and dialogue, hero stories use formulas. Each episode reports the action of Yahweh, who is the protagonist, and the reaction of the Hebrews, who are the antagonist. Yahweh frees the Hebrews by feeding them and protecting them from their enemies, so that they can work their own land and rear their own children. The Hebrews block Yahweh by negotiating covenants with strangers who enslave them by offering to feed and protect them in return for their land and children.

The clan of Caleb celebrated its hero Othniel (Judg 3:7-11). The clan of Shechem celebrated Gideon (Judges 9). The clan of Dan celebrated Samson (Judges 13-16). On anniversaries and holidays there would be stories to keep the memories of these heroes alive.

Hero stories were told by oppressed Hebrew clans to vent their frustration against their enemies. As each clan became part of the state of Israel, however, it brought not only its economic and political resources into the state, but its cultural heritage as well. Those who were once heroes of only a single clan became the heroes of all Israel. The book of Judges also celebrates their exploits as reflections of the great act of liberation of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt. These hero stories are full of language and motifs that recall the Death of the Firstborn of Egypt and the Birth of the Firstborn of Israel in the book of Exodus.

Hero stories follow a standard pattern, reflected in the story Othniel Delivers Israel from Aram (Judg 3:7-11). The protagonist in hero stories is always Yahweh. Human heroes like Othniel are not protagonists, but Yahweh's helpers, referred to in English translations as "judges."

In English, judges are officers of the court, who hear complaints and hand down verdicts. Judges in early Israel are chiefs or heroes who deliver the Hebrews from their enemies. Only when Yahweh decrees that their enemies have been "given into their hands" is it possible for the Hebrews to drive them out of the land. In this sense, the chief is a judge or officer of the court who carries out sentences imposed by Yahweh and the divine assembly.

The crisis episode in hero stories assumes, but does not report, Yahweh's action of endowing the Hebrews with land and children (Judg 3:7). Because land and children are Yahweh's gifts, Yahweh alone is entitled to protect and provide for them. If the Hebrews try to protect themselves or to provide for their land and children, they will forfeit them altogether. Hero stories interpret the loss of these divine endowments as a sentence for "doing evil," "forgetting Yahweh," or "serving Baal and Asherah."

Language in formulas is tightly packed. These formulas are not specified, so the indictments remain generic. They abbreviate a story that is assumed but seldom retold. The formula: "serving Baal and Asherah" is better understood as "serving Yahweh as Yahweh Baal or Yahweh Asherah." The formulas emphasize more how Yahweh is to be worshiped than the worshiping of the divine patrons of others. Most cultures celebrated

Baal and Asherah as a divine couple. Israel generally celebrates Yahweh as both Baal and Asherah. To honor Yahweh as Asherah celebrates Yahweh as the Godmother who feeds Israel. To honor Yahweh as Baal celebrates Yahweh as the Godfather who protects it. One creates; the other saves. Both traditions authentically reflect the Hebrews' understanding of their divine patron. Yahweh is both the Godmother who gives life and the Godfather who protects it. Yahweh is integral, not sexual. For the Hebrews, only humans were gender specific; Yahweh was not.

Most cultures practiced ritual intercourse to manage the sexual relationship between Asherah and Baal that determined the quality of the farming and herding seasons of the cultures. A healthy sexual relationship between them produced a fertile land and a fertile people. If their sexual relationship was unhealthy, there was death and famine. Therefore, male rulers and female priests had intercourse with one another or with the totem animals of Baal and Asherah at the beginning of the farming and herding seasons to remind Baal and Asherah to wet the land with just the right amount of sperm, or rain.

The Hebrews did not prohibit the worship of Yahweh with ritual intercourse simply because they were excessively modest about sexuality. Prudishness about human sexuality developed in sixteenth-century England and America, not in ancient Israel. The Hebrews objected to ritual intercourse because it overemphasized the role of human beings in economic life. The Hebrews were to enjoy life, not create it (Deut 6:10-19). Yahweh freely and generously endowed Israel with life, and did not need to be reminded with ritual intercourse to feed and to protect the land and its people. The Hebrews prohibited any institution that questioned the gratuitous quality of Yahweh's actions to feed and protect the land and its people.

When the Hebrews forgot who set their households free and gave them land, or when they did evil by negotiating covenants with states to protect their land, or when they served Baal and Asherah by participating in the ritual intercourse of their state partners to guarantee successful growing and herding seasons, the anger of Yahweh was kindled against them (Judg 3:8-9). Literally, Yahweh snorts like a bull (Jer 6:29; Song 1:6; Job 39:20) through his nostrils (Gen 24:47; Job 36:13).

The anger formula is an example of a bull image of Yahweh, which, although officially forbidden, is common in the Bible (Num 19:1-10; Exod 32:1—33:11). Throughout prehistoric times, huge cattle roamed wild along the shores of the Mediterranean. Early humans revered these great animals as symbols of divine fertility. The bull was a symbol both of life and of the ability of the creator to give life. A bull that is snorting mad is sterile. When Yahweh becomes angry, the land dies. Anger is the antithesis of love in world of the Bible. The angry destroy life; the loving create it.

Unlike the formulas used in the crisis of hero stories, which are seldom expanded, the anger formula in climax episodes is often elaborated by a story, that describes in detail the enslavement of the Hebrews. Hero stories consider slavery therapeutic or educational.

Slavery teaches the Hebrews to recognize that Yahweh feeds and protects them. The Hebrews do not feed and protect themselves. Slavery tutors them to profess their faith in Yahweh by crying out. When the Hebrews cry out to Yahweh, they say “uncle.” Both the Hebrew word “to cry out” and the English word “uncle” sound like what they signify, which is the sound of someone choking. The cry is a formal plea for Yahweh to set them free.

Yahweh raises up heroes designated when the spirit of Yahweh touches or comes upon them. This touched formula identifies exceptional members of societies (Judg 3:9-11). When Yahweh touches someone, it leaves a physical mark. Today, children with dimples are sometimes told that God pressed a finger into their cheeks when they were finished to show delight in the way they turned out. The Pillsbury Baking Company captures this motif in their doughboy commercials where a soft, rounded figure made of dough giggles while a giant finger presses gently into its side. Children with freckles are sometimes told they have been kissed by fairies. In traditional societies like ancient Israel, the left-handed, the tall, and the redheads were all people marked by the spirit of Yahweh for some special task. The Hebrews considered exceptional people tooled for the divine task of setting slaves free.

Once the Hebrews are free again, the land is at rest. The rest formula is a cease-fire that guarantees the villages of Israel will not be overrun, and that their people will be free to rear their children, farm their fields, and graze their herds.

Most hero stories conclude with the obituary of the hero. The obituary is a death certificate that testifies that the hero is human, not divine. The hero is Yahweh’s helper. Only Yahweh lives forever, and thus only Yahweh delivers Israel.

Clans told hero stories to inspire gratitude to Yahweh in their households for having set them free from their enemies. The intention of hero stories is to unite the households of a tribe in gratitude for the power of Yahweh to deliver them. Before Babylon defeated Judah and destroyed Jerusalem, hero stories celebrated war as just and noble. Most veterans enjoyed war as a challenge and a test, and thought about war with attitudes of both terror and excitement. War is celebrated even when the cost in human life is high. On July 1, 1916, during World War I, the British army lost 19,000 killed, 35,000 wounded, 2,000 missing, and 6,000 prisoners on a front less than twenty miles long on the Somme River. There was shock, but no political or public outcry. The only generals who faced a court-martial were a few who were not aggressive enough. The wars in Vietnam (1945–75), however, changed the assessment of war in the United States. In much the same way, the wars with Babylon changed the assessment of war for those who told the hero stories in the book of Judges, which now stress the need for a total trust in Yahweh to raise up heroes for the protection of the land and its people, and indict the household of David for its militaristic policies, which ultimately destroyed the land and its people.

Ehud Delivers Israel from Moab

(Judg 3:12-30)

In the story of Ehud Delivers Israel from Moab (Judg 3:12-30), the spirit of Yahweh marks him as left-handed. Right-handed warriors found it difficult to defend themselves against left-handed warriors, just as right-handed baseball players today find it difficult to defend themselves against left-handed players. To be left-handed was a divine gift.

The Hebrews declare their independence from Moab by designating Ehud to be their chief. The Covenant between Moab and Israel was renewed each time the king of Moab collected taxes on the herds and harvest of the Hebrews. The Hebrews designate Ehud to deliver their taxes, renew their covenant with Moab at the sanctuary of Gilgal near Jericho, and then assassinate King Eglon of Moab. The strategy will outwit their enemies, who are portrayed throughout the story as fools.

Ehud prepares for his mission by making a high-tech dagger. Heroes generally use unorthodox weapons. Like the novel and film character James Bond, agent 007 of the British Secret Service, they use special weapons. Shamgar uses an ox-goad (Judg 43:31). Samson uses the jawbone of an ass (Judg 15:15), Jael uses a mallet and peg (Judg 4:21), David uses a throwing stick, and Ehud uses a two-edged sword (Judg 3:16). Yahweh does not lift up professional soldiers to lead the Hebrews from slavery to freedom. These heroes are ordinary men and women who use the tools of their trade to deliver the Hebrews from their enemies. Ehud's dagger is a customized weapon, eighteen inches long and sharpened on both sides of the blade. It is not the standard weapon of a Hebrew warrior, who would have used a sickle sword.

Gilgal is a sanctuary dedicated to Yahweh, the divine patron of the Hebrews, not to Chemosh, the divine patron of the Moabites. At Gilgal, Yahweh speaks only with Hebrews like Ehud, and not with Moabites like Eglon. Therefore, Eglon is anxious to hear what Yahweh has told Ehud to tell him, expecting, of course, that it will confirm his power. In fact, Yahweh's words for Eglon are the same as Yahweh's words for Pharaoh: "Let my people go!" Ehud leans forward to whisper the declaration into Eglon's ear, and strikes the Hebrews' first blow for independence.

Eglon's death is shameful. The language that describes his death is the same language used to describe someone having a bowel movement. "Sitting alone in his cool roof chamber" (Judg 3:20) is a euphemism, which one of Moab's guards explains: "He is only relieving himself in the closet of the cool chamber" (Judg 3:24).

Saga of Deborah and Jael

(Judg 4:1—5:31)

Deborah Delivers Israel from Hazor

(Judg 4:1-16 + 5:31)

The stories of Deborah and Jael (Judg 4:1—5:31), the stories of Gideon and Jerubbaal (Judg 6:1—8:35) and the Stories of Samson (Judg 13:1—16:31) are sagas, which combine hero stories about the birth, marriage, exploits, and deaths of similar protagonists. Sagas also develop in medieval Iceland and Scandinavia. In the “Saga of Olaf,” American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow imitated medieval sagas like the *Heimskringla*, a collection of stories about the early rulers of Norway. Sagas like those of Deborah and Gideon contain stories only about the mission and about the death of the hero.

The Saga of Deborah and Jael combines a story of how Deborah Delivers Israel from Hazor (Judg 4:1-16 + 5:31), the story of how Jael Delivers Israel from Harosheth-ha-goiim (Judg 4:17-24), and a Hymn to Yahweh (Judg 5:1-31).

Just as the powerless in developing nations today associate the powerful in industrial societies with business suits, briefcases, and eyeglasses, the village cultures like Israel associated the powerful city cultures like Hazor with chariots. The Hyksos introduced chariots in Syria-Palestine during the Middle Bronze period. Although a federation of more than one ethnic group, the Hyksos are primarily a Semitic people. As many as four animals drew a war chariot, which had either two or four wheels. The crew of a chariot included a driver and a warrior and sometimes a shield-bearer. The Hyksos developed an entire social system around the chariot. Only Hyksos chariot warriors like the people of Hazor were eligible to become landowners for whom local villagers like the Hebrews farmed and grazed animals.

When an enemy like Hazor threatened the land or children of a Hebrew village, its elders issued a call to arms to the other villages in their tribe to draft detachments of warriors to defend their village from its enemies (Judg 5:2-12; 19:29-30; 1 Sam 11:1-8). The tribe was an insurance policy against both war and famine, and a key to Israel's ability to recover from economic crisis. Warriors mustered at a sanctuary like the “Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel” (Judg 4:5).

The story introduces Deborah as “wife of Lappidoth” (Judg 4:4). Beyond this title, however, Lappidoth appears nowhere else in the Bible. It would be more characteristic of the hero story if “the wife of Lappidoth” were translated as “woman of fire.” Saul is tall, David is ruddy, Ehud is left-handed, Samson is muscular, and Deborah is a “torch.” She has red hair.

After the warriors of the tribe of Ephraim muster, they designate Barak to be their chief. Then they wait for Deborah the prophet to confirm their war for independence. Deborah announces to Barak that Yahweh has given Hazor into the hands of the Hebrews.

Just as the book of Exodus celebrates Yahweh's deliverance of the Hebrews by sending Moses to destroy the chariots of Egypt with the waters of the Red Sea, the book of Judges celebrates Yahweh's deliverance of the Hebrews by sending Deborah to destroy the chariots of Jabin and Sisera with the waters of the Wadi Kishon (Judg 5:21).

Jael Delivers Israel from Harosheth-ha-goiim

(Judg 4:17-24)

In the story of how Jael Delivers Israel from Harosheth-ha-goiim (Judg 4:17-24), Jael is not a host who betrays her guest, but a hero who defends her household against its enemy (Fig. 32). Heber the Kenite sets up camp with Jael and the rest of his household beneath the Oak of Zaananim near Kedesh (Judg 4:11). His name is derived from the same root as "Hebrew" and means "itinerant." A "kenite" is a "smith." Like tinkers in the American West, many smiths in early Israel traveled from place to place to quarry ore, and to repair tools and weapons like the chariots of Hazor. Both the name "Kedesh" and the presence of a sacred oak identify the site as a sanctuary. A sanctuary was neutral ground, where the household of Heber would be out of harm's way during the impending battle.

Sisera is the commander of the chariots at Hazor. Barak is the chief designated by the Hebrews warriors from Naphtali and Zebulun. The story keeps its audiences in suspense. Yahweh will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman (Judg 4:9), but will it be Deborah or Jael?

After the warriors of Hazor have been routed, Sisera also seeks asylum at the sanctuary. It is the sanctuary, not the camp of Heber, that offers Sisera protection. When he finds the household of Heber already at the sanctuary, Sisera tries to take over the household of Heber to restore the fortune that he has lost in battle. To take over the household of Heber, Sisera must rape Jael, the mother of the household. David uses the same strategy when he rapes Bathsheba to take over the household of Uriah (2 Sam 11:1-17). Amnon rapes Tamar to take over to the household of Absalom (2 Sam 13:1-22), and Absalom rapes ten wives of David to take over the royal household (2 Sam 16:15-22).

Every action and reaction in the story pivots on Sisera's plan to rape Jael. If Sisera were merely seeking hospitality, he would have approached the tent of Heber, not the tent of Jael. The mother of a household may share the tent of the father of the household, but fathers with more than one wife provided each wife with her own tent. Jael has a tent to herself.

Heber was a Kenite smith from the household of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses. His household built and repaired the iron fittings on the chariots of Hazor and Harosheth-ha-goiim. When fighting broke out between them and Israel Heber remained neutral, and took refuge under the sacred tree in the sanctuary of Zaananim.

When Sisera was told that Barak, son of Abinoam, was mustering the warriors of Israel on Mt. Tabor, he moved his nine companies of iron-fitted chariots off the heights of Harosheth-ha-goiim into the Wadi Kishon.

Then Deborah said to Barak, "Attack! This is the day of Yahweh. Yahweh has given Sisera into your hands. Yahweh will lead you into battle."

So Barak attacked from Mt. Tabor with warriors from ten villages. The glance of Yahweh paralyzed the chariots of Sisera, and Barak routed the chariots of Harosheth-ha-goiim. Every last soldier fell by the sword. No one was left. Sisera, meanwhile, dismounted his chariot and fled on foot to the sacred tree in the sanctuary of Zaananim. Secretly, he approached the tent of Jael, wife of Heber, who had a covenant with Jabin, monarch of Hazor.

Jael came out of her tent and challenged Sisera: "Sir, this is your last chance. Put your plans to seize this household aside. If you leave me alone, no harm will come to you." Sisera, however, pushed Jael aside and barged into the tent.

Jael closed the rug flap of the tent behind him. Then Sisera ordered Jael: "Bring me water to drink. I am thirsty." So Jael opened a skin of goat's milk and gave him a drink. Then she covered him with a sleeping rug.

As he was falling to sleep, Sisera ordered Jael: "Stand at the entrance to the tent, and if anybody comes and asks you, 'Is there a man in here?' say, 'No.'" Jael, however, took a tent peg and her mallet. Secretly, she approached him, sound asleep from fatigue, and drove the peg through his temple into the ground and he died.

Meanwhile, Barak arrived in pursuit of Sisera. Jael came out of her tent and announced: "Come, and I will show you 'the man' whom you are seeking." So Barak entered her tent, and there was Sisera lying dead with a tent peg through his head.

Figure 32 Jael Delivers Israel from Harosheth-ha-goiim (Judg 4:11 + 15-22)

Sisera does not approach Jael the way Abraham's slave approaches Rebekah (Gen 24:17). The slave approaches a woman at a well, not at her tent. He asks for permission to use the well, not for hospitality. Sisera approaches Jael's tent unnoticed (Judg 4:17). The expression usually translated "on foot" can also mean "secretly," as it does here and in the Story of Rahab as a Host where the Hebrew warriors approach Jericho "in disguise" (Josh 2:1). Whether Heber was present or not, warriors would have been

in camp to protect the women (Gen 34:5). Unlike Dinah, who “went out to visit the women of the land” (Gen 34:1-2) where the men of her household could not protect her, Jael does not leave the protection of the camp (Judg 4:17). Jael confronts an intruder who has eluded her bodyguards and is trespassing. Jael’s actions here are similar to those of Jezebel, who confronts Jehu after he eludes the guards and trespasses into the palace (2 Kgs 9:31; Fig. 33).

Jael’s opening words to Sisera, “Turn aside. Do not be afraid” (Judg 4:18), are not an invitation. She does not want Sisera to come into her tent the way Boaz wants his neighbors to sit with him in the gate (Ruth 4:1), and she does not invite Sisera to be her guest the way Lot invites the two strangers to spend the night with his household (Gen 19:2). Jael is not the head of the household. She has no authority to offer Sisera hospitality. By themselves, the words “turn aside” can offer hospitality, but together with the words “do not be afraid” (Judg 4:18) they cannot. The words “do not be afraid” are addressed to candidates like Abraham (Gen 15:1) and Gideon (Judg 6:23) setting out on missions. Jael’s words challenge Sisera to abandon his mission to take over the household of Heber (Ezek 33:11).

Jael’s words also do not indicate that she is physically attracted to Sisera. Traditional societies develop only the external actions of their characters, not their internal emotions. The Bible would not evaluate the character of Jael or of Sisera on the basis of how they felt about losing a battle, about seeing a handsome warrior, or about killing an enemy threatening their household.

Jael’s words do not negotiate a covenant with Sisera to overthrow Heber. Nothing suggests that Jael is acting against the father of her household. She is not like Abigail, who negotiates a covenant with David to overthrow Nabal (1 Sam 25:2-43).

When Jezebel received the report that Jehu was marching on Jezreel, she put on her royal makeup and wig, and took her place in the royal window. She indicted Jehu the moment he walked through the gate of the palace: “Have you come to surrender, you ‘Zimri,’ for the assassination of your king?”

The “Zimri” scoffed at his queen in the window and said, “Who is on my side? Who?”

Two or three royal bodyguards stepped forward. The “Zimri” ordered them: “Throw her down.”

So they threw her down from the balcony, and her blood spattered on the wall of the palace and on the horses of the “Zimri’s” chariot, which trampled her to death.

Figure 33 Trial of Jehu (2 Kgs 9:29-33)

Jael is not lying to Sisera. Nothing suggests that Jael and Heber are double agents working for their own advantage with both Israel and Hazor. Lies need credibility, but there is no reason for Sisera or the audience to believe her.

Jael's words are not ironic. Irony needs subtlety. Her words are absolutely clear. In contrast, Sisera's words to Jael (Judg 4:19-20) and the words between Sisera's mother and the women of her household (Judg 5:29-30) are brimming with the subtle misunderstanding irony requires.

Sisera has no right to hospitality in the tent of Jael. As long as Jabin ruled Hazor, Heber and Jael were obligated to take care of the chariots of Sisera and to provide hospitality for any member of the household of Jabin. If Jabin were still king of Hazor, Jael would have an obligation to protect Sisera from his enemies. Deborah, however, has overthrown Jabin, making the household of Heber covenant partners with the household of Deborah. Sisera is neither a monarch with whom Jael has a covenant nor a stranger seeking hospitality. Sisera is her enemy. He has lost his former status and is reduced to the role of a runaway slave.

Jael's words are a protest against Sisera, who is planning to take over the household of Heber. They are a final warning advising Sisera to abandon his mission or face the consequences. Jael's warning plays on the word "turn." She gives Sisera one last chance "to turn away from" his plan (2 Kgs 17:18; Judg 9:29; 1 Kgs 16:13). Sisera ignores her protest and "turns Jael out of his way." Jael says, "Turn aside from your plan," but Sisera "turns her aside" and invades her tent. Jael's words serve the same purpose as the words of Tamar to Amnon (2 Sam 13:12-13). Jael warns Sisera to leave her alone (Exod 8:27; Lam 4:15), to give up his plan to attack her (2 Kgs 10:29; Prov 13:14; Isa 11:13), and to disappear before he is discovered by the men of her household (1 Kgs 15:14).

Like Deborah, Jael is a liminal woman, who acts heroically when men fail to fulfill their responsibilities. When Barak fails to defend Israel against Hazor, Deborah acts. When Heber fails to defend his household, Jael acts. Both women go above and beyond the call of duty as mothers of their households. Both risk their own lives to save their households. Sisera ignores Jael's protest and turns her out of his way.

Once Jael's opening words to Sisera are read as a protest, rather than as an invitation, the significance of her actions that follow becomes clearer. Jael never regards Sisera as her guest. She declares war on him as her enemy. Sisera never regards Jael as his host. He plans to take over the household of Heber.

If Sisera were Jael's guest, she would have washed his feet (Gen 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; Judg 19:21). Jael does not omit washing Sisera's feet because such a leisurely and relaxing task is inappropriate in the middle of Barak's hot pursuit of Sisera. The omission indicates that Sisera has not been granted the status of guest.

Most translations say Jael "covered him with a rug" (Judg 4:18). At this point in the story, however, after Sisera barges past her, Jael steps into the tent behind him. She coolly

and decisively draws the rug hanging as a curtain across the opening of the tent, and prepares to confront her enemy alone.

Sisera misunderstands Jael's courage. At precisely the moment that he has fallen into the power of a woman (Judg 4:9), he assumes that she is now in his power. Unaware that he is in danger, Sisera orders Jael to wait on him like a slave by bringing him a drink. If Sisera were Jael's guest, he would not ask her for anything. She "opens a skin of milk and gives him a drink" (Judg 4:19). Abraham offers his guests "a morsel of bread" (Gen 18:4-5), and then upgrades it to pastry, a calf, curds, and milk, but Jael is not a host providing the best for her guest. When Jael gives Sisera milk to drink, she is a hunter stalking prey. Jael manipulates Sisera, not by treating him like a child, but by distracting him as if he were her lover. Goat's milk is a wedding drink with which a man and woman toast their marriage. Milk is also contains lactic acid, which soothes away the anxieties that prevent sleep. Sisera drinks the milk to prepare for sex. Jael serves the milk to prepare him for the sleep of death (Judg 16:14-19; CTA 19.213-224).

After Jael serves Sisera a drink, she covers him with a rug (Judg 4:19). This rug is the shroud in which his body will be carried home to his mother. (Judg 5:30). Jael stalks Sisera the way Judith stalks Holofernes in the book of Judith (Jdt 12:10—13:10), and Pughat stalks Yatpan in the Story of Aqhat from Ugarit (CTA 19.205-221). Sisera, Holofernes, and Yatpan all foolishly taunt the women they plan to rape with the foreplay of eating and drinking, while all the women wisely first put them to sleep, and then to death. Jael, Judith, and Pughat hunt and kill their enemies to set their households free.

Sisera also orders Jael to guard the door to the tent. He continues to command Jael as if she were a soldier in his now vanished army. "If anyone comes and asks you, 'Is there a man in this woman's tent?' say, 'No!'" Hosts like Lot, Rahab, or the slave at Enrogel (2 Sam 17:17-21) do guard the door to protect their guests, but guests can never order a host to stand guard. Sisera's order dramatizes his powerlessness as he cries out like a child afraid of the dark. The story uses a word that means both "anyone" and "a man" to force this once-great warrior to unwittingly admit that he is no longer a man. Sisera orders Jael to lie, but she can use his exact words and tell the truth.

Jael fetches the hammer and peg that she uses to pitch her tent. Her weapons are unorthodox, but they are familiar. The same skills and strength that Jael uses to erect her tent, she uses to defend it. She drives the peg through Sisera's skull with the same speed with which she normally sinks it into the ground. The man who penetrated the door of her tent is penetrated by the woman he threatened.

From the moment he passes through the door of her tent, Sisera is guilty of rape. The door of a house or a tent is a metaphor in love songs from both Egypt (Papyrus Harris 500) and the Song of Solomon (Song 5:4) for the woman herself. Although Sisera enters her tent, he never has sexual intercourse with Jael. He is impotent, and "falls

between her legs” (Judg 5:27), as much a failure against Jael as he had been against Deborah (Judg 4:15). On neither field does he mount a successful assault. He tries to bring shame upon Barak and Heber, and instead suffers the shame of death at a woman’s hand (Judg 9:53).

Like Deborah, who leads Barak to Sisera on the battlefield (Judg 4:14-16), Jael now leads Barak to Sisera on the floor of her tent. This final episode (Judg 4:22), with the opening episode (Judg 4:18), creates a frame around the stories.

Hymn

(Judg 5:1-31)

When Hebrew warriors returned to their villages after battle, women sang hymns to celebrate Yahweh’s victories over their enemies. Miriam sings after Yahweh delivers the Hebrews from the Egyptians at the Red Sea (Exod 15:20-21). Jephthah’s daughter sings after Yahweh delivers the Hebrews from the Ammonites (Judg 11:34). Here Deborah sings to celebrate Yahweh’s deliverance of the Hebrews from the rulers of Syria-Palestine at Taanach (Judg 5:19).

The hymn celebrates both Deborah and Jael as mothers in Israel, who delivered their households from the enemy. Mothers in Israel were selfless, not only in birthing and rearing their children, but in protecting them. In contrast, the mother of Sisera pines selfishly for a child to feed and protect her (Judg 5:28-30).

The irony with which the mother of Sisera speaks is exquisite. She rationalizes Sisera’s delay by assuming her warrior son is busy handling the two women he has taken prisoner. In fact, it is Sisera who has fallen into the hands of two women. Sisera’s mother imagines her loving son arriving with a bolt of fabric dyed in royal purple for her. In fact, her son will soon arrive shrouded in the carpet he has dyed with his blood.

In the hymn, Deborah and Jael are “blessed among women” (Judg 5:24). The title is superlative and confers on the two women honor equal to that of Othniel, Ehud, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, Saul, Jonathan, and David. Deborah and Jael were “friends of Yahweh” (Judg 5:31) who set their households free.

Jephthah Delivers Israel from Ammon

(Judg 11:1-40)

In the story of how Jephthah Delivers Israel from Ammon, a father offers his daughter as a human sacrifice in thanksgiving to Yahweh for delivering his household from its enemies (Fig. 34). Today Jephthah’s actions would be child abuse and murder.

Like Jacob, Jephthah becomes the father of his household, not by birth, but by achievement. His birth mother is not the mother of the household, but a secondary wife, although her title is generally translated into English as “harlot,” “concubine,” or “prostitute.” Jephthah’s father did not designate Jephthah to be his heir, but chose a son from the mother of the household. The heir and his brothers exile Jephthah to protect their status in the household, just as the sons of Jacob exile Joseph. Gilead exercises his authority to appoint an heir, and his heir exercises his authority as the new father of the household to adopt and to exile members by forcing Jephthah to become a man without a household. The same belligerence that made Jephthah a threat to this new father of the household, however, becomes an asset to other exiles who join Jephthah and support their households by raiding caravans.

When the people of Ammon invade the land of Gilead, however, the same sons who drove Jephthah into exile send him a call to arms and designate him as the chief who will deliver them from their enemies. He reminds them: “Did you not shame me, and excommunicate me from the household of my father?” (Judg 11:7). Then he negotiates with them for his reinstatement. He will serve as their chief on condition that, if he defeats the Ammonites, they will designate him as the father of their household. The covenant they negotiate with Jephthah is comparable to the covenant made between the divine assembly and Marduk in the Enuma Elish Stories. Marduk demands: “If I agree to serve as your deliverer, if I am successful in defeating Tiamat, if I save your lives, you must proclaim me the ruler of the divine assembly. My word, not yours, must determine all things. What I create must not change; what I command must not be revoked or altered” (Enuma IV:3-41).

As a chief, Jephthah vows not only a portion of the plunder that his warriors will take from the Ammonites, but also “whoever comes forth from the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites” (Judg 11:30-31). His vow is part of the ritual of *herem* war. Like David, who shared his plunder with those who remained with the pack animals, Jephthah shares the price of war with those who remained in the village (1 Sam 30:21-25).

The first person to greet Jephthah after the battle is his daughter. She comes out of the village playing a tambourine and dancing (Exod 15:20; 1 Sam 18:6). She is Jephthah’s “only child” (Judg 11:34). This is the child that Jephthah designated to be his heir.

When Jephthah realizes the implications of his vow, he has second thoughts, but his daughter is resolute. She knows that the honor of the household must be maintained. She insists that her father fulfill his vow. The daughter of Jephthah, like the daughters of Lot, is not a tragic or pathetic figure. She is heroic. Unlike the daughters of Lot, she is not silent. Her words reinforce her actions, and she makes the decision to lay down her life for her household.

Every year, Hebrew women remember the daughter of Jephthah. They lament not only her premature death, but also her inability to fulfill her role as a mother.

At the beginning of the story, Jephthah has a child, but no land. At the end of the story, he has land, but no child. He regains his position within the household of Gilead, but he is unable to pass on his inheritance. The story remembers Jephthah as a father who paid a terrible price for trying to defend his village, and to provide an heir for his household on his own. Like all hero stories, Jephthah Delivers Israel from Ammon reminds the Hebrews that only Yahweh can bless a household with land and children. Without Yahweh, fathers of households are powerless.

crisis (Judg 11:1-3)

There was a chief from the household of Gilead named “Jephthah,” who was the son of Gilead and a secondary wife. Besides Jephthah, Gilead had sons with his primary wife. When the sons of Gilead with his primary wife became elders, they excommunicated Jephthah. “Because you are the son of stranger, you shall inherit nothing.”

Jephthah went into exile in the land of Tob, about twelve miles north of Ramoth-gilead near the border of Jordan and Syria today. Other exiles joined him and they supported their households by raiding.

climax (Judg 11:4-33)

Some time later, when Ammon began to attack Israel, the elders of Gilead sent messengers to Jephthah in the land of Tob. “Come,” they said to Jephthah, “be our chief that we may defend ourselves against Ammon.”

“Are you not the elders who excommunicated me from the household of my father?” Jephthah replied. “Why do you come to me now, when you are in distress?”

The elders of Gilead replied to Jephthah, “In spite of our actions then, we are now asking you to return as the chief of Gilead and defend us against Ammon.”

Jephthah told the messengers to reply to the elders of Gilead: “If you allow me to return and Yahweh delivers Ammon up to me, then you must recognize me as the father of the household of Gilead.”

The elders of Gilead replied: “We will do as you say. Yahweh is our witness.”

So Jephthah returned to Gilead with the messengers, and the warriors of Gilead inaugurated him as their chief before Yahweh at the sanctuary of Mizpah.

Then Jephthah sent messengers to the ruler of Ammon with the message: “What have you against me that you attack me in my land?” (Judg 11:12).

(continued)

The spirit of Yahweh came upon Jephthah (Judg. 11:29). He reconquered Gilead and Manasseh, and Mizpah-Gilead as well, and from there he went on to attack Rabbath-Ammon.

Before the battle, Jephthah made a vow to Yahweh: "If you deliver Ammon up to me, I will sacrifice to you the first to come out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in triumph."

Then Jephthah attacked Rabbath-Ammon and Yahweh delivered Ammon up to him. His victory was complete. He destroyed twenty villages between Aroer and Minnith and Abel-keramim, and sold the Ammonites as slaves in Israel.

denouement (Judg 11:34-40)

When Jephthah returned to Mizpah, his daughter was the first person to come out of his house, praising Yahweh with her tambourines and dancing. She was his heir. Jephthah had no other sons or daughters. When Jephthah saw her, he tore his clothes in mourning, and cried out: "Oh my daughter, the words of your song are a death sentence for our household. For I have made a vow to Yahweh and I must fulfill it."

"Father," she replied, "you have made a vow to Yahweh. Do with me as you have vowed, because Yahweh has delivered your enemies up to you. But grant me this favor. For two months, let me and the other marriageable women in the household go off to the mountains to mourn our infertility."

"Go," he replied, and sent her away for two months.

She departed with the other marriageable women and they mourned their infertility on the mountains. After two months she returned to her father without ever having had sexual intercourse, and her father sacrificed her to Yahweh as he had vowed. It then became an annual custom for the women of Israel to mourn the daughter of Jephthah from Gilead for four days.

Figure 34 Jephthah Delivers Israel from Ammon (Judg 11:1-40)

Saga of Samson

(Judg 13:1—16:31)

Ugarit was a state strategically located on the trade lanes between Egypt to the south, islands like Crete to the west, and Mesopotamia to the east. Ugarit prospered during the Late Bronze period. Among the traditions of this wonderful culture, excavated by the French team of Claude A. Schaeffer during twenty-two seasons between 1929 and 1960, are the Stories of Aqhat. The Stories of Aqhat were popular throughout the world of the Bible. The Saga of Samson parallels the Stories of Aqhat. The Hebrews may have

first heard them in Philistine ports like Gaza and Ashkelon, where Ugarit's merchant ships called, or border towns like Timnah.

The crisis episode in the Saga of Samson is simply two formulas: "The Israelites again offended Yahweh, who therefore delivered them into the power of the Philistines for forty years" (Judg 13:1). The climax episodes are developed by a series of seven hero stories. The first is simply the formula: "the spirit of Yahweh first stirred him in Mahaneh-dan" (Judg 13:25), which is attached to the Annunciation to the Wife of Manoah.

Annunciation to the Wife of Manoah

(Judg 13:1-25)

In an Annunciation to the Wife of Manoah, Samson's parents-to-be, like Danil and Danatiya in the Stories of Aqhat, have no children. Yahweh, like Baal in the Stories of Aqhat, intervenes and Manoah and his wife have a son. This barren-wife motif also appears in the Stories of Abraham and Sarah (Gen 15:1-4; 16:1-15; 18:9-15; 25:21; 30:1-24), the Stories of Samuel, and the Stories of Elijah and Elisha (1 Sam 1:2-17; 2 Kgs 4:8-17).

Samson and Aqhat both grow up to become fearless hunters. Undaunted by animals, they are defeated by women. Delilah, a Philistine woman, outwits Samson, just as Anat, the divine patron of love and war, outwits Aqhat. The deaths of both Aqhat and Samson are avenged by their divine patrons.

The wife of Manoah is wise. Because the message involves childbirth, and because women have a greater role in childbirth than men, the messenger deals with the wife of Manoah, rather than with Manoah. The same motif appears in the Stories of Adam and Eve. The snake talks with the woman, not because women are prey to temptation, but because the consequences of fertility have more to do with them than with their partners. The wife of Manoah respects the messenger, pays close attention to the directions, and conscientiously tells Manoah what the messenger told her to do for their son.

In contrast, Manoah is a fool who not only knows little or nothing about child-bearing, but also does not listen to his wife, who does. Manoah also violates the protocol of a host by asking the messenger for his name. The foolishness of fathers in annunciation stories does not just make fun of them, but emphasizes the powerlessness of human beings to save themselves. Annunciation stories celebrate the power of Yahweh to give birth to children even from infertile couples. The infertility of the mothers of great men celebrates their births as the work of Yahweh, rather than as human work. Infertile women are liminal women, who, like Israel itself, are without status, but infertile women, like Israel itself, are chosen by Yahweh to free the slaves.

Samson Courts the Woman of Timnah

(Judg 14:1-4 + 10)

Samson is named for Shamash, the divine patron of the sun. He is a sun child. Traditions celebrate the sun as a voyeur who spends his day gazing down on all the women on earth. The Saga of Samson characterizes him as a womanizer, who seduces the woman of Timnah and the woman of Gaza, and is seduced by Delilah. The wife of Manoah is a Hebrew. She is the mother of a household in Israel. The other three women in the Saga of Samson are Philistines. They are strangers. The wife of Manoah is the insider whom Yahweh protects. The woman of Timnah, the woman of Gaza, and Delilah are the outsiders from whom Yahweh protects the Hebrews (Fig. 35).

Samson Courts the Woman of Timnah

(Judg 14:1-4 + 10)

Once Samson went down to Timnah, and had intercourse with a Philistine woman. When he came back to his own village, he told his father and mother: "I had intercourse with a Philistine woman at Timnah with whom I want you to arrange a wedding for me." His father and mother refused. "Are there no Hebrew women for you to marry? Why do you want to marry the daughter of an uncircumcised Philistine?" Samson, however, insisted. "Arrange a wedding for me with the woman I want." His father and mother did not know that Yahweh was going to use Samson to shame the Philistines, who ruled the villages of Israel.

Samson Slays the Lion of Timnah

(Judg 14:5-9)

Samson went down to Timnah. . . . When he came to the vineyards of Timnah, a female lion suddenly attacked him. The spirit of Yahweh possessed Samson, and he tore the lion apart bare handed as easily as if she were a newborn goat. He did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. Then Samson proposed to the Philistine woman he wanted to marry. When Samson returned to marry her, he left the road to look at the carcass of the lion. A swarm of bees had built a hive in her carcass, and filled it with honey. Samson scooped out the honeycomb with his bare hands, and ate the honey as he walked on down the road. When he met his father and mother, he gave them some honey, and they ate it. Samson did not tell them that he had collected the honey from the carcass of the lion. While his father negotiated with the woman, Samson began the traditional celebration with the other young men in the village.

Figure 35 Stories of Samson (Judg 14:1-10)

The sight of the woman of Timnah and the woman of Gaza sexually arouses Samson, who is a fool for seeking to have intercourse with strange women. He crosses back and forth over the frontier separating Hebrew and Philistine villages. He marries outside his tribe.

Samson Slays the Lion of Timnah

(Judg 14:5-9)

The story of how Samson Slays the Lion of Timnah is framed by the sentences: "Samson went down" (Judg 14:5) and "his father went down" (Judg 14:10). Samson is the protagonist in both stories, and the woman or lion of Timnah is the antagonist.

Samson's weapons in these stories are his bare hands. The Hebrews considered Philistine weapons to be state of the art. The Philistines had the best available arsenal of military hardware, yet the best iron weapons that the Philistines could forge were no match for the hands of Samson, or the jawbone of an ass, when these unorthodox weapons are wielded by heroes lifted up by Yahweh to deliver the Hebrews from slavery.

Double entendre is used throughout the Stories of Samson. Words frequently have more than one meaning. One meaning is always sexual, the other meaning is not. The woman of Timnah is a female lion. She roars or taunts Samson, who, nonetheless, overpowers her. Eating the honey from the body of the lion is a double entendre for Samson's enjoyment of his sexual conquest.

Samson Kills the Warriors of Ashkelon

(Judg 14:11-20)

Traditions like those in the Saga of Samson were told at weddings by men celebrating their own sexual conquests. During the first six days of the wedding, the household of the groom displayed the bride-price that it was investing in the household of the bride. Likewise, the household of the bride displayed the dowry that it was investing in the household of the groom. The guests looked over the bride-price and the dowry to be sure that they met the stipulations of the covenant that the two households had negotiated. Then, on the seventh day of the wedding feast, the guests witnessed sexual intercourse between the bride and groom to officially consummate the covenant.

Riddles were also part of the wedding ritual. Riddles are sexual word games that men used at weddings to determine their rank in the household. The groom ran a gauntlet of riddles before going in to have intercourse with the bride. Samson Kills the Warriors of Ashkelon (Judg 14:11-20) begins when Samson loses a riddle contest, which renders him impotent and, therefore, unable to consummate his marriage.

To redeem the honor of his household, Samson kills and strips thirty Philistine warriors to shame them. Exposing the genitals of a warrior was comparable to castration. Only children played naked. Clothing was the uniform of a sexually active adult. To remove the clothing of sexually active adults returns them to the status of children. Hanun cuts off the tunics of the men whom David dispatched to the funeral of Nahash, Hanun's father (2 Sam 10:4). By symbolically castrating David's messengers, Hanun declares that Israel is impotent in Rabbath-Ammon.

In the world of the Bible, marriage was almost always patrilineal. Women left the households of their fathers and moved to the households of their husbands. In this story there is no marriage. Samson leaves the wedding feast unable to consummate his marriage, so the woman of Timnah returns to the household of her father unmarried.

Samson Burns the Crops of Timnah

(Judg 15:1-8)

The story of how Samson Burns the Crops of Timnah begins when Samson returns to have intercourse with his wife. The father of her household, however, has already abrogated the covenant that he negotiated with the household of Samson, and turns Samson away. Again Samson is shamed.

To recover his honor, Samson runs three hundred foxes through the fields, orchards, and vineyards of Timnah, setting them on fire. Foxes are often associated with sexual revenge. Men frustrated in their desire for sexual intercourse shift into the shape of a fox to seduce the women. These traditions are especially popular during the grain harvest when foxes, whose burrows have been disturbed by workers in the fields, appear everywhere. As the book of Ruth reflects, men and women sleep in the fields during the long hours of harvesting. Harvesters take advantage of being away from their homes for days at a time to make love in the field, as undetected as foxes digging burrows in the grain. The land whose grain is abundant at the harvest is imitated by harvesters sowing their own seed. In Samson Burns the Crops of Timnah, Samson himself is the fox, and the fields into which the fox burrows are the women of Timnah. Denied intercourse for a second time with his wife, he stealthily ravages every other woman in the village.

Samson Massacres the Garrison of Lehi

(Judg 15:9-17)

The stories of how Samson Massacres the Garrison of Lehi (Judg 15:9-17) and How Samson Raids the Spring at Hakkore (Judg 15:18-20) use mnemonics to help their audiences remember where the stories take place, the cry that Samson lets out, and the

unorthodox weapon with which he massacres the Philistines. The Hebrew letter *'ayin* appears in the word that means “to cry out.” Each of the seven stories that make up the climax of the saga expand the two parts of the episode in a standard hero story, where enemies oppress Israel for years until the Hebrews cry out to Yahweh for help. The tradition names Lehi “Jawbone Springs.” The name reminds the Hebrews where Yahweh began their deliverance from the Philistines, because at this spring Samson cried out for independence.

The same Hebrew letter also appears in the Hebrew word that means a “spring of water.” It is shaped like a fork with two tines. These prongs represent the crack in the face of a rock through which the water, here portrayed as the handle of the fork, trickles like tears from a human eye. By drinking water from the spring shaped like the sound of a cry for help, Samson cries out. The shape gives birth to a sound.

Finally, the letter *'ayin* and the jawbone of an ass have the same shape. Again, the association between the shape of the spring leads Samson to the shape of his unorthodox weapon. Traditional people strongly believe in the desire of creation to harmonize. Nothing likes to stand out or create discord. In the Stories of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel, Jacob exploits nature’s penchant for harmony, when he breeds Laban’s sheep and goats in pens constructed with spotted fence poles (Fig. 36). In order to harmonize with their surroundings, the ewes and nannies give birth to lambs and kids with spotted coats (Gen 30:25-43).

Laban said, “How will I pay you?” Jacob said, “You will not pay me anything. I will continue to graze and herd your sheep and goats as long as you give me every speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb, and the spotted and speckled among the goats. My honesty will speak for itself, when you inspect your sheep and goats and not one which is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs is missing.” Laban said, “Agreed!” But that day Laban removed the male goats that were striped and spotted, and all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white on it, and every lamb that was black, and put them in charge of his sons. He moved their herds three days away from the herds of Jacob.

Then Jacob cut fresh poles from poplar and almond and plane trees. He peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the poles. He set up the poles, which he peeled at the watering troughs in front of the sheep and goats. Since the sheep and goats bred when they came to drink, they produced kids and lambs that were speckled and spotted.

Figure 36 Stories of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel (Gen 30:31-39)

Samson Raids the Spring at Hakkore

(Judg 15:18-20)

The formula: “Samson judged Israel for twenty years in the days of the Philistines” (Judg 15:20) at the end of the story of how Samson Raids the Spring at Hakkore originally concluded the Saga of Samson. As the saga continued to develop, its literary conclusion was moved from here, even though the formula remained.

Samson Wrecks the Gates of Gaza

(Judg 16:1-3)

Striking natural phenomena invite interpretations handed on as etiologies. The gates of Gaza are stone, not wood or metal. The story of how Samson Wrecks the Gates of Gaza provides an interpretation for an unusual rock formation on a hill outside the city that people nicknamed “The Gates of Gaza.” Etiologies appear today in the names of natural formations like the “Devil’s Post Pile” or “Camelback Mountain.”

The gates of a city and the doors of a house are also metaphors for the vagina of a woman. The metaphor appears in Egyptian love songs (Fig. 37) and in the Song of Solomon (Song 5:2-6). When Samson goes into the woman and comes out through the gates of the city, he shames the Philistines of Gaza, who cannot protect either their women or their city. The interplay between the woman and the gates of the city in this hero story is comparable to the interplay between the woman of Timnah and the lion.

*The woman whom I love is the lady of a great house.
You enter her house in the center.*

*The doors are wide open, the bolt is unfastened
Because she is angry with her lover . . .*

If she hired me to guard her door,

At least when I made her angry,

*I would get to hear her voice,
Even as I tremble like a child.*

Figure 37 Egyptian Love Song (Matthews and Benjamin 1997: 300–01)

Samson Terrorizes the Wadi Sorek

(Judg 16:4-22)

In the story of how Samson Terrorizes the Wadi Sorek (Judg 16:4-22), Samson delivers Israel from Philistia three times, before Delilah delivers Philistia from Israel by shaving his head. A man's hair and his beard were comparable to his pubic hair because they appear together during puberty. By shaving Samson's head, Delilah castrates him, and leaves him as weak as a child.

Other aspects of the story also describe the transformation of Samson from powerful to powerless. In a Hymn to Yahweh celebrating the deliverance of Israel from Harosheth-ha-goiim, Sisera "sank, he fell, he lay still at Jael's feet; at her feet he sank, he fell; there he sank, there he fell dead" (Judg 5:27). Similarly, Delilah "let Samson fall asleep on her lap" (Judg 16:19). Both gestures are reversals. Sisera tries to fall between the legs of Jael and rape her, but instead he falls between her legs dead. Samson tries to fall between the legs of Delilah and have intercourse with her as an adult, but instead falls asleep on her lap like a child.

When the Philistines take Samson prisoner, they gouge out his eyes. The tactic renders warriors powerless. Blinding was also equivalent to castration because the eyes of warriors were equivalent to their testicles. To be blind was to be impotent. The Middle Assyrian Code (1115–1077 B.C.E.) reflects this equivalence: "If a woman ruptures a man's testicle during a fight and, even after medical treatment, his other testicle also ruptures, then both of the eyes of the woman are gouged out" (Art. 8).

Mutilating prisoners of war also disabled them from bearing arms. The Babylonians blind Zedekiah after destroying Jerusalem and executing the members of his household before his eyes (2 Kgs 25:7; Jer 39:7; 52:11). The king is powerless to protect the land and its children. Mutilated warriors could work, but they could not fight. Adoni-bezek the Perizzite cuts off the thumbs and toes of seventy rulers he defeats, before the warriors of Judah cut off his thumbs and toes (Judg 1:4-7). Without their big toes, warriors could not balance. Without thumbs it was virtually impossible for warriors to grasp their weapons. Mutilation also clearly identified convicts and served as a warning to others.

The Philistines sentence Samson to grind at a mill. The great warrior is forced to do the work of a woman. Grinding grain for bread was a metaphor for sexual intercourse. Job testifies that his wife never ground grain for another while he was father of the household (Job 31:9-10). During intercourse a woman grinds the semen of a man to create a child, just as at the mill she grinds grain to bake bread. With the same motion she draws life from the land and from its men.

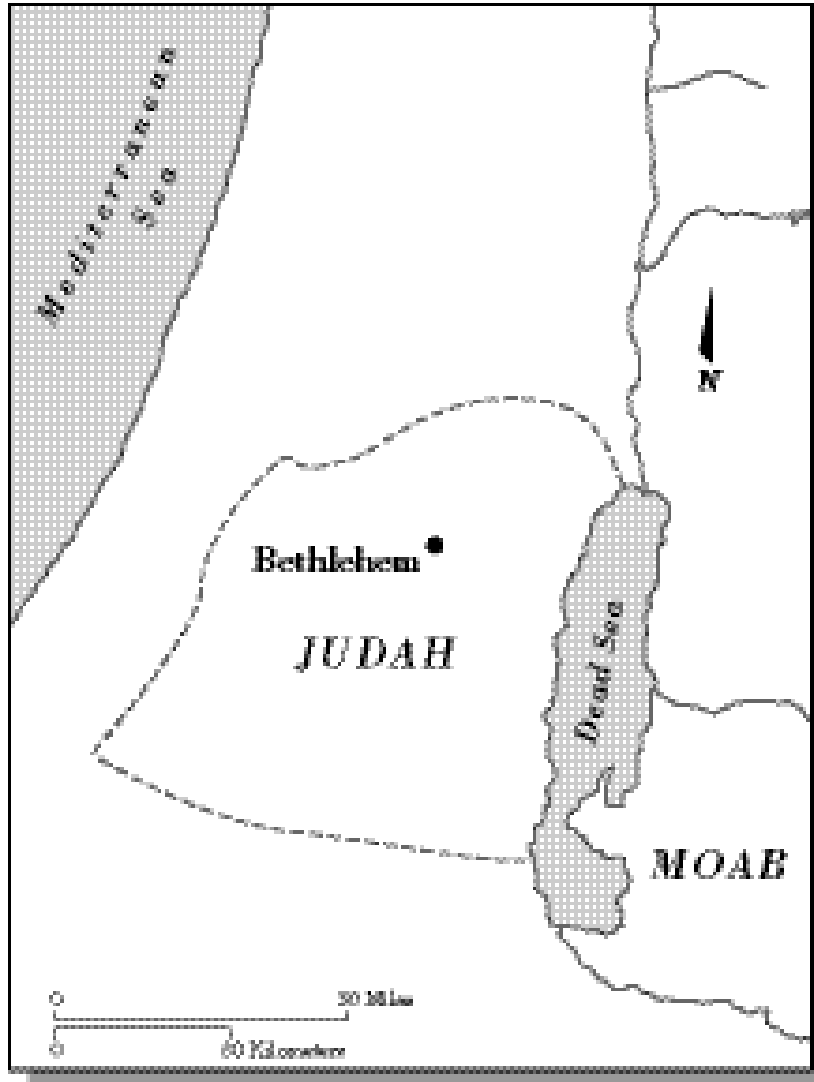
Samson Destroys the House of Dagon

(Judg 16:23-31)

Prisoners of war were brought back from the battlefield as evidence to the people at home that the warriors had fulfilled their obligation to protect them from their enemies. Some prisoners were sold as slaves. Others, like Samson, are publically tortured and executed in mock battles in order to shame them. Pharaohs would use conquered rulers as footstools, or they would have them lashed beneath the anuses of the horses on the tongue of their war chariots. As the pharaohs entered the city with their victorious troops, crowds waited for the horses to shower their enemies with excrement. During the festival of Dagon, the Philistines sexually abuse Samson by striking or fondling the blind man's genitals (Gen 26:8-9).

Samson puts out the "eyes," or twin pillars, of the Philistine sanctuary in retaliation for the loss of his eyes. The pillars mark the place where the divine patrons of the community enter and leave the human plane. The Philistine sanctuary at tel Qasile just north and east of the mouth of the Yarkon River likewise rests on two pillars. Through these eyes of the Philistine temple Dagon enters Philistia. Blindness closes the vent, cutting Philistia off from its divine patron. The Philistines have left Israel powerless by blinding Samson. Samson has left Philistia powerless by blinding Dagon.

The Saga of Samson does not celebrate Samson. The stories make fun of him in order to question whether heroes really protect Israel from its enemies. Similarly, the book of Jonah does not celebrate Jonah, but makes fun of him in order to question whether the death sentence that the prophets imposed on the enemies of Israel will be carried out. In all his glory, Samson is a fool. Only blind and powerless does he become a hero. The hero stories with which the book of Judges opens (Judg 1:1—12:15) are told only to argue in the Saga of Samson that Yahweh does not need great warriors like Othniel, Deborah, Jael, or Gideon to deliver Israel from its enemies, but can use a blind man like Samson. It is Yahweh, and Yahweh alone, who feeds and protects the land and its people.



Points of Interest (Chapter 5)