The Israel Times

Judges 4-5

JABIN THREATENS ATTACK!

Storm Clouds of War Gather over Jezreel Valley!

Under the Palm

Daily wisdom from Deborah

The kings came and fought;
Then fought the kings of Canaan at Taanach near the waters of Megiddo;
They took no plunder in silver.
The stars fought from heaven, from their courses they fought against Sisera. The torrent of Kishon swept them away, the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon.
O my soul, march on with strength.
(Judges 5:19-21)

Weather forecast:

Today mostly sunny with chance of rain increasing by the end of the week. Heavy rain and wind expected. Flood warning in effect for the weekend.

Weekly Ads:

10,000 warriors from Zebulun and Naphtali needed to fight Jabin's chariots. Call 1-800-BARAK to sign up. (Judges 4:6-10)

Multi-purpose TENT PEGS for SALE! Contact Jael, wife of Heber, for further information.
(Judges 4:16-22)

Air-BnB by Jael. Privacy ensured. Food and milk provided.
(Judges 5:25-26)

Deborah and Barak. *In the period of the judges, the Canaanites maintained control of the valleys and plains where the chariot gave them a decisive advantage against Israel. Canaanite pressure thwarted Israel's attempt to expand beyond the hills into the lowlands. On one occasion, however, Israel won a great victory in the* ***Jezreel Valley*** *against Canaanite forces led by* ***Sisera, the commander of the army of Jabin****, king of Hazor. The prophetess Deborah, who judged Israel under a palm tree near Bethel, summoned Barak from Kadesh in Naphtali and charged him to gather the men of Naphtali and Zebulun on Mount Tabor. Contingents from Issachar, Ephraim, Benjamin, and Machir also rallied to Deborah's call.*

To meet this provocation, Sisera moved his chariot corps from his base at Harosheth ha-goiim to the Wadi Kishon below Mount Tabor where the chariots would be most effective. At Deborah's command Barak attacked, routing the Canaanites below. Swollen by recent rains, the Kishon River rendered the chariots useless (Judg. 5:20–21). The Canaanite army perished in retreat, while Sisera escaped to the camp of Heber the Kenite at Elon-bezaanannim (oak in Zaanannim) east of Mount Tabor. Jael, Heber's wife, killed Sisera by driving a tent-peg through his head while he slept. This great victory—beating the Canaanites on their own turf—was celebrated in an early Israelite poem, "The Song of Deborah" (Judg. 5)

Brisco, T. V. (1998). *Holman Bible atlas* (pp. 92–93). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Kinds of Salvation

At various times Israel, oppressed by other nations, had to go to war to win and to maintain its freedom. In these battles the nation turned to God for help. They believed that the outcome of the battle belonged to Yahweh (I Sam 17:47). Thus they ventured out in the assurance of a victorious outcome. The focal point of God's saving deeds in the OT was the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage (Ex 14:30). Thereby they became known as a people saved by Yahweh (Deut 33:29). Such deeds of salvation became a witness of the lordship of Yahweh not only to future generations, but also to the surrounding nations (cf. Ps 106:8; I Sam 4:6ff.). Later as the Israelites anticipated entering the promised land, Moses said, "the Lord your God is he that goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory" (Deut 20:4).

God fulfilled this promise through Joshua, who led the people to take possession of Canaan. Afterwards when Israel was oppressed by one of the surrounding nations, **God delivered them through a judge** (Jud 2:16). The general pattern was to endow the judge with his Spirit in order that he could defeat Israel's enemies. Later under the kingdom Israel defeated their enemies by a righteous king who was anointed and aided by Yahweh (I Sam 9:16; Ps 20:6 [H 7]). The truly believing leader ventured forth in the spirit of the words of Jonathan, "nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few" (I Sam 14:6). The salvation from God was the king's glory and firmly established his authority over the people (Ps 21:5 [H 6]). It became imperative as the nation grew in power and prestige for the king and the people to realize that salvation does not come by a mighty army, but solely from the power of God (Ps 44:1–8 [H 2–9]). **Although God generally used human agents to bring salvation, the obstacles surmounted were so spectacular that there unquestionably had to be special help from God himself (**cf. Prov 21:31). Here is the creative tension between divine action and human response which establishes God's purpose on earth and yet builds the character of his people. **Sometimes God may do the work totally, and all man has to do is wait and see the mighty deeds of the Lord (II Chr 20:17**; cf. Hos 1:7). Building on this historical pattern of **God's saving deeds through a charismatic leader arose the concept of a future savior who would fulfill the role of a king anointed with God's Spirit** (cf. Jer 23:5f.).

Salvation may be not only offensive, but also defensive. When opposition comes, one may retreat to a refuge for safety. God is frequently viewed as this refuge for his people; "On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is God" (Ps 62:7 [H 8]). **One who experiences salvation does not need to be tormented by internal anxiety.** It is true that he will have to endure opposition, but God will ensure that his opponents do not destroy him. The protective nature of salvation is seen in other concepts, namely "the shield of salvation" (Ps 18:35 [H 36]), "a helmet of salvation" (Isa 59:17; Eph 6:17), "the garments of salvation" (Isa 61:10). **Thus salvation is not merely a momentary victory on the battlefield; it is also the safety and security necessary to maintain life unafraid of numerous dangers.** As the OT looks for the city of God at the end of the age, it sees that its walls will be called "Salvation" (Isa 60:18). This city is only for the righteous, and it provides all the security attending salvation (Isa 26: I).

Hartley, J. E. (1999). 929 .יָשַׁע In R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr., & B. K. Waltke (Eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (electronic ed., pp. 414–416). Moody Press.

The Israel Times Judges 6-9

MIDIANITES SWARM THE LAND!

Ravages of Hoards Bring Food shortages for Jezreel Valley

The Daily Dish

For the latest scoop

According to anonymous sources, top officials have asked Gideon to be KING! After Gideon's crushing defeat of the Midianite leaders, the possibility seems to be increasingly on everyone's mind. Gideon has refused the offer, citing loyalty to God as King. However, he has made an ephod and named his son, "My father is king" giving rise to speculation about future plans. (Judges 8:18-22)

Weather forecast:

Sunshine for most of the week. Perfect conditions for harvesting crops. Clear nights with winds picking up.

Weekly Ads:

SALE! SALE! SALE!
Fleeces are on sale at a great price! Buy one, get one free!
(Judges 6:36-40)

NEEDED: if you have a clay jar or a shofar to donate to the war effort, call 1-800-4GIDEON. (Judges 7:8)

Need a Dream Interpretation?
Local Midianites skilled in dream interpretation are in the area. Free services available after dark.
(Judges 7:9-14)

Gideon. *Gideon delivered the tribes of Israel from the scourge of seminomadic raiders who pillaged the land at harvesttime (Judg. 6–8). The Midianites and Amalekites appeared out of the deserts like a plague of locusts, encamping in the fields of ripening grain and devouring the land's produce. Using the camel, these invaders moved quickly and retreated into the deserts before organized pursuit could follow. Seven years of oppression left the tribes in the area destitute.*

To relieve the oppression, God selected Gideon, a man of the Abiezerite clan from the village of Ophrah. Gideon's army came from the tribes of Asher, Manasseh, Zebulun, and Naphtali. With three hundred men selected at the Spring of Harod in the Jezreel Valley, Gideon carried out a surprise night attack on the Midianites camped near Endor (cf. Ps. 83:9–11). Blaring trumpets and lighted torches struck fear in the hearts of the invaders who fled southeastward, seeking the safety of the desert. Ephraimites cut off their escape route by seizing the Jordan Fords at Beth-barah, where Oreb and Zeeb, two Midianite chieftains, were captured. Gideon and his men pursued their foe across the Jordan River, passing through Succoth and Penuel along the Wadi Jabbok. Taking a caravan route eastward into the desert, Gideon surprised the Midianites again at the Oasis of Karkor in the Wadi Sirhan. After the victories, the grateful tribal elders asked Gideon to be their king, but Gideon refused, believing that only Yahweh had the right to rule Israel (Judg. 8:22–23).

Brisco, T. V. (1998). *Holman Bible atlas* (pp. 93–94)

ABIMELECH'S TWO FATAL STONES!

Not far from Ophrah, but in the territory of Ephraim, was the ancient Shechem, connected with so much that was most solemn in the history of Israel. **We know the long-standing tribal jealousy of Ephraim and their desire for leadership.** Moreover, as we learn from Judges 9:28, Shechem seems to have retained among its inhabitants the lineal representatives of Hamor, the original "prince" and founder of Shechem in the days of Jacob (Gen. 33:19; 34:2; comp. Josh. 24:32). These would represent, so as speak, the ancient feudal heathen aristocracy of the place, and, of course, the original worshippers of Baal. Shechem seems to have become the centre of Baal worship. …The present rising would in turn be the contending of Baal against the house of Gideon, and his triumph its destruction. It only needed a leader. Considering the authority which the family of Gideon must still have possessed, none better could have been found than one of its own members.

Abimelech seems to have possessed all the courage, vigour, and energy of his father; only coupled, alas! with restless ambition, reckless unscrupulousness, and daring impiety. His real name we do not know: for Abimelech, father-king, or else king-father, seems to have been a by-name, probably suggested by his natural qualifications and his ambition. The plot was well contrived by Abimelech. At his instigation his mother's relatives entered into negotiations with the "citizens" or "householders" of Shechem. The main considerations brought to bear upon them seem to have been: hatred of the house of Gideon, and the fact that Abimelech was a fellow-townsman. This was sufficient. The compact was worthily ratified with Baal's money. Out of the treasury of his temple they gave Abimelech seventy shekels. Such was the value which Israel put upon them! Apparently unresisting, they were all slaughtered upon one stone, like a sacrifice—all but one, Jotham ("Jehovah [is] perfect"), who succeeded in hiding himself, and thus escaped.

This is the first scene. The next brings us once more to "the memorial by the vale" which Joshua had set up, when, at the close of his last address, the people had renewed their covenant with Jehovah (Josh. 24:26, 27). It was in this sacred spot that "the citizens of Shechem and the whole house of Millo" were now gathered to make Abimelech king! Close by, behind it, to the south, rose Gerizim, the Mount of Blessings. On one of its escarpments, which tower 800 feet above the valley, Jotham, the last survivor of Gideon's house, watched the scene. And now his voice rose above the shouts of the people. In that clear atmosphere every word made its way to the listeners below. It was a strange parable he told, peculiarly of the East, that land of parables, and in language so clear and forcible, that it stands almost unique. It is about the Republic of Trees, who are about to elect a king. In turn the olive, the fig tree, and the vine, the three great representatives of fruit-bearing trees in Palestine, are asked. But each refuses; for each has its own usefulness, and inquires with wonder: "Am I then to lose" my fatness, or my sweetness, or my wine, "and to go to flutter above the trees?"

…Jotham had not spoken as a prophet, but his language was prophetic. Three years, not of kingdom, but of rule, and the judgment of God, which had been slumbering, began to descend. Scripture marks distinctly both the Divine agency in the altered feeling of Shechem towards Abimelech, and its import as boding judgment. The course of events is vividly sketched…Abimelech set the Millo on fire, and 1000 persons perished in the flames. Even this did not satisfy his revenge. He next turned his forces against the neighboring town of Thebez. Reduces to the utmost straits, its inhabitants fled to the strong tower within the city. Thither Abimelech pursued them. Almost had the people of Thebez shared the fate of the citizens of Millo, when Abimelech's course was strangely arrested. From the top of the tower a woman cast down upon him an "upper millstone." …As the Rabbis put it, he that had slaughtered his brothers upon a stone, was killed by a stone. Abimelech died as he had lived. Feeling himself mortally wounded, ambitious warrior to the last, he had himself run through by the sword of his armor-bearer, to avoid the disgrace of perishing by the hand of a woman.

Edersheim, A. (1975). Bible History: Old Testament (Vol. 3, pp. 146–152). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

The Israel Times Judges 10-12

TRAGIC LOSS BEFALLS JEPHTHAH!

Jephthah Loses Only Daughter After Ammonite Victory

What did Jephthah really intend by the language of his vow; and did he feel himself bound by it in the literal sense to offer up his daughter as a burnt sacrifice? Assuredly, we shall make no attempt either to explain away the facts of the case, or to disguise the importance of the questions at issue. At the outset we are here met by these two facts: that up to that period Jephthah had both acted and spoken as a true worshipper of Jehovah, and that his name stands emblazoned in that roll of the heroes of the faith which is handed down to us in the Epistle to the Hebrews (11:32). But it is well-nigh impossible to believe that a true worshipper of Jehovah could have either vowed or actually offered a human sacrifice—not to speak of the sacrifice being that of his own and only child. Such sacrifices were the most abhorrent and opposed to the whole spirit and letter of the Law of God (Lev. 18:21; 20:2–5; Deut. 12:31; 18:10), nor do we find any mention of them till the reigns of the wicked Ahaz and Manasseh. Not even Jezebel had ventured to introduce them; and we know what thrill of horror ran through the onlookers, when the *heathen king of Moab offered his son an expiatory sacrifice on the walls of his capital (2 Kings 3:26, etc.). But the difficulty becomes well-nigh insuperable, when we find the name of Jephthah recorded in the New Testament among the heroes of the faith. Surely, no one guilty of such a crime could have found a place there! ...we observe:*

1. That the language of Jephthah's vow implied, from the first, at least the possibility of some human being coming out from the door of his house, to meet him on his return. The original conveys this, and the evident probabilities of the case were strongly in favor of such an eventuality. Indeed, Jephthah's language seems to have been designedly chosen in such general terms as to cover all cases. But it is impossible to suppose that Jephthah would have deliberately *made a vow in which he contemplated human sacrifice; still more so, that Jehovah would have connected victory and deliverance with such a horrible crime*.
2. In another particular, also, the language of Jephthah's vow is remarkable...*It is never said of an animal burnt-offering, that it "shall be to Jehovah"—for the simple reason that, as a burnt-offering, it is such. But where human beings are offered to Jehovah, there the expression is used, as in the case of the first-born among Israel and of Levi (Numb. 3:12, 13). But in these cases it has never been suggested that there was actual human sacrifice*.
3. It was a principle of the Mosaic law, that burnt sacrifices were to be exclusively *males (Lev. 1:3)*.
4. If the loving daughter had devoted herself to *death, it is next to incredible that she should have wished to spend the two months of life conceded to her, not with her broken-hearted father, but in the mountains with her companions*.
5. She bewails not her "maiden age," but her "maidenhood"—not that she dies so young, but that she is to die unmarried. The Hebrew expression for the former would have been quite different from that used in Scripture, which only signifies the latter. But for an only child to die unmarried, and so to leave a light and name extinguished in Israel, was indeed a bitter and heavy judgment, viewed in the light of pre-Messianic times. Compare in this respect especially such passages as Lev. 20:20 and Psalm 78:63. The trial appears all the more withering when we realize, how it must have come upon Jephthah and his only child in the hour of their highest glory, when all earthly prosperity seemed at their command. The greatest and happiest man in Israel becomes in a moment the poorest and the most stricken. Surely, in this vow and sacrifice was the lesson of vows and sacrifices taught to victorious Israel in a manner the most solemn.
6. It is very significant that in 11:39 it is only said, that Jephthah "did with her according to his vow"—not that he actually offered her in sacrifice, while in the latter case the added clause, "and she knew no man," would be utterly needless and unmeaning. *Lastly, we may ask, Who would have been the priest by whom, and where the altar on which, such a sacrifice could have been offered unto Jehovah?*

On all these grounds—its utter contrariety to the whole Old Testament, the known piety of Jephthah, the blessing following upon his vow, his mention in the Epistle to the Hebrews, but especially the language of the narrative itself—we feel bound to reject the idea of any human sacrifice. In what special manner; besides remaining unmarried, the vow of her dedication to God was carried out, we do not feel bound to suggest.

Edersheim, A. (1975). (Vol. 3, pp. 158-162). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

The Israel Times Judges 13-16

PHILISTINE PARTY ROCKS!

Samson's Killer Performance Brings the House Down

The Philistine Fete

You won't want to miss it!

Philistines--Mark your calendars for the BIGGEST Philistine Fete of the year! All the leaders of the Philistine cities will be hosting a huge celebration to god Dagon for finally capturing the Israelite strong man, Samson. Come and join the eating, the drinking, and of course, the entertainment provided by Samson himself! (Judges 16:21-27)

Weather forecast:

Sunshine for most of the week.
Perfect conditions for harvesting crops.
FIRE HAZARD IN EFFECT.
No fire burn in vicinity of crops.

Weekly Ads:

Check out the **New Riddles** Section by Samson on page 4.
Answers can be obtained by writing to Mrs. Samson in Timnah.
(Judges 14:12-14)

Needed: More Volunteers are needed for the Fire Brigade in the Timnah Valley.
(Judges 15:5)

FREE HAIRCUTS! Check out Delilah's Hair Salon for more details.
(Judges 16:18-19)

Samson. As the Philistines expanded their territory into the Shephelah, conflict with Israel was inevitable. The tribes of Dan and Judah claimed portions of these rolling hills and the strategic wadis that led up into the heart of Judah. The Samson stories portray the struggles between Philistines and Israelites for control of the Shephelah.

Samson was a Danite born at Zorah in the hills flanking the eastern Sorek Valley. He married a Philistine woman from nearby Timnah and later fell in love with Delilah, who came from the same area. Betrayed in love, Samson exacted his revenge against the Philistines by slaying thirty men of Ashkelon and setting afire the grain fields surrounding Timnah. Although the treachery of Delilah brought him into the hands of his enemies, his famous strength returned a final time to bring the walls of Dagon's temple crashing down upon the citizens of Gaza. But Samson's deeds failed to relieve Philistine pressure upon Dan. The tribe abandoned its original allotment and migrated north in search of new land (Judg. 18).

Philistine power reached its peak in the mid-eleventh century as they continued to oppress Israel. The Philistine lords were capable military rulers who coordinated their strategy carefully. The Philistine army with its chariots, archers, horsemen, and infantry was superior to Israel's military forces.

Brisco, T. V. (1998). *Holman Bible atlas* (pp. 95–96). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

The Israel Times Judges 13-16

MORE TRAGEDY FOR DANITES!

Manoah's Sons Travel to Gaza to Retrieve Brother's Body

It was in the days of Eli the high priest. Strange and tangled times these, when once again principles rather than men were to come to the front, if Israel was to be revived and saved. The period of the Judges had run its course to the end. The result had been general disorganization, an almost complete disintegration of the tribes, and decay of the sanctuary. But now, just at the close of the old, the new was beginning; or rather, old principles were once more asserted. In Eli the Divine purpose concerning the priesthood, in Samson that concerning the destiny and mission of Israel, were to reappear. In both cases, alike in their strength and in their weakness—in the faithfulness and in the unfaithfulness of its representatives.

The whole meaning of Samson's history is, that he was a Nazarite. His strength lay in being a Nazarite; his weakness in yielding to his carnal lusts and thereby becoming unfaithful to his calling.

The whole meaning of Samson's history is, that he was a Nazarite. His strength lay in being a Nazarite; his weakness in yielding to his carnal lusts and thereby becoming unfaithful to his calling. In both respects he was not only a type of Israel, but, so to speak, a mirror in which Israel could see itself and its history. Israel, the Nazarite people—no achievement, however marvelous, that it could not and did not accomplish! Israel, unfaithful to its vows and yielding to spiritual adultery—no depth of degradation so low, that it would not descend to it! The history of Israel was the history of Samson; his victories were like theirs, till, like him, yielding to the seductions of a Delilah, Israel betrayed and lost its Nazarite strength. And so also with Samson's and with Israel's final repentance and recovery of strength. Viewed in this light, we can not only understand this history, but even its seeming difficulties become so many points of fresh meaning.

We can see why his life should have been chronicled with a circumstantiality seemingly out of proportion to the deliverance he wrought; and why there was so little and so transient result of his deeds. When the Spirit of God comes upon him, he does supernatural deeds; not in his own strength, but as a Nazarite, in the strength of God, by Whom and for Whom he had been set apart before his birth. All this showed the meaning and power of the Nazarite; what deliverance God could work for His people even by a single Nazarite, so that, in the language of prophecy, one man could chase a thousand! Thus also we understand the peculiar and almost spasmodic character of Samson's deeds, as also the reason why he always appears on the scene, not at the head of the tribes, but alone to battle.

If the secret of Samson's strength lay in the faithful observance of his Nazarite vow, his weakness sprung from his natural character. The parallel, so far as Israel is concerned, cannot fail to be seen. And as Samson's sin finally assumed the form of adulterous love for Delilah, so that of his people was spiritual unfaithfulness. Thus, if the period of the Judges reached its highest point in Samson the Nazarite, it also sunk to its lowest in Samson the man of carnal lusts, who yielded his secret to a Delilah. As one has put it: "The strength of the Spirit of God bestowed on the Judges for the deliverance of their people was overcome by the power of the flesh lusting against the Spirit."

Edersheim, A. (1975). (Vol. 3, pp. 164-165). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Judges 17-21 **The Bethlehem Gazette** Ruth

LOCAL LEVITE MAKES IT BIG!

Levite Finds Rare Opportunity After Moving North

As we saw in the opening chapter of the book, the Danites were unable to gain full possession of their allotted territory in the south (1:34). Their migration to the far north, which is recounted here, probably took place quite early in the Judges period. ...*In Laish, which the Danites rename, Micah's shrine is re-opened, as it were, on a new site and under new management (30–31). But the ominous words until the captivity of the land point to the fact that this shrine eventually suffered the same fate as the original one*. The whole story is told with wry humor. There are many superficial similarities to Israel's original conquest of the land (Nu. 13–14; Dt. 1)....It is above all about the false confidence people have **that they can manipulate God with religious objects and institutions**. The Danites essentially made the same mistake as Micah, and their new shrine was doomed from the start, just as surely as Micah's was. Self-serving religion brings God's judgment, not his blessing. *Webb, Barry*. (1994) Judges. (In *New Bible Commentary*)

LOCAL GIRL SAVAGELY KILLED!

Levite Finds Heartbreak After Traveling South

The events chronicled in these chapters are without exception the sort of thing on which one never hears sermons preached, even among Bible-loving people: 'Their hearts whisper softly and tenderly that there is no need to wrestle with such Scripture when they can be meditating on Philippians.'

'There was a man ...' (The narrator) writes here as if there were two of him, as if a couple of story-tellers were swapping yarns. 'Let me tell you,' says the first, 'the story of the Levite who travelled **from Bethlehem in Judah** to the hill country of Ephraim ...' After which the second rejoins, 'Now have you heard the one about the Levite who travelled ***to Bethlehem in Judah*** from the hill country of Ephraim?' The two tales look dispassionately at what it meant in practical terms **to live as a weak, faithless, sinful people who no longer had a Joshua, and did not yet have a David, to keep them straight.** Wilcock, Michael (1992) The Message of Judges: Grace Abounding

FOREIGN GIRL FINDS LOVE!

Naomi's Return Brings Big Stir to Small Town

SAVE THE DATE!

Naomi announces the wedding of daughter-in-law, Ruth, the Moabitess, to kinsman redeemer, Boaz. All invited to join the celebration. Reception following the ceremony. (Ruth 4)

Whereas its opening words recorded famine, migration and deaths, **the end of the book looks forward in hope**. The list of names, covering the period **from the patriarchs to David**, reminds the reader that what happened to Naomi and Ruth was part of the **ongoing saving work of God** through the centuries. Life had meaning because the Lord, who had made clear promises to Abraham, **was active in each generation, revealing his character, keeping his promises and achieving his purposes**. Baldwin, Joyce G. (1994). Ruth (In New Bible Commentary)