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WISDOM COMMENTARY

Volume 7

Judges

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A Michael Glazier Book

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*For my mother, Ingrid Bachmann
and for my father, Sergio A. García Hübscher.
You are the best I could have hoped for*

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ATJ	<i>Ashland Theological Journal</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CV	<i>Communio Viatorum</i>
Dtr	Deuteronomistic (History; Writer); Deuteronomist
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching

ICC	International Critical Commentary
IFT	Introductions in Feminist Theology
ISBL	Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature
ITC	International Theological Commentary
JANES	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JFSR	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenistic Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
PL	Patrologia Latina
RIBLA	<i>Revista de interpretación bíblica latino-americana</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SJOT	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
StBibLit	Studies in Biblical Literature (Lang)
SymS	Symposium Series
TBN	Themes in Biblical Narrative
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

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Foreword

“Tell It on the Mountain”—or, “And You Shall Tell Your Daughter [as Well]”

Athalya Brenner-Idan

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What can Wisdom Commentary do to help, and for whom?

The commentary genre has always been privileged in biblical studies. Traditionally acclaimed commentary series, such as the International Critical Commentary, Old Testament and New Testament Library, Hermeneia, Anchor Bible, Eerdmans, and Word—to name but several—enjoy nearly automatic prestige, and the number of women authors who participate in those is relatively small by comparison to their growing number in the scholarly guild. There certainly are some volumes written by women in them, especially in recent decades. At this time, however, this does not reflect the situation on the ground. Further, size matters. In that sense, the sheer size of the Wisdom Commentary is essential. This also represents a considerable investment and the possibility of reaching a wider audience than those already “converted.”

Expecting women scholars to deal especially or only with what are considered strictly “female” matters seems unwarranted. According to Audre Lorde, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”¹ But this maxim is not relevant to our case. The point of this commentary is not to destroy but to attain greater participation in the interpretive dialogue about biblical texts. Women scholars may bring additional questions to the readerly agenda as well as fresh angles to existing issues. To assume that their questions are designed only to topple a certain male hegemony is not convincing.

At first I did ask myself: is this commentary series an addition to calm raw nerves, an embellishment to make upholding the old hierarchy palatable? Or is it indeed about becoming the Master? On second and third thoughts, however, I understood that becoming the Master is not what this is about. Knowledge is power. Since Foucault at the very least, this cannot be in dispute. Writing commentaries for biblical texts by feminist women and men for women and for men, of confessional as well as non-confessional convictions, will sabotage (hopefully) the established hierarchy but will not topple it. This is about an attempt to integrate more fully, to introduce another viewpoint, to become. What excites me about the Wisdom Commentary is that it is not offered as just an alternative supplanting or substituting for the dominant discourse.

These commentaries on biblical books will retain nonauthoritative, pluralistic viewpoints. And yes, once again, the weight of a dedicated series, to distinguish from collections of stand-alone volumes, will prove weightier.

That such an approach is especially important in the case of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament is beyond doubt. Women of Judaism, Christianity, and also Islam have struggled to make it their own for centuries, even more than they have fought for the New Testament and the Qur’an. Every Hebrew Bible/Old Testament volume in this project is evidence that the day has arrived: it is now possible to read *all* the Jewish canonical books as a collection, for a collection they are, with guidance conceived of with the needs of women readers (not only men) as an integral inspiration and part thereof.

In my Jewish tradition, the main motivation for reciting the Haggadah, the ritual text recited yearly on Passover, the festival of liberation from

1. Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984, 2007), 110–14. First delivered in the Second Sex Conference in New York, 1979.

bondage, is given as “And you shall tell your son” (from Exod 13:8). The knowledge and experience of past generations is thus transferred to the next, for constructing the present and the future. The ancient maxim is, literally, limited to a male audience. This series remolds the maxim into a new inclusive shape, which is of the utmost consequence: “And you shall tell your son” is extended to “And you shall tell your daughter [as well as your son].” Or, if you want, “Tell it on the mountain,” for all to hear.

This is what it’s all about.

Judges 1:1–3:31

Beginnings of a Stormy Venture

Judges 1:1–3:6 is generally taken as a “(double) prologue” (or “Introduction A,” 1:1–2:5, when seen together with the second introduction, “Introduction B,” 2:6–3:6) enveloping the book with its double dénouement (also dubbed “appendix”) in chapters 17–21. That seems to be a remnant of a time when the “real stories” were only those beginning in Judges 3:7 and ending in chapter 16. Accordingly, the remaining chapters were the right frame for those stories yet somehow secondary and definitely ideological. In recent years, some commentaries have reintroduced discussion on the structure of the book and its overall ideology and theology, thereby giving most chapters their due. In other words, it is possible to look at chapters 1:1–3:6 and 17–21 as different from the stories about judges or deliverers (3:7–16:31). But in splitting the book in that way, we should be aware of our own lenses, which determine how we view the book’s structure, themes, and theology.

The text runs smoothly from one episode to the next and cannot be split so easily into clear-cut pericopes. To take just one example, Judges 2:6–9 recaps Joshua’s leadership of the people, his death, and his burial, which is the way the book started in Judges 1:1. It would seem that Judges 2:9 (+ 2:10), then, is a fitting place to close the pericope, seeing it as a kind of envelope structure. On the other hand, most commentaries set the break between Judges 2:5 and 2:6. Why? One may easily imagine

1:1–2:5 and 2:6–3:6 as parallel episodes, both prompted by Joshua’s death but each one looking at its aftermath from a different angle. Imagine someone saying, “Well, we started off very well, didn’t we (1:1–15)? But then, somehow, things got a little out of control (1:16–2:5).” Then a second voice would say: “Now, don’t fool yourself: that generation after Joshua’s death (2:6–10) sinned in great manner, as we know, and we also know the reason was YHWH getting tired of their faithlessness (2:11–3:6).” This commentary sees the subunits as follows: 1:1–15, 16–36; 2:1–5, 6–10, 11–23; 3:1–6, and 7–31.

Prologue A (1:1–2:5)

The Tribes, without Joshua, Start Their Exploits (1:1–4)

The book begins with a kind of orphanhood situation (see “Important Themes” in this volume’s introduction): after Joshua’s death, the Israelites inquired of YHWH, “Who shall go up first for us?” The verb שָׁעַל usually refers to an oracular inquiry, and this may be the case here, although there is no sanctuary for the oracular consultation or specialist mentioned (priest or prophet, male or female). Generally, oracles are obscure, so one should not miss the double entendre. In this case, the answer given, “Judah will go up,” may refer to that particular situation, but it may also refer to the late monarchic and postexilic concerns about “which tribe remains and which tribe will lead the way back to the land.”¹

From now on (according to the story line, not chronologically or factually speaking) there is no overall leader, none directly appointed and anointed by YHWH, whose authority would be (almost) unquestioned and who would be in direct contact with the divine, as Moses and Joshua had been. The situation points toward centralization over against decentralization (of power and of tribal organization). This will be one key issue at least until David is recognized as king over all Israel.

Joshua’s death without a successor signals a paradigmatic change in Israel’s leadership, a change made all the clearer in discussions, such as whether or not Israel needed a king, in the last chapters of Judges and the first portion of the book of Samuel. Even though at first sight kingship came much later to Israel, there are king-like hints in Joshua’s and

1. Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges: A Commentary*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 3–4.

Judges 1:1-4

^{1:1}After the death of Joshua, the Israelites inquired of the LORD, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?" ²The LORD said, "Judah shall go up. I hereby give the land into his hand." ³Judah said to his brother Simeon, "Come up with me into the territory allotted to me, that we may fight against the Canaanites; then I too will go with you into the territory allotted to you." So Simeon went with him. ⁴Then Judah went up and the LORD gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand; and they defeated ten thousand of them at Bezek.

Gideon's descriptions, not to mention Abimelech's claim to rule (Judg 9) and Jair's thirty sons each riding their donkey and owning thirty towns in Gilead (Judg 10:3-5).

A different issue is the historical veracity of the text, about which there is currently much debate. In a sense, "centralization versus decentralization" was, is, and will be a key issue for people and society. The more centralized a society is the less room there is for diversification and, thus, for people other than "the ideal male" (i.e., other than the heterosexual, upper-class, educated, landed male with son/s to inherit). Centralization may mean governmental decisions, symbolic structures, even the hierarchical organization of a group or a land, or propaganda. And although centralization may be a helpful way of organizing diverse elements and giving them a sense of belonging and a particular location with regard to the whole, it has often meant suppression of differing voices and perspectives, from the smallest settlers described in the book of Judges to today's migrants, landless farmers, feminist groups, indigenous groups, and others. Perhaps the million-dollar question is how to provide (and then keep) a sense of unity between groups who have little in common?

Perhaps the story would have resulted otherwise if Joshua had continued to lead the people into the land. For better or for worse, Judges marks a new start because the strong leader, Joshua (following another one, Moses), is dead. His death is not to be celebrated, of course, but it moved (or should have moved) the people into a more responsible attitude. For one thing, had Joshua directed the land-taking operation, Judah and Simeon would not have come together. Joshua would have been the strong man commanding the situation and no "brother" would have asked for another brother's help. At least, this is what I gather as I compare this story with the one in Joshua 1:10-18, where the two and a

half eastern tribes, which have already been allotted their land, agree to help the remaining tribes in their fight for their land. The tribes respond to Joshua not only with actions but also with words that sound very similar to God's own words shortly before: "Only be strong and courageous" (Josh 1:9, 18). No doubt, the unity of the people is fundamental in both books, Joshua and Judges, as a prerequisite and as a consequence of possessing the land. But in Joshua that unity comes from the top down, so to speak: God commanded Moses that the eastern tribes should come along, Moses commanded the tribes, and now, Joshua repeats the same command and sees that it is carried out. In Judges 1, on the other hand, it is the selected tribe, Judah, who asks his brother to come along. There is a more horizontal kind of brotherhood or unity. Since this kind of horizontal relationship is extremely hard to find when there is a strong leader through whose hands all cords run, in a sense, being an orphan is an asset.

Repeated references to the eastern tribes suggest a countertheme in Joshua, that of geographical and ethnic division and pluralism. The Deuteronomists take pains to assert the unity of Israel, but their very emphasis indicates that unity could not be taken for granted. . . . The compilers' struggle with pluralism and division in relationship to the unity and identity of Israel is also seen in the stories about different ethnic groups such as Rahab's family (Josh 2:1-24; 6:22-25) and the Gibeonites (Joshua 9).²

Judah Takes Jerusalem (1:5-8)

After the first verses, in which this situation of new beginnings, new leadership, and settlement on the land are presented, verses five and following give the first example of what this whole enterprise is about. While Judah goes up and fights, it is YHWH who gives the land to them and defeats the enemies. The names of the different warring peoples and of the places taken are several and not all easily identifiable today. But the message is clear: Israel has the responsibility of taking the land from its inhabitants as a demonstration of their obedience to YHWH. And YHWH will give them the land as a demonstration of YHWH's faithfulness to the covenant made.

2. Carolyn Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 17.

Judges 1:5-8

⁵They came upon Adoni-bezek at Bezek, and fought against him, and defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. ⁶Adoni-bezek fled; but they pursued him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and big toes. ⁷Adoni-bezek said, “Seventy kings with their thumbs and

big toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has paid me back.” They brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there.

⁸Then the people fought against Jerusalem and took it. They put it to the sword and set the city on fire.

The right of the land’s inhabitants to dwell on it is not brought up in the text, of course. What would seem to be a modern question, in fact, is not. Already in the biblical record, when the people (Israel) gain a particular land, it is presented as their right over the Perizzites or Canaanites; however, when Israel loses it to an invader (e.g., Assyria, Babylon, Rome), it is never the invader’s right to claim that land. Yes, Israel’s disobedience brought their loss, but it is always their land. Strangely, rights to a conquered land never expire, even in the twenty-first century!

Judges 1:5-8 offers the first war report, and immediately afterward the lens zooms in and a concrete example of the war’s consequences for a defeated king is given. Here it is Adoni-bezek, lord of Bezek, whose thumbs and big toes are cut off as he is caught fleeing. Adoni-bezek (Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem according to Josh 10:1-3) gives his own verdict against himself: “Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has paid me back” (Judg 1:7). It is characteristic of the Deuteronomist to put into non-Israelites’ mouths (e.g., Rahab in Josh 2) some of his main theological perspectives.³

Considering the opening-like character of the chapter and its Deuteronomistic overtones, the reason for Adoni-bezek’s words might be

3. See the introduction on foreignness. See also Dora Rudo Mbuwayesango, “Canaanite Women and Israelite Women in Deuteronomy: The Intersection of Sexism and Imperialism,” in *Postcolonial Interventions: Essays in Honor of R. S. Sugirtharajah*, ed. Tat-Siong Benny Liew (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 45–57; Kah-Jin Jeffrey Kuan and Mai-Anh Le Tran, “Reading Race Reading Rahab: A ‘Broad’ Asian American Reading of a ‘Broad’ Other,” in Liew, *Postcolonial Interventions*, 27–44; Steed V. Davidson, “Gazing (at) Native Women: Rahab and Jael in Imperializing and Postcolonial Discourses,” in *Postcolonialism and the Hebrew Bible: The Next Step*, ed. Roland Boer (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013), 69–92.

other than only “tit for tat.” Susan Niditch observes, “The central theme is that power comes and goes, for the mighty fall. He who inflicts punishment may, with God’s will, become the afflicted. . . . The rhythmic proverb, ‘As I did, so God has repaid me,’ is less an expression of Israelite or Judahite triumphalism than a warning, colored with pathos, about the vagaries of power.”⁴ Likewise, Tammi Schneider sees here a prophetic utterance, whereby “in the words of a foreign ruler the Israelites are already acting like the Canaanites.”⁵ In this way, Adoni-bezek’s daily life was severely hardened beyond the impossibility of being priest or king.⁶

The story of Adoni-bezek stands in contrast to that of King Jehoiachin, who is presented as eating at the Babylonian king’s table (2 Kgs 25:29). Even a defeated and humiliated king who sat at the king’s table every day of his life must have gotten help with his everyday needs, I can imagine: there were plenty of prisoners and a whole “apparatus” to live a bearable existence in Babylon, even if blinded. This would not have been the case for Adoni-bezek, however, for it would have been against the socio-political model brought to the land by this group of escapees from Egypt.

Another way of reading Judges 1–3 is to relate it to the larger story of which it is a part, Genesis–2 Kings. Adoni-bezek speaks of captured kings eating at his table. At the end of Kings, with the nation devastated and the people scattered, Jehoiachin, king of Judah, eats at the table of his captor, the king of Babylon. Israel’s dispossession, insists the narrator, has been divine punishment. Given this ending, Adoni-bezek’s story reads like a parable. As Israel constantly breaks its covenant with God, as in the first chapters of Judges and as the story unfurls, what would be its just requital? A thumb for a thumb, so to speak, would have brought the story to a swift conclusion. As it turns out, the larger story from Judges to Kings seems to suggest more like a thumb for 70 thumbs. God “has a way of offering two springs of water instead of one, and requiting one thumb for seventy.”⁷

4. Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 39, 40.

5. Schneider, *Judges*, 7.

6. John C. Yoder, *Power and Politics in the Book of Judges: Men and Women of Valor* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 115–25.

7. David M. Gunn, *Judges through the Centuries* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 31.

Rape-Atrocity in Judges

Atrocity is an extreme act of evil or pain that physically harms another person. It is portrayed in Judges through a variety of forms, most repetitiously dismemberment and impalement. Characters minor and major, protagonist and antagonist, Israelite and non-Israelite, female and male, peasantry and royalty, as well as the socially vulnerable and powerful are all atrocified. No single group is isolated for atrocification in Judges. Rather, atrocity is the great equalizer. Adoni-bezek, King Eglon, Commander Sisera, Commanders Oreb and Zeeb, Abimelech, Samson, and the Levite's concubine all suffer the same fate—atrocification, gender-based shame or humiliation (GBSH), and death.

Beatrice Heuser's work on atrocity and military insurgency isolates three categories of atrocities deployed against warriors, but most significantly against civilian populations—rape, mutilation, and torture.⁸ Where torture-atrocities are rare in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Adoni-bezek) and mutilation-atrocities are common (e.g., Eglon, Sisera, Oreb, and Zeeb), rape-atrocities are selectively portrayed across the Deuteronomist History and

Prophets. Female characters (e.g., Levite's concubine) and female-personified cities (e.g., Zion) are portrayed suffering malevolent sexual acts in times of war emphasizing two factors—powerlessness and shame or humiliation. The premortem sex act is public and made spectacle by rape participants or onlookers. Male characters, rather, can be portrayed suffering torture- and mutilation-atrocity primarily and rape-atrocity through allusion not indication.

In Judges, select non-Israelite male characters suffer mutilation-atrocity—where a part or area of the body is the focus of the attack with force or repetition greater than needed to kill (i.e., stomach/womb, head)—and to which rape is alluded through corresponding GBSH. In these cases, objects other than genitals serve as penetrative objects (i.e., weapons, household tools); spatial location of altercation, penetration location, and body positions frame the atrocification pseudo-sexually. Mutilation-atrocity that alludes to rape-atrocity of male characters emphasizes power subversion and victim-shaming, thus compounding the dehumanization of the character.

Male and female characters function as assailant and

8. Beatrice Heuser, "Atrocities in Theory and Practice: An Introduction," *Civil Wars* 14, no. 1 (2012): 2–28.

atrocified. Though gender roles portrayed in biblical literature commonly reflect the patriarchal socio-cultural norms of their biblical Levant production, often ascribing power to men and powerlessness to women, subverted expectations are threaded through the rhetoric of Judges. Women exhibit power with great variety—Achsa (1:12-15), Deborah (4-5), Jael (4-5), and the certain woman with an upper millstone (9:53)—and men made powerless are depicted with nuance and particularity—Adoni-bezek (1:4-7), Eglon (3:12-30), Sisera (4-5), Zebah and Zalmunna (8:5-21), Samson (13-16).

Descriptions of rape-atrocity in Judges range in detail: direct indication (i.e., Levite's

concubine), through gender-based shame (i.e., Eglon and Sisera), indirect indication (i.e., daughters of Shiloh), secondary indirect indication (i.e., Sisera's mother). The atrocified characters never speak of the events themselves, for their stories end at the spectacle of their death post-attack. Their character bodies are splayed for other characters and readers to encounter the horror with the twists of humor, celebration, and ghastliness built into the rhetoric of each episode. Judges captures the malevolence and trauma of rape. For where does one begin to speak about acts so dehumanizing that today's world considers it a crime against humanity?

Corinna Guerrero

Achsa, the Right Wife for the Conqueror Othniel (1:9-15)

After defeating Jerusalem, Judah went further south, with several successes, identified by geographical location and by names from defeated kings. Just as the Jerusalem report is complemented by the Adoni-bezek anecdote, the Debir/Kiriath-sepher report is adorned by another anecdote, to which we turn soon. The number of names (geographical and personal) and name changes in this chapter are remarkable, many of which have to do with cities conquered and renamed. They reflect Israel's identity concerns as chapter 1 was written or added to the book (in postexilic times).⁹

Several personal names have already appeared in this chapter, many of which go unnoticed because they belong to the "Canaanites" and are meant to be dismissed: Sheshai, Ahiman, Talmai, and, of course, Adoni-bezek.

9. I have dealt more thoroughly with these issues in "¿Cómo hacerse un nombre sin negar otros nombres? Identidad y conquista a partir de Jueces 1," in *Con la mirada en el Mesías, de la mano del pueblo: Libro en homenaje a Néstor O. Míguez*, ed. Pablo Ferrer and Daniel Berós (Buenos Aires: ISEDET, 2014), 15-48.

Judges 1:9–15

⁹Afterward the people of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who lived in the hill country, in the Negeb, and in the lowland. ¹⁰Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron (the name of Hebron was formerly Kiriath-arba); and they defeated Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmi.

¹¹From there they went against the inhabitants of Debir (the name of Debir was formerly Kiriath-sepher). ¹²Then Caleb said, "Whoever attacks Kiriath-

sepher and takes it, I will give him my daughter Achsah as wife." ¹³And Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it; and he gave him his daughter Achsah as wife. ¹⁴When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for a field. As she dismounted from her donkey, Caleb said to her, "What do you wish?" ¹⁵She said to him, "Give me a present; since you have set me in the land of the Negeb, give me also Gullath-mayim." So Caleb gave her Upper Gullath and Lower Gullath.

None of these have any patronymic; the most that they own as they are defeated is their first names. Then, there are those general names, including "Perizzites" and "Canaanites," and those of Israel's tribes (so far, Judah and his brother Simeon). With no introduction at all, now in Judges 1:12 the narrator says, "And Caleb said [ויאמר כלב]." So, here there is a new character, yet not quite new. For the reader will recall that Joshua and Caleb were the only two spies from the delegation of twelve sent by Moses to spy the land who came back thinking the land could be conquered (Num 13–14). That the narrator takes for granted that readers will recognize Caleb is evident also in the fact that he is not even identified by his father's name, "Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite," as in Numbers 32:12 and other texts.

There seem to be conflated traditions with regard to Caleb's ancestry (evident also in the different textual variants), as his nephew or brother Othniel is always presented as son of Kenaz or Kenezite but not related to Jephunneh, or there may be here looser family ties. Be that as it may, Caleb is, in Judges, the only one who remains from the older generation, the generation that experienced the exodus, the generation punished with death because of their lack of faith. In this sense, Caleb may have been even more important than Joshua to have survived him. Maybe he was just younger and survived him. Or maybe he was less of a strong leader, the ideal nexus to ensure the first steps into the land, until the first judge be appointed. We cannot know; the text does not tell us what his abilities were or what were God's reasons to keep him to survive Joshua. A few texts, like Deuteronomy 1:36, say it was "because of his complete fidelity to the LORD."

Caleb makes a rather dramatic entrance into the scene, uttering a promise to a would-be hero: “Whoever attacks Kiriath-sepher and takes it, I will give him my daughter Achsah as wife” (Judg 1:12). There are several interesting aspects to this short sentence. First of all, there is the patriarchal aspect, which allows him to give away his daughter as a trophy—an aspect of society to which we will come back soon.¹⁰ Second, there is the assumption that his daughter Achsah is worth the risk of taking an enemy city. Third, the village to be taken holds the telling names of “the village of the book” (קריית-ספר), then changed into the “holiest village” or the “village of the speech” (דביר), about whose significance we may speculate but may not know.¹¹ Finally, I wonder whether such a promise could be made and was in effect made by any father or whether it was possible because of Caleb’s leadership, a leadership position that would not be surprising in response to his stand, already leading in a sense, as the spies had come back and he and Joshua had been vocal in advocating for YHWH. Nevertheless, nowhere in Joshua or Judges, or elsewhere for that matter, is that leadership made explicit.

The hero who gets the city and the wife is Othniel, the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother. Othniel is the first to be introduced as judge in chapter 3, but there is no official presentation for him as yet, only in relational terms, as son and as younger brother. In good old Abrahamic fashion, Othniel marries his closest kin, his cousin (or niece), Caleb’s daughter Achsah. Beyond historical or even narrative accuracy,¹² it would also be possible to see in this story an argument about political alliances through marriage as ideal for this new people. Caleb is given a voice, Othniel is presented as the bravest soldier, Achsah is given the best possible husband, political intermarriage is affirmed, and the Canaan-

10. According to Shulamit Valler, “The Story of Jephthah’s Daughter in the Mi-drash,” in *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 4, 2nd ser. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 50–55, Caleb’s and Jephthah’s vows were inappropriate because they put people other than themselves at risk.

11. Danna Nolan Fewell, “Deconstructive Criticism: Achsah and the (E)razed City of Writing,” in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 124, states that “the first bits of slippery language that we notice are the place-names.”

12. According to Josh 14:6–15, Caleb was eighty-five years old as he claimed the region of Hebron, drove away its inhabitants the Anakim, and gave rest to the land, and he died at 110 (Judg 2:8). “Caleb’s younger brother” may apply to Othniel or to Kenaz.

ites—well, they perish, as decreed by the God, who is taking possession of the land. Mieke Bal also considers this marriage a “triple proper” gift:

The gift of Achsah, the daughter of Caleb, to the victor of the city of books is promised in a vow that functions as the perfect riddle: its outcome is unpredictable while its answer, in retrospect, produces the *gibbor* who is to be the model judge. The military issue is “proper”: the city to be conquered is part of the promised land. . . . The gift is also “proper” on the level of sexual relations, since it is not only endogamous within the tribe, but even within the clan, the family. . . . Chiefhood is thus handed over from elder to younger brother. In this respect, the marriage between Achsah and Othniel is a model also in that it avoids the problem of the conflict between patrilocy and virilocy, both being of the same clan. A-conflictual, the gift is triple proper and can be seen as the core which generates, by antithesis, the problematic cases that elaborate on each of this gift’s “properties.”¹³

Othniel is the only one among the twelve leaders (saviors or judges) who is depicted in what would be similar to a modern Western heterosexual, monogamic family situation.

Another issue raised by this passage concerns whether Caleb, Othniel, and Achsah are Israelites or not. This is important because Caleb is the first man and Achsah the first woman to receive land belonging to the territory of Judah. According to the Joshua account (Josh 14:6-15; 15:13-19), Caleb the son of Jephunneh, a non-Israelite, a Kenizzite, was given land because of his faithful service as a spy. At the very beginning of Judges the three names reappear, but now he is only “Caleb” while his youngest brother is “Othniel, the son of Kenaz” (Judg 1:13). Since Judah is given the honor of starting the land-taking and this is the first recorded taking of enemy land, it seems to imply that Caleb (thus, his daughter) and Othniel belong to Judah.¹⁴ The issue is more important in Judges than in Joshua because of its exemplary character accorded by being set at the very beginning of the book.

13. Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 149.

14. Most commentators take this position; see, for instance, Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, 131, who describes them as belonging to “two tribal groups closely associated with Judah,” while on p. 95 she had taken them to be non-Israelites (probably because that is how they are described in the book of Joshua). This would accord also with the ambiguous biblical witness; compare Num 34:19, which reads, “These are the names of the men: Of the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh,” with Num 32:12, which says, “Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite.”

Sexual Minorities (SM) versus Family Values

Of the twelve liberators-caudillos ("judges," six **major** and six *minor*), all except one appear to be sexual minorities.¹⁵

	1. Othniel , 3:7-11	Achsah, wife (1:11-15)
SM	2. Ehud , 3:12-30	Single?
SM	3. <i>Shamgar</i> , 3:31	Single?
SM	4. Deborah , 4:1-5:31	Prophetess, woman/wife? of/from Lappidoth (4:4)
SM	5. Gideon , 6:1-8:35	Polygamist, seventy children + concubine
SM	6. <i>Tola</i> , 10:1-2	Single
SM	7. <i>Jair</i> , 10:3-5	Polygamist, thirty children
SM	8. Jephthah , 10:6-12:7	Bastard, mother = prostitute (11:1); virgin daughter (11:37-38) sacrificed in fulfillment of Jephthah's vow
SM	9. <i>Ibzan</i> , 12:8-10	Polygamist, thirty daughters and thirty sons
SM	10. <i>Elon</i> , 12:11-12	Single
SM	11. <i>Abdon</i> , 12:13-15	Polygamist, forty children and thirty grandchildren
SM	12. Samson , 13:1-16:31	Married, separated + prostitute + Delilah

In addition, Judges mentions two other sexual minorities: Micah (17:1-13) and the Levite of Ephraim with his concubine (19:1-10).

Taking his cue from the mischievous Samson (Judg 15:4-5), Martin Luther described his two principal enemies (the Vatican and the Anabaptists) as two female foxes that appeared to fight each other but actually were tied tail to tail, since both exalted a human word (from the pope or from the sect's prophets) above the Word of God in the Scriptures. Similarly, traditional commentaries and modern feminist studies, usually so opposite, have something in common: they look with disapproval on all the

arrangements and adventures in Judges that did not support traditional family values. It is very difficult to imagine, however, that the authors of the individual narratives and of the two Deuteronomistic writings shared this perspective. Of the twelve "judges," Othniel (the first, 3:7-11; 1:11-15) is the only one who is presented with a wife (Achsah, an admirable Israelite woman), while Samson (the last, 13-16) is the one who enjoyed the most sexual adventures. Of the ten male liberators-judges after Othniel, we have four polygamists (Gideon, with his concubine; Jair; Ibzan; Abdon); four bachelors (homosexuals? Ehud, Shamgar, Tola, and Elon); Jephthah, who abandoned his

15. By "sexual minorities" the author refers to people who are not said to be in a heterosexual marriage.

wife; and Samson, “sleeping with the enemy” (his Philistine wife), later with a prostitute, and, finally, fatally seduced by Delilah. And regarding the only female judge, “Lappidoth” (feminine plural, a name without parallels) may indicate another woman or a place and not a husband. Such a conclusion fits better with the strong personality of Deborah and with the fact that she continually appears in the text with Barak at her side and not “Lappidoth.” We might easily suppose that she was a lesbian, since she seems a great deal like another military heroine, Joan of Arc, burned at the stake by the English for insisting on wearing male clothing (see Deut 22:5).

The scarcity of any biblical support for modern family values is due to the fact that in the Hebrew Bible the patriarchal “house” is larger than the modern nuclear family, while New Testament leaders (Jesus, Paul, etc.) prefer something narrower: unmarried itinerant teachers rather than married couples with children (see Rom 16). Like the prophets and prophetesses, the caudillos-liberators of Judges appear to be people of the Spirit, sexual minorities like the shamans, almost without exception. In addition to its lack of exemplary marriages, Judges describes various friendships between males that appear to have a homoerotic flavor (see Micah and the Levite, in Judg 17–19, whose most intimate relationships appear to be with males except for Micah’s mother).

In addition to the first judge, Othniel (3:7–11) with his wife Achsah (1:11–15), the only respectable couple in Judges are Manoah and his anonymous wife (13:2–24), the pious parents of the scandalous last judge, Samson. At the beginning, however, the wife is a kind of sexual minority since she is “sterile,” according to the prescientific concepts of infertility (13:2–3). Although the author of the account dignified Manoah by preserving his name, the angel of Yahweh preferred to dignify the wife and first appeared twice to her and only later to the husband (cp. the angel who appeared to Mary in Luke 1:26–38 and Joseph in Matthew 1:20–21; 2:13, 19–20).

Modern women may scorn Samson for being a “womanizer,” but it is quite doubtful that the authors of the narratives and the Deuteronomistic editors who incorporated them into their framework shared this disdain. Instead of disqualifying Samson, we can learn how God anoints “unworthy” human beings with God’s Spirit and does not allow certain sexual weaknesses to disqualify them for God’s service (see Cyrus, Isa 45). We should not be surprised that the Spirit of Yahweh, who gave Samson so much physical energy, also had its manifestation in the erotic/affectionate sphere—although we should recognize the lack of wisdom and justice in the sexual life of the last liberator.

Without doubt the final narratives (the rape of the Levite's concubine and the resulting civil war, Judg 19–21) illustrate the urgency of a new order (the monarchy), but such recognition does not justify the conclusion that the book describes a continual degeneration. Best recognize that the individual Judges narratives support no rigid philosophy/theology of the history—neither purely cyclical nor degenerative. The individual stories are “squeezed into” the Deuteronomistic framework (with its insistence on idolatry as almost the only sin), but this framework squeeze cannot eliminate the strong manifestations of individuality and strength that reflect the diversity of God's ways in history and God's delight in carrying out the divine project through quite diverse human beings always ready to surprise us. A wise hermeneutic in the interpretation of Judges must always maintain a strong dialectic between the framework's Deuteronomistic theology and the individuality inherent in each narrative.

Ehud (3:12–30), the liberator-leader who freed Israel from the oppression of Eglon, the fat Moabite king, was both unmarried and left-handed. Although Qoheleth/*Ecclesiastes* manifests a certain scorn against left-handed persons (10:2) and many biblical texts reflect

the common prejudices of the majority, which gives special honor to the right hand (see Jesus seated “at the right hand of God” in Ps 110; Matt 22:44; Col 3:1; Heb 1:13; and in the Apostles' Creed), the subversive role that Deborah and other women played in Judges subverts patriarchal prejudices. Similarly, Ehud fulfills his function in the face of the common prejudices against left-handed persons—prejudices embodied in the vocabulary and in the common expressions in almost any language: see “right,” whose omnipresence in English subtly supports traditional oppressive ideologies, both secular and religious. In 1963 the Quakers of England declared that “to be homosexual is to be sexually left-handed”—a prophetic perception, since it indicated that a homosexual orientation is simply a normal human variant and not a perversion, a degeneration, a vice or an illness. As the second of the twelve liberators-leaders, Ehud by no means represents a degeneration, compared with the first judge Othniel. On the contrary, the text highlights, with detailed description, his astute military strategy to triumph against more powerful enemies-oppressors. The Hebrew text literally says Ehud was “restricted” with reference to his right hand but, as a “disabled” person, he learned to utilize this limitation and

to develop the capacity of his left hand to a surprising and effective degree.¹⁶ According to prescientific concepts, everyone prefers the right hand and relationships with the opposite sex, and to be left-handed or homosexual is an indication of a problem. Ironically, Judges informs us that Ehud, the left-handed one, was of the tribe

of Benjamin (3:15, literally, “son of the right hand”), and at the end of the book we are told that seven hundred of the best warriors of this tribe were left-handed (20:15-16). By no means should we conclude that Ehud, the left-handed person, represented a degeneration compared with Othniel.

Thomas Hanks¹⁷

The name Achsah (“bangles, adornments”) appears in the Bible five times (three of which occur in our text in Judges and one more in its parallel in Josh 15). In Joshua, she “is one of only two women to be identified,” as noted by Lillian Klein.¹⁸ There is finally a genealogical note in 1 Chronicles 2:49, where she is mentioned as Caleb’s daughter alongside several male relatives, mentioned before her (brothers, half-brothers, etc.). This is interesting, for daughters appear alongside sons when they are so weighty on their own merit that they cannot be erased, such as Miriam the prophet and singer. Otherwise, they come to the fore when there are no sons, such as Zelophehad’s five daughters (Num 26:33). The most telling case for their appearance alongside male relatives is when they “mean trouble.” Dinah the daughter of Jacob (Gen 34:1) and Tamar the daughter of David (2 Sam 13:1) are some of the stories to be recalled.¹⁹ Which of these reasons merit the Chronicler’s remembrance of Achsah? There is no trouble associated with her in the text; centuries of exegesis, however, have also managed to make her into a nagging wife.²⁰ Achsah’s surprising appearance mounted on a donkey to request from Caleb springs of water is reminiscent of Goddess Anat’s “adolescent” behavior.²¹

16. Schneider, *Judges*, 47–49.

17. Thomas Hanks, *Subversive Hebrew Bible*, Judges 9–11, at: <http://www.fundotrasovejas.org.ar/ingles/ingles.html>.

18. Lillian R. Klein, “Achsah: What Price This Prize?,” in *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 4, 2nd ser. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 18.

19. Also when there are no sons, such as Zelophehad’s five daughters (Num 26:33).

20. Gunn, *Judges through the Centuries*, 25–28; Klein, “Achsah,” 23.

21. Neil H. Walls, *The Goddess Anat in Ugaritic Myth*, SBLDS 135 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 94.

Verse 14 sets her on the scene. Three verbs are used, all of which allow for more than a unique interpretation. The first one is an infinitive of the verb בוא, “to come, to go into,” with a third feminine singular suffix. The fact that it is not a finite verb allows the suffix to work as subject or as object of the verb. Thus, most translations have “when she came to him” (although the Spanish Reina Valera version [rev. 1995] has “when she was leaving with him,” “cuando ella se iba con él”). Schneider is right that the reverse interpretation is equally possible and, since the verb “to enter” often has a sexual connotation, and this is the first verse after their marriage arrangement, it may be understood as “As she entered her husband’s wedding chamber.”²² If this interpretation is correct, the reference to sexual intercourse would be yet one more connection between Achsah and the dismembered woman in Judges 19. The second verb to be noted is the third feminine of the root סוּח translated as “urged” (see “Translation Matters” box).

TRANSLATION MATTERS

On verse 14, the MT parses the verb סוּח as third feminine causative, “allure” or “instigate” (subject, “she”; object, “him”: Achsah would urge Othniel to request water basins from Caleb). The LXX (followed by several modern scholars) inverted them, so that he is the subject of the action: if the lands belong to her father, it must be (a greedy) Othniel who entices Caleb’s daughter to ask for them. Considering that it is Achsah who goes to make a request from her father, the LXX seems to have corrected the verb subject to agree with the actual action. On the other hand, ascribing the plan to Othniel steals any initiative from her, making her only the puppet of her husband’s vision (and turning Othniel into a manipulative husband). Another proposal is taking the infinitive “to ask” as a gerund.²³ In this way, Othniel is absent: he has no business at all between a daughter and her father.

Finally, there are several proposals for the verb צנה, translated “dis-mounted,” because Caleb’s question to her, “What’s the matter?” seems to imply some kind of strange action on her behalf. It may well be, however, that what prompted his surprise (if that is indeed conveyed by his question) is the sight of a married woman coming alone on a donkey

22. Schneider, *Judges*, 12.

23. Paul G. Mosca, “Who Seduced Whom? A Note on Joshua 15:18//Judges 1:14,” *CBQ* 46 (1984): 21.

(implying a long-distance trip), unaccompanied by her husband and perhaps unexpectedly—just as the *pīlegeš*-wife's unexpected appearance at her father's house must have taken him by surprise (Judg 19:2).²⁴ The verb appears in third feminine singular form only in this story, in its parallel in Joshua, and in Judges 4:21 to describe Jael's action when she pierces the tent peg through Sisera's temple. Thus, a meaning in the line of letting fall (an object or one's body) would cover the three instances. On the other hand, the Greek and Latin versions add sighing and crying to her appearance. This would comply with the idea (still in vogue) that women would get more if they appeal to male compassion.

In verse 15 we have Achsah's only utterance (along with its parallel in Josh 15). According to the MT, as she dismounted, Caleb asked her, "What do you wish?" or "What is the matter?" as if realizing or knowing already she had come with a request.²⁵ Achsah then asked her father for springs or pools along with the land, getting the Upper and Lower Gullot (1:15). From a different angle, William Hallo looks at this short story in relation to the proverb on the leeches (Prov 30:15a) and the two subterranean springs called "of the upper leech" and "of the lower leech," respectively: "What we have then is, on the one hand, an enigmatic proverb about two insatiable leeches, and, on the other, the story of Achsah importuning her father for a blessing and receiving upper and lower pool(s) or well(s) near the city of Devir (= Khirbet Rabud) which to this day is located near 'the upper well of the leech' and 'the lower well of the leech', respectively."²⁶ I find most challenging Hallo's attempt to connect dissimilar references, such as the proverb of the leeches, the story of Achsah, and the modern Arabic name of the two pools identified by archaeologists as the probable location of Debir.²⁷ What deserves further consideration here is his comment on Achsah as a *femme fatale* and spoiled child who runs to her father crying "gimme, gimme."²⁸

What to do with such a view? The inner-biblical allusion to the leech, detected by Hallo, may have been intended by the author when the

24. Schneider, *Judges*, 14.

25. Gunn, *Judges through the Centuries*, 25.

26. William W. Hallo, "New Light on the Story of Achsah," in *Inspired Speech: Prophecy in the Ancient Near East; Essays in Honour of Herbert B. Huffmon*, ed. Louis Stulman and John Kaltner (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 332.

27. Usually Moshe Kochavi ("Khirbet Rabud = Debir," *Tel Aviv* 1 [1974]: 2–33) is quoted on this identification, also supported by later bibliography.

28. Hallo, "New Light on the Story of Achsah," 331.

verb יָהַב was used instead of נָתַן, but it may as well have been a hermeneutical consideration unintended by the author. But even if intended, who are we to say she was or was not a spoiled child? Achsah is not the only woman in Judges accused of that, as we will realize.²⁹ And why not? The biblical text neither supports nor denies it, since it gives her so little chance to express herself or her story. And parents—here a father—have spoiled sons and daughters throughout the centuries, to their children's harm. Worse: it is a patriarchal mechanism, by which to compensate the daughters' loss by marriage and the daughters' (and wives') submission by spoiling them. For in the end, what is given or accorded and what is denied in the spoiling act comes from the father's will, not the daughter's right.

Spoiled or not, this is the first nonmilitary story in the book, even though Achsah's marriage to Othniel is the outcome of the battle against and destruction of Kiriath-sepher. The positive answer to her request of water pools from her father may be read as an auspicious model to the way women relate to their husbands and fathers and to the land and its resources.

Noting several unconventional roles ascribed to women in Judges, Susan Ackerman has produced a balanced analysis of Israelite society, in which Jael, Sisera's mother, Delilah, and others are seen against the background of ancient Near Eastern mythological characters, particularly the goddess Anath. One of those characters is Achsah, whom she sees "as assertive, as practical, and as one who, at least to some degree, can lay claim to land ownership." This picture leads Ackerman to conclude that the picture has some grays besides blacks and whites:

Judges at first glance seems to be a book about men. It is about the great men who led Israel during her premonarchical days. . . . It is about the mighty fighters who prevailed over Israel's foes. . . . It is about men's cunning strategies that confounded their enemies. . . . Yet scattered throughout this book of men there are numerous "Achsahs," women whose stories are interspersed with the tales of men and women who, like Achsah, exert themselves in the narrative as actors in their own right.³⁰

29. Pamela Tamarkin Reis, "Spoiled Child: A Fresh Look at Jephthah's Daughter," *Prooftexts* 17 (1997): 279–98.

30. Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 2, 3.

Even more auspicious (and thus, more contrasting to other women in Judges) is the degree of safety Achsah enjoyed. To be safe at home (both her paternal home and her husband's), to come and go safely, and even to have a name are not to be taken for granted in Judges.³¹

*Military (Thus, Androcentric) Successes and Failures
of the Northern Tribes (1:16–36)*

Getting land and water may be very pleasant and a token of Israel's blessings on the land, but the tribes still have a mandate to obey: to take the land from its inhabitants. So the remaining verses of chapter 1 move on to a panoramic assessment of the enterprise commanded by YHWH.

The first verses are devoted to Judah, according to the divine instruction at the beginning of the chapter. Curiously, the information on Judah is mediated by reference to a non-Israelite group, the Kenites, presented here as descendants from Moses' father-in-law (called Hobab in the LXX and some other versions, including NRSV; but the MT does not give any name aside from the Kenites). I am not sure what is the importance of this information for the redactor: Is it only to recognize groups that later became integrated, such as Rahab's family or the Gibeonites in the first chapters of Joshua? Or is this a proleptic introduction to the clan from which Jael and/or her husband would come, which will be mentioned in Judges 5:24 when Jael is blessed together with the group of Kenites?

Danna Nolan Fewell is on the right track when she observes that Judges, like Genesis, is a family quarrel in which the "Canaanite" side of the family lineage is denied (she speaks of matrilineal descendants), rewritten, blurred, written again, and so on, often through the killing of the "different." I would add "the different who is so like us," otherwise there would be no need to kill him or her.³² Siblings and close relatives, like children who grow up together, are sometimes friends and sometimes rivals, and this is what we see happening with Israel and its "brothers." The problem is, they are not on the playground; their war game *is* war, no game.

This may seem a digression, yet it is not, for patriarchy uses this weapon called "courage, honor, male behavior," and the like, by which

31. Schneider, *Judges*, 17.

32. Danna Nolan Fewell, "Imagination, Method, and Murder: Un/Framing the Face of Post-Exilic Israel," in *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and the Book*, ed. Timothy K. Beal and David M. Gunn (London: Routledge, 1997), 140–46.

Judges 1:16-36

¹⁶The descendants of Hobab the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah from the city of palms into the wilderness of Judah, which lies in the Negeb near Arad. Then they went and settled with the Amalekites. ¹⁷Judah went with his brother Simeon, and they defeated the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath, and devoted it to destruction. So the city was called Hormah. ¹⁸Judah took Gaza with its territory, Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory. ¹⁹The LORD was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain, because they had chariots of iron. ²⁰Hebron was given to Caleb, as Moses had said; and he drove out from it the three sons of Anak. ²¹But the Benjaminites did not drive out the

Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have lived in Jerusalem among the Benjaminites to this day.

²²The house of Joseph also went up against Bethel; and the LORD was with them. ²³The house of Joseph sent out spies to Bethel (the name of the city was formerly Luz). ²⁴When the spies saw a man coming out of the city, they said to him, "Show us the way into the city, and we will deal kindly with you." ²⁵So he showed them the way into the city; and they put the city to the sword, but they let the man and all his family go. ²⁶So the man went to the land of the Hittites and built a city, and named it Luz; that is its name to this day.

²⁷Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or

it gets rid of many (particularly low-ranking) men and several "expendables" (like women, children, animals, trees, etc.), blaming them. Something happens as the narrator goes on with the list of tribes, however, for what had started with so much success soon shows itself to be also flawed: Judah chose not to or could not rid the land of its more powerful enemies. Now, should Judah have fought anyway, in order to get the valley and expel "them"; or are we to understand the first part of the verse (which says that YHWH was with Judah and Judah took the hill country) as evidence that the hill country was what YHWH wanted to give to Judah? Of course, there is always recourse to source criticism, and one can "blame" later traditions for this wonderful gem of truth. But that would not solve the theological problem. For the question here is whether Judah's not taking the valleys should be seen matter-of-factly as a statement of its unfaithfulness, or with a sigh of relief. Here I am proposing another reading, besides the traditional one that "they couldn't." For many a person must have sighed with relief when they heard that

the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; but the Canaanites continued to live in that land. ²⁸When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not in fact drive them out.

²⁹And Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer; but the Canaanites lived among them in Gezer.

³⁰Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites lived among them, and became subject to forced labor.

³¹Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco, or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, or of Achzib, or of Helbah, or of Aphik, or of Rehob; ³²but

the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out.

³³Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anath, but lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became subject to forced labor for them.

³⁴The Amorites pressed the Danites back into the hill country; they did not allow them to come down to the plain.

³⁵The Amorites continued to live in Harheres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim, but the hand of the house of Joseph rested heavily on them, and they became subject to forced labor. ³⁶The border of the Amorites ran from the ascent of Akrabim, from Sela and upward.

their beloved ones, their sons, their husbands, their fathers, the soldiers themselves, would not be going head-on against the iron bars.

After Judah, Benjamin is mentioned. Preoccupation with the peoples Israel could not drive out of the land is highlighted also by the interruption of the *wayyiqtol* chain and the emphasis on the people Benjamin could not dispossess: "But/and the Jebusite, who resides in Jerusalem" (Judg 1:21). The downgrading of Benjamin at the expense of Judah is one of this book's characteristics. While Judah had killed the whole population of Jerusalem and set it on fire, now Benjamin is said not to have driven (not to have been able to or wanted to?) the Jebusites from it and, even worse, to have settled among them. Next, the town of Bethel (said to formerly have been called Luz) receives attention by way of the third anecdotic depiction: they made a deal with an inhabitant of Luz/Bethel, who agreed to give away his town to them (Judg 1:22-26). Niditch sees in this notice an indication that there is no polemic against the northern tribes here:

In its current setting, the tale of the founder of Luz acknowledges the way in which power and control fluctuate. The people of the man from Luz are displaced by the descendants of Joseph, and he then goes off to found a city in the land of the Hittites. Within the narrative, the important message is that one Luz is gone and another established. The vision in Judges 1, in contrast to portions of Joshua, is of fluid and shifting power, a theme reinforced by all three vignettes.³³

From a feminist perspective, it is noteworthy that, while so many commentaries stress Delilah's "betrayal" of Samson (even if we do not know whether she was Israelite), this unnamed man from Luz, who betrays his city (for unknown and perhaps justified reasons), goes unnoticed.³⁴

The remaining tribes are treated summarily. Some facts deserve a quick mention before we leave chapter 1. The first one involves the character of Joseph for the northern tribes, parallel to Judah. Gregory Wong sees the material arranged in a chiasmic way, rather than a progressive deterioration from south to north. Neither Judah (Judg 1:19) nor Dan (1:34) could take over their valleys from their indigenous populations, while the remaining tribes (i.e., "Joseph") managed only to dwell with the Canaanites and submit them to forced labor (Judg 1:21, 27-30, and 31-33).³⁵ Neither cohabitation with the peoples of the land nor forced labor is within the Deuteronomistic ideal picture for a people freed from bondage to leave each with enough land to have dignity. Perhaps, like war, they are inescapable in a world where economic gain has more weight than people; still, they do not belong to the ideal society.

Implicit in Judges 1 is the theme of disobedience and judgment. The northern tribes fail to conquer major parts of their territories. While the list of their failures appears to be presented factually, hints arise of a theological explanation of the failures—that is, that military defeat is linked to disobedience. The description of the northern tribes' failure to

33. Niditch, *Judges*, 43. Other scholars disagree: Schneider, *Judges*, 21 reads this ruse against Judg 2:2 and therefore considers it a (veiled) criticism of Joseph's ways.

34. Also Rahab comes into this category, but we will stay within Judges here. See Bradley L. Crowell, "Good Girl, Bad Girl: Foreign Women and the Deuteronomistic History in Postcolonial Perspective," *BibInt* 21 (2013): 5; and Uriah Y. Kim, "Postcolonial Criticism: Who Is the Other in the Book of Judges?," in Yee, *Judges and Method*, 168, on the figure of the foreigner to advance the authors' own interests (that is, the foreigners' own interests, words, perspectives are unaccounted for; they are used to advance Israel's own ideology).

35. Gregory T. K. Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges: An Inductive, Rhetorical Study* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 92.

take various cities says that they “did not” conquer them—not “*could* not,” but “*did* not.” The wording implies that the tribes could have obeyed God’s order to drive out the native inhabitants of the cities, had they chosen to obey.³⁶

The problem with disobedience is not disobedience per se but the worldview derived from following YHWH. The problem for Israel was the socio-economic, political, and cultural model derived from following “the Baals and the Astartes,” as Judges 2:11, 13 denounces. The last chapters of Judges and later the monarchy will show all the horrible consequences of these choices, such as child sacrifice, perversion of justice, manipulation of religion, accumulation of land, and so on.

First Appearance of a Divine Herald (2:1-5)

Chapter 2 begins, like many of the actions narrated in chapter 1, with the verb “come up,” עלה. Here the one coming up is YHWH’s messenger. The image is set in such a way as to build up suspense, at least in the audience, for it is not usual to learn of a divine messenger coming up from one geographical location to another. There might be another explanation, since Gilgal, etymologically related to a round thing, is the site in which Joshua gave Caleb his land (Josh 14:6) and Bochim is the site of weeping (although at the end of Judges, the community will weep at Bethel [Judg 20:26]). Thus, the narrator may be using symbolic names here to indicate the need to go back, turn around in weeping, or it may be a way to indicate that the Israelites did see someone coming up, but so far they could not recognize the divine messenger.

There is a long tradition of men and women to whom a messenger or group appears and at first they cannot know whether they are a “friend or foe” (see Josh 5:13), divine or human. Abraham, Sarah, Lot, and Samson’s parents in Judges (Judg 13:1-7), are some examples. Likewise, it is not clear until the end of the pericope who are the recipients of this announcement. It starts with “I shall bring/have brought you [עלה *yiqtol*, second plural masculine suffix] from Egypt.” This “you” turns out to be the people of Israel, who end up crying and thus name the place Bochim, “weepers.”

36. Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, 127. Emphasis in original.

Judges 2:1-5

^{2:1}Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, "I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you into the land that I had promised to your ancestors. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you. ²For your part, do not make a covenant with the inhabitants of this land; tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my command. See

what you have done! ³So now I say, I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become adversaries to you, and their gods shall be a snare to you." ⁴When the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the Israelites, the people lifted up their voices and wept. ⁵So they named that place Bochim, and there they sacrificed to the LORD.

TRANSLATION MATTERS

"I have brought you out" (Judg 2:1): The verb עלה is in the *yiqtol* form, to be translated, in prose, as unfinished action, future; however, several translations render it as past tense. Carlos Sosa sees it as an *apropos* device to allude both to the past (Egypt) and to the future enterprise of taking the land.³⁷

The main translation problem is whether the masculine participle בוכים, literally "the weeping ones," and the second plural pronoun כם, "you," are referring to the men from the different tribes warring to take the land from the indigenous population or whether they refer to the whole people, men unable to go to war (including priests), women, elderly, and children.

My questions intend to sharpen the scenario: Who is on stage? Is this a new scene, independent from the conquest annals of chapter 1? According to Barry Webb, "2:1-5 is the climax of the first major part of the introduction to the book," because they are part of a chiasmus around the theme of coming up (Hebrew עלה).³⁸ On the other hand, most scholars take Judges 1:1–2:5 as a unit, and, thus, the recrimination at Bochim would be related to the people's inability to "cleanse" the land:

37. Carlos R. Sosa, "Forma y función de Jueces 2:1-5; 6:7-10 y 10:11-16: Una comparación literaria y estructural," *Kairós* 46 (2010): 54.

38. Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 128. Contra Schneider, *Judges*, 26, who considers 2:1-5 a new unit, because it does not deal with leadership, as chapter 1.

The priority, arrangement and proportion of space given to the portrayal of the tribes in Prologue-A (1:1–2:5) corroborates the thesis that the tribal-political arrangement of Judges was designed to enjoin its readers to endorse Judah as the tribe divinely appointed to lead the other tribes of Israel. Prologue-B (2:6–3:6) sets forth the cyclical religious-historical paradigm by which the religious-historical events presented in the delivered accounts of 3:7–16:31 are to be measured.³⁹

The text does not offer temporal clues that would help us here: the opening verb, ויעל, is a *wayyiqtol*, thus resuming narration—“And the messenger came up”—without any adverb that would help us to temporally locate it; the fact that Judges 2:6 is analeptic and takes us back to Joshua’s time does not help either. The change of style between the annals-like information on each tribe’s failures and this short piece, which is mainly a direct speech, seems to indicate that the author’s intention is to read this short piece separately.

The question remains: Who are “all the sons/children of Israel, the people” here? A definite answer is difficult to give because the arrangement of the narratives is so masterful that one is led nonstop from one event to the next. As we saw already, the question as to “who’s in and who’s out” is important in Judges. In Judges 1 the Israelites had the shape of tribes, allegiances, and expulsion; now in Judges 2, YHWH’s people comes in the guise of a worshiping community that needs to learn not to let other gods interfere with its faithfulness to the only God of the freed slaves. The messenger’s words resonate with references to the mighty acts of God during the exodus and the wilderness.

In this text there are no particular references to women, neither as a group nor as victims of patriarchal actions; the message is too general, filled both with promise (as God had decided never to break the covenant no matter what) and with a warning as to how ensnaring Israel’s disobedience will be. Thus, estrangement from each other, crying, and even sinning will be taken within the loving and committed relationship of these partners, not on their own.

Thinking of today’s gender roles, I notice that weeping is here the community’s action, not the women’s. Is this because in an ancient Middle Eastern society crying was an acceptable means of expressing regret also for men? Many texts affirm this. On the other hand, it is to the Dtr’s credit to refrain from blaming idolatry on the Canaanite women, as he will later do (Judg 3:6; 1 Kgs 11:1–13).

39. Robert H. O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, VTSup 63 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 3.

Judges 2:6-10

⁶When Joshua dismissed the people, the Israelites all went to their own inheritances to take possession of the land. ⁷The people worshiped the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the Lord had done for Israel. ⁸Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at

the age of one hundred ten years. ⁹So they buried him within the bounds of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. ¹⁰Moreover, that whole generation was gathered to their ancestors, and another generation grew up after them, who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.

Prologue B (2:6–3:6): Cultic Loyalty, a Key Element in Israel's Identity and Land Holding

The Ideal View of the Beginnings (2:6-10)

The so-called Introduction B presents a periodization of the time intended as a hermeneutical lens with which to read the book. It resumes where it all had started, with Joshua, his generation, and the tribes living each in its land. Then, everything was good. But as soon as that generation died, there arose a new generation who did not know their God. Just as Pharaoh had not known Joseph (and Joseph's God), now it is Israel who does not know. And if you do not know, you do not follow, for how would you recognize a deity's ways when you do not acknowledge that deity?

A people slow to acknowledge YHWH as their God was Moses' and God's struggle in Egypt, as Pharaoh defied YHWH's command; it continues as the judges rule, and it will get more critical as Israel and Judah become ever more oppressive toward its own people, like the Canaanite leagues before them. It is the inescapable truth that every generation is in danger of not knowing. "'Knowing' God, like knowing a person, is experiential and relational. . . . Not to know God is to abandon that relationship."⁴⁰ The relationship between YHWH and Israel is, for sure, very complex. Yet, despite all of the people's failures, YHWH had decided not to break up with Israel. And while God's stubborn commitment to God's people is to be celebrated, no automatic application of that model of faithfulness should be made to a violent relationship, particularly to one in which violence may lead to a femicide.

40. Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, 137.

Judges 2:11-23

¹¹Then the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and worshiped the Baals; ¹²and they abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; they followed other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were all around them, and bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. ¹³They abandoned the LORD, and worshiped Baal and the Astartes. ¹⁴So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers who plundered them, and he sold them into the power of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. ¹⁵Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them to bring misfortune, as the LORD had warned them and sworn to them; and they were in great distress.

¹⁶Then the LORD raised up judges, who delivered them out of the power of those who plundered them. ¹⁷Yet they did not listen even to their judges; for they lusted after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their ancestors

had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD; they did not follow their example. ¹⁸Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD would be moved to pity by their groaning because of those who persecuted and oppressed them. ¹⁹But whenever the judge died, they would relapse and behave worse than their ancestors, following other gods, worshiping them and bowing down to them. They would not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. ²⁰So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel; and he said, "Because this people have transgressed my covenant that I commanded their ancestors, and have not obeyed my voice, ²¹I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died." ²²In order to test Israel, whether or not they would take care to walk in the way of the LORD as their ancestors did, ²³the LORD had left those nations, not driving them out at once, and had not handed them over to Joshua.

The Cyclic View of History (2:11-23)

The cycle of sin, punishment, distress-and-outcry, deliverance, peace, and faithfulness is rhetorically so effective that it has dominated biblical studies of the book of Judges, to the point that what does not conform has been either deemed an "appendix" (introduction and dénouement) or filled in. Carolyn Pressler notes that Israel's cry is not mentioned in Judges 2:11-23,⁴¹ and Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher notes that neither is

41. Ibid., 138.

there a change in the people's attitude.⁴² As long as no real repentance and amendment are present, death-dealing cycles (such as in domestic violence, or in self-destructive behaviors like Israel's in relation to God) will repeat over and over again.

TRANSLATION MATTERS

One issue to take note of is the use of the verb זנה for Israel's lust after other deities (Judg 2:17). The verb has two different yet interconnected meanings. The most literal sense is that of taking part in an illicit sexual act, always a female action in the Bible. For instance, Tamar's pregnancy is interpreted by Judah as an act of זנה until his own responsibility in it is revealed (Gen 38:24). A woman who engages in such a behavior, or seems to, is a זונה, often translated as "harlot" or "prostitute." While many women thus called in the Bible may have been sex workers, the issue is far more complicated in a society in which even legal sex was accompanied by gifts and where the biblical evidence shows several models of "marriage." Since there is only one use of the term with a possible sexual connotation in Judges 19:2, we will leave the discussion until then.

The other use of this root is not literal, and it applies to anyone (usually groups more than individuals, and among these, the elite, the political, social, and religious male leadership) who does not stay faithful to YHWH. This is the sense it has in this verse, and in Judges 8:27, 33, the only other occurrences of the root in Judges. Although this is a symbolic usage of the root זנה and it involves particularly males and not females in their political and religious—not sexual—behavior, it has contributed to gender stereotyping of women as lustful, prone to promiscuity, and dangerous to men.

YHWH cannot but be faithful to YHWH's compassion and raises a savior, thus denying any mechanical application of the cycle of sin-punishment-outcry-deliverance. This variation in the model is very insightful because it also refers back (perhaps inadvertently) to the time when the people were slaves in Egypt and were too burdened even to cry out aloud to YHWH (Exod 5). There is a cycle, yes, but rather than seeing in YHWH an administrator of blessings and curses, there is here a lover trying out different ways to carry on the relationship. "Lover" in the biblical text is (mainly, not always) the male YHWH who entices the female Israel, but this metaphor today is no longer enough. On the one hand, one must be alert to its inherent violence; on the other hand, there is need for much more nuanced metaphors on love relationships, as gender and sexuality are constantly evolving.

42. Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, "Framework and Discourse in the Book of Judges," *JBL* 128 (2009): 690.

The Pedagogic View of the Military Actions (3:1-6)

These verses look at Israel's history (and here one may surmise, from the exodus to the return from Babylon) as a process that served to teach Israel the art of war. On the one hand, someone who was learned in war techniques would appreciate these opportunities to try new tricks and to train their men. On the other hand, the reason given in verses 2-3 may also have been an excuse, just as when we say, "Well, how can I turn this nasty experience into a learning one?" Regardless of the writers' intention, their recognition that Israel had to live with other nations provides us with a clue that this book is not so univocal in its view of war and death.

In Judges 3:6 we find again the motif of the women given and taken as wives; unlike Achsah, the ones mentioned here are involved in "foreign trade." Women are the currency exchange between families from Israel and at least six nations. Bible authors rarely if ever reflect on the fate of their own daughters given away (in 3:1-6) to several nations; their concern is with foreign daughters brought into Israelite families.⁴³ Even though this practice might seem foreign and outdated to us, adult women and girls (and also some boys) are still either given in marriage without their consent or sold by their respective fathers/families to become part of trafficking networks.

To summarize, in order to appreciate the introduction of the book, it is necessary to accept Judges' presupposition that Israel's identity cannot be shaped outside its land—the land promised to Abraham and his family, unto which the Israelites have been coming for forty years since the exodus—and with a social and ethical behavior associated with expelling the Canaanites and tearing down their altars. As mentioned earlier, the question of a military, war-like campaign as *the* way to achieve this gift of land is a questionable one for modern interpreters. The question is to what extent the book of Judges is imaginable without this presupposition. Even though the book just starts to unfold its treasures, several voices compete for attention. Joshua and his generation are exonerated from any blame, yet the orphanhood situation he has left is not necessarily bad for Israel: now the tribes will have to deal with each other and

43. In Gen 31:50 we learn that Laban makes an accord with Jacob that Leah and Rachel will not be humiliated by having to accept further wives of Jacob. This is a notable text in that the daughters had earlier affirmed that their father had sold them (31:14-15). While they are married to their cousin, they move out of their homeland.

Judges 3:1-6

^{3:1}Now these are the nations that the LORD left to test all those in Israel who had no experience of any war in Canaan ²(it was only that successive generations of Israelites might know war, to teach those who had no experience of it before): ³the five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites who lived on Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath.

⁴They were for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their ancestors by Moses.

⁵So the Israelites lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; ⁶and they took their daughters as wives for themselves, and their own daughters they gave to their sons; and they worshiped their gods.

find new ways to achieve life on their land. Joshua is exonerated by the narrator from having left incomplete the destruction of the inhabitants of Canaan, so that Israel may be ensnared or tried or taught—the reader can choose the explanation. Ironically, YHWH's test of Israel (v. 1) also meant life for many people(s) not devoted to the ban or expelled from their land.

Israel and Its All-Male Chieftains (3:7-31)

As the first of the judges is introduced, the narrator states that the Israelites did wrong in YHWH's eyes (Judg 3:7); furthermore, that "the Israelites again [Hebrew root אָסַף, 'to add'] did what was evil in the sight of the LORD" (v. 12) will become a sort of refrain. Notice the contrast between the evil in YHWH's eyes and the right in everybody's own eyes as the book progresses toward kingship (Judg 17:6; 21:25). Reflecting this contrast, kingship will show the two sides of one coin. Perhaps the Israelites also saw the right in YHWH's eyes as wrong in their own eyes, so they turned to the Baals and Asherahs. I am not defending any party, just reflecting on how difficult this relationship is presented according to the book. If one adds the possibility of a historical origin during the Assyrian invasion of Israel, one gets a better picture: Israel was losing its grip on a land they felt had been given to them by YHWH; they turned to the local deities hoping to better their situation and everything went worse. War was everywhere, the (mainly male) leaders got it ever more wrong, the people were disoriented, and the women and children suffered the most, as in any war. And YHWH also suffered with these

attitudes. This context is important for the stories to be studied next, for this Israel, with a Deborah or an Othniel, but also with an Abimelech or a Samson, is not the Israel with weapons of mass destruction; rather, it is a small, impoverished people, who nevertheless want to survive and believe in the promises received.

Othniel (3:7-11)

Here we encounter once again the first hero, both the first in the row of local heroes about whom the central section of the book of Judges tells and the first one to be said to “judge”—govern; also bring justice to?—Israel (Judg 3:10). The verb שָׁפַט appeared in the book already five times in the theological overview in chapter 2. This verb will be used for several “judges” and is also used by Jephthah to invoke YHWH as “the Judge” between him and the Ammonites (Judg 11:27). It is used for the last time of Samson (Judg 16:31).

Othniel and his wife Achsah are so far the only individuals identified from the new generation, after Joshua and Caleb are gone from the story. (Caleb’s death is not recorded; this is the common fate of women in the Bible, not of heroes!) Some aspects in the story of Othniel, as first judge, are confusing. Judges 1:12-15, for example, places Othniel around Hebron in the south of Judah, and then it shows him leading Israel in a war against king “Cushan-Double-Evil” of northern Mesopotamia. Is the Dtr thinking of a pan-Israelite state known to him at a much later time? Is it the exaggeration typical of taunt poetry and humorous stories? Or is it just the author’s way to make Othniel the ideal judge, as most commentaries state? On other aspects, the information is precise in the sense that it adjusts to the Judges’ cycle: YHWH raised Othniel to save Israel, YHWH’s Spirit was on him, Othniel ruled for eight years, he went to war, he prevailed, the land rested, and Othniel died. A new cycle begins.

Serge Frolov notes that unlike other saviors, Othniel acts singlehandedly against a super-enemy.⁴⁴ In this text, Israel is never a subject but always an object of diverse actions from Cushan-Double-Evil (slavery), YHWH (pity, setting up a deliverer), and Othniel (deliverance, long rule over Israel, peace). One may suppose that when the narrator tells us that Othniel went to war, he was not alone, yet the focus is far from the people’s army (perhaps because by the time of the Dtr, the army had

44. Serge Frolov, “Fire, Smoke, and Judah in Judges: A Response to Gregory Wong,” *SJOT* 21 (2007): 129.

Judges 3:7-11

⁷The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, forgetting the LORD their God, and worshiping the Baals and the Asherahs. ⁸Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram-naharaim; and the Israelites served Cushan-rishathaim eight years. ⁹But when the Israelites cried out to the LORD, the LORD

raised up a deliverer for the Israelites, who delivered them, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. ¹⁰The spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel; he went out to war, and the LORD gave King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. ¹¹So the land had rest forty years. Then Othniel son of Kenaz died.

been professionalized and the people were not fighting their own battles anymore). The point I want to make is another, though, namely, that being acted upon, humiliated, subject to servitude, delivered, and so on are usually actions men take in the name of and for "their" women. Here patriarchy seems to be acting at its best, turning life on the land into a man's game between Double-Evil, Superhero, and YHWH. Would that be the model for future judges? Is this, precisely, the critique the author wants to bring home in an ironic way?

We will be watching for this clue regarding other deliverers as they will also take upon themselves killing their enemies singlehandedly, including Ehud, Jael, "a certain woman" who killed Abimelech with one deft stroke, Samson (who is also a loner), and Shamgar with the oxgoad; still later, David will kill Goliath likewise. So the question is, perhaps, whether it is a bad thing that a judge would kill the epitome of the enemy with no help from the army.

Schneider considers Othniel the model judge because of his military and family credentials, introduced earlier. Yet, neither his military ability nor his own lineage but his marriage is his major asset: "The reader knows he was not guilty of the crimes that caused the situation in the first place, intermarriage with the local inhabitants. Othniel was the only one who could bear this role since he was the only one whose background and marital relations are legitimate."⁴⁵ Something about this line of reasoning makes me uncomfortable. It is not Schneider's fault, but the text's underlying assumption is that (besides being considered in terms of compliance to the father's authority) women may be so easily

45. Schneider, *Judges*, 39.

divided by drawing a line between acceptable or unacceptable on the basis of men's exchange for marriage. I would like to emphasize not only Othniel's position as a bridge to the next generation but also Achsah's. For no man can establish a family on his own, much less a tribe. The book of Judges says nothing about whether they had children, although such a model male would have had at least a son. That Judges is more interested in the office than in the family life of a judge becomes evident when one gathers all the information about each judge.

To be highlighted are Othniel's military valor and his stable family life (ancestry, marriage, and no dynastic claims afterward), serving as foil especially to Abimelech, Jephthah, and Samson. Also, an argument out of silence is the fact that Othniel does not attribute his success to himself, for it was not his. McCann notes that mention of "rest" for the land starts with this judge's rule, continues with Ehud and Deborah, and it will not be mentioned again after the rule of Gideon.⁴⁶

Ehud (3:12-30)

The expression "did evil in YHWH's eyes" appears only four times in the Bible, all of them in Judges (3:12; 4:1; 10:6; 13:1). The author must have liked the phrase, for even though the evil was great, it was not unlike other periods in Israel's history.

The scenario for Ehud's action is the "city of Palms," identified with Jericho since the enemies are from around the vicinity. The deliverer will be a Benjaminite, literally "son of the right hand" (ימין), who is left-handed. The story has become very popular in recent years, with different degrees of humor identified. While some scholars take the name of the king of Moab, Eglon (from עגל, "calf"), and his description as ברי (full-fledged, sturdy, fat) to be that of an obese man ready to be slaughtered, others point out that calves are fit for sacrifice or to be worshiped; so, his description is not derogatory but points to a fit king, who has long been in the battlefield.⁴⁷ Ehud, therefore, will have to be very artful to overcome him!

Robert O'Connell identifies verbal imagery and temporal ordering as satiric devices to fool the king and his courtiers: a "double-mouthed" dagger hidden at Ehud's right thigh and double messages—"I bring the king an offering," "I have a secret message from YHWH"—and these are

46. J. Clinton McCann, *Judges*, IBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 43.

47. See Lawson G. Stone, "Eglon's Belly and Ehud's Blade: A Reconsideration," *JBL* 128 (2009): 650–52, and Gunn, *Judges through the Centuries*, 51.

Judges 3:12-30

¹²The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD strengthened King Eglon of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the LORD.

¹³In alliance with the Ammonites and the Amalekites, he went and defeated Israel; and they took possession of the city of palms. ¹⁴So the Israelites served King Eglon of Moab eighteen years.

¹⁵But when the Israelites cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud son of Gera, the Benjaminite, a left-handed man. The Israelites sent tribute by him to King Eglon of Moab. ¹⁶Ehud made for himself a sword with two edges, a cubit in length; and he fastened it on his right thigh under his clothes. ¹⁷Then he presented the

tribute to King Eglon of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man. ¹⁸When Ehud had finished presenting the tribute, he sent the people who carried the tribute on their way. ¹⁹But he himself turned back at the sculptured stones near Gilgal, and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." So the king said, "Silence!" and all his attendants went out from his presence. ²⁰Ehud came to him, while he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber, and said, "I have a message from God for you." So he rose from his seat. ²¹Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into Eglon's belly; ²²the hilt also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the

Ehud's dagger in the king's lower belly.⁴⁸ A third device is the structuring of the story through chiasms with alternation of actions of "coming in" (the Moabite courtiers, Ehud, his dagger-hilt, the Moabite courtiers) and of "going out" (the Moabite courtiers, Eglon's excrement, and Ehud), mirroring another chiasm around "sending" and "saying" between the same actors; at both centers Eglon stands alone, surrounded by Ehud.⁴⁹ This is a well-crafted story, where form and content amuse and teach.

What makes the story so complex is the interrelation of several aspects, only one of which is sex; others are murder (regicide), the war environment, the socio-political oppression of the Midianites over the Israelites, and the ethnic component. For this is a story not about homosexuality but about the weapons a loner can use to deliver his people from a powerful king and fit soldier when YHWH decides this powerful king is no longer YHWH's instrument. Jack Sasson, on the other hand, argues

48. O'Connell, *Rhetoric*, 85.

49. Michael L. Barré, "The Meaning of *pršdn* in Judges III 22," VT 41 (1991): 8-9; see also O'Connell, *Rhetoric*, 89.

sword out of his belly; and the dirt came out. ²³Then Ehud went out into the vestibule, and closed the doors of the roof chamber on him, and locked them.

²⁴After he had gone, the servants came. When they saw that the doors of the roof chamber were locked, they thought, "He must be relieving himself in the cool chamber." ²⁵So they waited until they were embarrassed. When he still did not open the doors of the roof chamber, they took the key and opened them. There was their lord lying dead on the floor.

²⁶Ehud escaped while they delayed, and passed beyond the sculptured

stones, and escaped to Seirah. ²⁷When he arrived, he sounded the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites went down with him from the hill country, having him at their head.

²⁸He said to them, "Follow after me; for the LORD has given your enemies the Moabites into your hand." So they went down after him, and seized the fords of the Jordan against the Moabites and allowed no one to cross over. ²⁹At that time they killed about ten thousand of the Moabites, all strong, able-bodied men; no one escaped. ³⁰So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest eighty years.

that traditional readings, including rabbinic ones, looked at Eglon more positively and wondered at the regicide involved in this story. I appreciate Sasson's warning as to the literary genre and therefore message of the text, as well as new sexual readings of it.⁵⁰

Is raping a person (man, woman, child, a person) a valid weapon in war, in torture camps, in prison?⁵¹ Is anything valid when the enemy is powerful? For this is one of the story's presuppositions, that Eglon was much stronger than Ehud, just as Holofernes was much stronger than Judith, and Sisera than Jael (at least before Sisera's defeat in battle). I am aware that not every reader will see this sexual innuendo in Eglon's assassination, yet it is within the hermeneutical range of meaning (and, unfortunately, it is not the only violent text we have to deal with in the Bible).

50. Jack M. Sasson, "Ethically Cultured Interpretations: The Case of Eglon's Murder (Judges 3)," in *Homeland and Exile: Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honour of Bustenay Oded*, ed. Gershon Galil, Mark Geller, and Alan Millard (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 571–73, 589–92. He takes issue particularly with Robert Alter and T. A. Jull on their sexual and scatological readings of the story, as well as on ascribing it to the satirical genre (he recognized humorous aspects, but within a narrative, not a satire).

51. See Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 157–59.

TRANSLATION MATTERS

Deryn Guest observes that “three elements of Ehud’s characterization suggest that his assassination of Eglon is meant to be read figuratively as a male rape scene: the emphasis upon his left-handedness, the several references to his ‘hand,’ and his Benjaminite affiliation.”⁵² That the left hand had a lesser value than the right one does not need a long explanation (think of the pair right-left, always in that order in the Bible; of ancient and modern cultures where the left hand is related to the “untoward,” or of the connotations of “leftist” and “sinister”). When we imagine Ehud from an elite group of commandos, however, possibly ambidextrous, his left-handedness becomes one more weapon, and in a story like this one that is not to be discredited.⁵³ The second hint is the use of “hand” as a euphemism for the genitals and the cubit-long dagger hanging next to his thigh. Finally, his Benjaminite affiliation would point to the homoerotic relationship that later Saul and Jonathan (Benjaminites) had with David. To these elements one may add the use of ambiguous vocabulary (“come into,” “secret or hidden thing,” “belly or womb,” and “covering of the feet”), the inner organs closing around the stuck phallus-like dagger, the upper room’s location where both men are alone, the discomfort of the king’s courtiers to interrupt—and the use of rape as a way to emasculate an enemy, especially in war milieus.⁵⁴

In conclusion, it becomes clear that the Moabites, who are all described as “fat” men at the close of the story (3.29), are the butt of a narrative loaded with ethnic humour and scathing satire. The sexual slur reinforces the generally hostile and racist presentation of the Moabites. . . . The narrator uses sexual practice to create boundaries between self and other. Bailey (1995) in particular demonstrates how foreigners, as the “out-group,” are often distinguished on the basis of their practice of taboo sexual acts. . . . Here, in Judges 3, sexual language, imagery, and *double entendre* are graphically used in order to ridicule and discredit such foreigners and to legitimize their oppression.⁵⁵

Guest pushes for the inclusion of such a story among the texts of terror for gay men, noting YHWH’s condoning position. But even worse,

The text assumes that to be caricatured as a passive recipient of anal rape is one of the most derogatory insults that one can direct towards a person/group. The text thus requires a shared contempt for any man who is penetrated by another and for the act itself. It also assumes that people like Eglon *deserve* to be violated/eliminated from society.⁵⁶

52. Deryn Guest, “Judges,” in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, ed. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Shore-Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache (London: SCM, 2006), 167–89, at 168.

53. Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, 147–48.

54. See Guest, “Judges,” 168–77, and Susanne Scholz, *Sacred Witness: Rape in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 160–64.

55. Guest, “Judges,” 173. Emphasis in original.

56. *Ibid.*, 176–77.

***Gay Hate Crime or
Justified Act of Liberation?
The Story of Judge Ehud and
King Eglon (Judg 3:12-30)***

Ehud, “a social bandit,”⁵⁷ is more traditionally recognized as an important “judge” who saves the Israelites from Moabite oppression. However, his characterization as a Benjaminite and a left-handed warrior and the repeated references to his “hand” encourage some interpreters to view the entire episode as a “deliberately scripted figurative rape scene.”⁵⁸ It tells of Ehud and the king of Moab, Eglon, entangling in a homoerotic and sexually violent encounter that ends in the bloody murder of the king.

Sometimes interpreters point to the link in the narrative between sexually-erotic allusions, on the one hand, and aggressive-combative references, on the other hand. To them, the short blade in verse 16 is a phallic image, and the reference to the king’s body size in verse 17 is a feminizing attribute; these combine in a vaginal image when the sword disappears in the belly fat of the king in verse 22, especially since the noun for belly means “womb” in the original Hebrew text. In other words, Eglon performs in the position of a woman who is penetrated and passive. He

is feminized and hence not so subtly ridiculed.

The sexual insinuations also include the location of the sexually murderous encounter, which is ambiguously described and thus variously translated. Some believe that verse 23 refers to a balcony or a cool, upstairs room. Others suggest the location must be imagined as a royal toilet room, a locked, private space where Eglon went alone. There the king stands with his pants down, and Ehud performs in this “male-male sexual innuendo,”⁵⁹ killing the king in the end.

The ethnic-racist humor is part of this male-on-male sexually violent depiction. The Israelite audience, the addressee of the narrative, knows who the “bad boys” are: the Moabites. They are feminized, sexualized, dehumanized, and hence discredited as foreigners, the others, who deserve contempt, ridicule, sexual violence, and even murder. Nobody wants to be on the Moabite side, because the Moabites are the oppressors of Israel. In short, the sexualized representation of the Moabite king goes hand in hand with the ethnic denigration of the entire nation, taking the penetrated role of a woman in verse 30, when this time not only Ehud’s but all of Israel’s “hand” subdues Moab.

57. Niditch, *Judges*, 55.

58. Guest, “Judges,” 170.

59. *Ibid.*, 173.

And again, ignoring the sexually violent imagery, interpreters have sided readily with the victorious Israelites.

When Judges 3:12-30 is read this way, the story of Ehud the judge turns into a highly uncomfortable and shocking "text of terror for gay-identified readers."⁶⁰ The narrative exonerates quickly the assailant and murderer, as well as the conquering Israelites who killed ten thousand Moabite males, "all strong, able-bodied men," and then the Israelites lived in peace for the next eighty years (3:30). The male-on-male

rape story culminates in the assassination of the oppressive king. It also plays with feminizing metaphors, inviting the warmongering killing of the enemy in the readers' minds, even though initially it is God who "strengthened King Eglon of Moab against Israel" (3:12). But perhaps only a later editor, who attempted to justify the murder, added this argument to the story. Or is the imagined revenge of a people against its former oppressor acceptable after all, especially when it relies on images of hate crime?⁶¹

Susanne Scholz

There are no women present in this story: where are Eglon's mother, wife (wives), daughter(s)? Are there no women at Eglon's court? Being a seasoned commander, was his rather a fortress than a palace? Perhaps the notable absence of women here is one reason to have a left-handed Benjaminite violate/kill the commander and become a bit effeminate. Like Judith, Ehud risked his life coming into the enemy's quarters (to its most private areas) and killing the mighty ruler to deliver Israel; unlike Judith, the powerful is not infatuated by Ehud's beauty or attire, but falls for "a secret thing/word from Elohim/deity" (is he naïve or religious?).⁶²

The discussion on Eglon's intestines, and even on Ehud's dagger, would be different if there were no implicit idea that rape of a male means his feminization. Rape itself is bad enough, and having been stabbed and deftly killed should be bad enough as well. It all boils down to the problem of taking a particular action as feminine. From the moment anything hard, phallus-like, penetrates something, that "some-

60. Ibid., 176.

61. Susanne Scholz, "Judges," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, 3rd rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 113-27, here 117.

62. Schneider, *Judges*, 51.

thing” is feminized—the land, a person—which is to say, put in the inferior position of the hierarchical binary pair as passive, possessed, to be taken. “Although both males and females in the Bible may behave as tricksters, gender ideology still functions in their respective presentation, as it must; and this gender differentiation may cut both ways.”⁶³

The end of the story is not one man’s assassination but the killing of ten thousand seasoned warriors at the hands of Israel, whose victory is from YHWH (Judg 3:28), and peace on the land for eighty years. This would have meant peace for two generations; peace that would have allowed families to plant, to build up, to have children and grandchildren, fearing no external threat.

Shamgar ben-Anath (Judg 3:31)

This is the shortest notice about a deliverer. In one verse we learn the order in which he came (after Ehud), his name, enemies, his weapon, and a validation: “He too delivered Israel.”

Compare this information with that from any other “judge” and you will notice how much we are missing. Adrianus van Selms describes him as “isolated” even though “he *also* delivered Israel.”⁶⁴ According to most studies, Shamgar’s name is not Israelite but indigenous (Hurrian or Canaanite); since there is no tribal reference either, there is no intention to “Israelitize” him. Nevertheless, Shamgar might have come from Beth-Anath in Galilee, or, in parallel to Barak ben Abinoam, Anath might have been his father’s name, coming from the Hebrew root ענה, to answer.⁶⁵ Other facts, however, would point to an explicit connection to the popular Canaanite goddess of war, consort of Baal, who “embodies the tensions and paradoxes of feminine power in an androcentric world. She disdains feminine social roles and domestic responsibility, and engages in the masculine activities of hunting, warfare, and politics,” as Schneider reminds us. Since these are also Deborah’s and Jael’s characteristics, inclusion of Shamgar before these women is, according to

63. Athalya Brenner, “Who’s Afraid of Feminist Criticism? Who’s Afraid of Biblical Humour? The Case of the Obtuse Foreign Ruler in the Hebrew Bible,” *JSOT* 63 (1994): 47.

64. Adrianus van Selms, “Judge Shamgar,” *VT* 14 (1964): 296.

65. Thus Thomas F. McDaniel, *The Song of Deborah: Poetry in Dialect; A Philological Study of Judges 5 with Translation and Commentary* (2003), 45–60, <http://tmcdaniel.palmerseminary.edu/>.

Judges 3:31

³¹After him came Shamgar son of Philistines with an oxgoad. He too delivered Israel. Anath, who killed six hundred of the

Schneider, "a foreshadowing which prepares the reader for other women who engaged in warfare and politics and were not controlled by clear male authority."⁶⁶ Another scholar, Susan Ackerman, affirms that "the Israelite authors responsible for Judges 5 . . . derived their portrayal of Deborah as a female military hero in the battle against Sisera from older Canaanite paradigms of Anat, the warrior goddess."⁶⁷

Shamgar ben-Anath appears in association with Jael in the song of Deborah, in reference to a time long past that of the poet (Judg 5:6), in which insecurity was so widespread that caravans had stopped running. What exactly Shamgar did is subject to speculation, but the general idea is clear: he used an agricultural tool to repel a battalion of Philistines. If there is any historical truth behind him, Shamgar probably was a peasant who either fought alone or, more probably, lead a guerrilla-like battle against a group of Philistines. Like Jael and Samson, he did not use professional, military weapons but rather the tools with which he lived every day.

Schneider wonders whether the trend is to praise the participation of a non-Israelite or to take it as "the decline of the leaders that Israel relied upon for help."⁶⁸ It is easy to forget, with the narrator's constant use of "the Israelites," that there is no Israel as such; it is "in the making," so to speak. The first hero was a Kenizzite even though Judah was supposed to lead the tribes. Soon after, Jael, another non-Israelite, will deal the death blow to the powerful commander Sisera. Is "Israel" an allegiance to a socio-political egalitarian program with faithfulness to its "designer"/promoter YHWH, rather than an ethnic characteristic? While Shamgar is not absorbed into Israel through marriage or genealogy (unless Anath was his Israelite father, which is far from clear), he is given the third place among Israel's deliverers. In my opinion, the text leaves to the audience an evaluation of him as positive or flawed.

66. Schneider, *Judges*, 56; also referring to Walls, *The Goddess Anat in Ugaritic Myth*.

67. Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 58.

68. Schneider, *Judges*, 56.

Closing Judges

A Final Reflection

Israel has come full circle, from the Judah of Achsah to the Judah of the *pîlegeš*-wife. From the cries at Bochim to the cries after the massacre at Mizpah, there remain also the unheard cries of all victims, female and male, and YHWH's cry. Israel has come full circle, wounded by the increasing estrangement with YHWH.

One of the presuppositions of Judges is that there is a relationship between possession of the land taken from Canaan and worship of YHWH, whose proper name recalls the divine decision to be with the people from early times on. Proper worship involves rituals but also a particular way of dealing with each other, which may be compacted in the formula "justice and mercy." That relationship is made explicit in Joshua in terms of expectations from YHWH that the people would not go after the land's deities but would rather be faithful to YHWH. In exchange for that faithfulness, the land would be lent to them. From the first chapters of Judges it is clear, however, that this relationship will be set up in other terms than the equation faithfulness to YHWH equals annihilation of the land's nations. The peoples of the land will not be displaced to check whether Israel can maintain its faithfulness or not. And the reader needs not get to chapter 21 to realize that God's people have failed badly and live and deal with each other far worse than the nations they wanted to expel—which is, in the end, the impossible attempt to extricate oneself from one's own past and present.

As for non-Israelites, Joshua and Judges present a field day for scholars. Non-Israelites are Canaanites and all the Other “ites” in Judges. The text creates an Us/Them relationship between Canaanites and Israelites, a cultural distinction that archaeologists find hard to affirm. Specialists in the history of religion face similar problems as Gideon slips from Baal worshiper to Yahweh worshiper, and the people of Yahweh’s covenant face the people of El-Berith and of Baal-Berith in Shechem, a central sanctuary for the people of Yahweh (Joshua 8 and 24; Judges 9).¹

Judges tells us that Israel’s attempt to conquer Canaan was the attempt to found a new society, a society ruled by YHWH and by human men and women who would look after justice and peace—for their own people. It would be a new society that would treat women the way Achsah is treated, with a reasonable degree of freedom within the patriarchal system she is in, to travel, to manage her economic resources, and to enjoy the best of the land offered to the tribes. It would be a new society that would celebrate Deborah and Jael and Jephthah’s daughter, a world without raped and dismembered women of lower social rank!²

Israel failed to live up to that utopia, just as we fail to realize our own utopias.

At first sight the world of the book of Judges seems very far from many of our societies and countries today. But those of us who have experienced international or civil war, harsh economic disadvantages, or any situation in which law, order, and reason seem to have been cancelled until further notice find ourselves understanding many of the dilemmas represented in Judges. Understanding does not mean condoning their solutions, especially where women are involved. This is the first problematic aspect that remains at the end of the book.

I would like to indicate a second problematic aspect: the notion Israel had that having a king would solve their problems. Granted, that is not explicitly said. Perhaps the notice that every man did as he pleased (including individuals and tribes) should be affirmed with “and thank God!” for Saul and David and his house (whose stories are so impor-

1. Trent Butler, “Joshua–Judges and Postcolonial Criticism,” in *Joshua and Judges*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Gale A. Yee, Texts @ Contexts (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 31.

2. Tammi Schneider, “Achsah, the Raped *Pilegeš*, and the Book of Judges,” in *Women in the Biblical World: A Survey of Old and New Testament Perspectives*, ed. Elizabeth A. McCabe and William L. Lyons (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2009), 56–68.

tant in the next books of the Hebrew Bible) dealt with their respective daughters (and sons) and with other women in no better manner than society did at the time of the judges. “Yet Judges does not end with chaos; it ends with wholeness, reconciliation, rehabilitation, and peace, made possible in men’s eyes through the taking of women,” as Susan Niditch notes. This “peace” is achieved intertribally, through trafficking of women, not through a king.³

Even though much has changed from Judges 1 to Judges 21 (for instance, the enemy now is not Qiriath-sepher or Sisera but Benjamin), some operational principles remain, such as war as a preferred means of solving conflict, trafficking of women, negotiating between men and groups (groups of men or groups on whose behalf men make decisions). As we reach the end of the book of Judges, we realize the violence and prejudices found in Judges are by no means over; it is discouraging that humanity has not learned to deal better with each other. Unfortunate expressions still heard uttered by Christians, such as, “The God of the Old Testament is violent,” are both confirmed and qualified. Yes: the God of the Old Testament is a violent God because God’s followers saw God asking for—or at least allowing—violence against other peoples, just as many do see God today. Thus, the world of Judges is neither more nor less violent than our world; it is different, but at its core it deals with the same questions we deal with today. And just as today, YHWH speaks to YHWH’s people insofar as the people are willing to listen. “Perhaps Yahweh’s drawing out of the Israelite conflict is a reflection of his [*sic*] own prolonged inner conflict. It is said that Yahweh is ‘grieved by the misery of Israel’ (10.16), but could it be possible that Yahweh is turning the tables on Israel and forcing them to experience the same kind of conflicted situation which he [*sic*] is suffering?”⁴ Or perhaps, as Adrien Bledstein imagines, Judges is the product of a group of women tired of men playing God, and perhaps the pained voice that tells of all these daughters (and also of many sons) is not the approving or indifferent voice that scholars often detect but the resigned voice of those who

3. Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 211.

4. Lee Roy Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God: A Pentecostal Hearing of the Book of Judges*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 32 (Dorset: Deo Publishing, 2008), 225.

recognize social and religious injustice for what it is.⁵ Furthermore, since patriarchy is the system within which both the Israel of Judges and we live, even feminists are never outside it, healed from it, and free to act in totally egalitarian, nonsexist ways; this is never so clear as when gender intersects with race, class, age, education, physical fitness, nationality, and other social constraints that set people up one against another.

5. Adrien Janis Bledstein, "Is Judges a Woman's Satire on Men Who Play God?," in *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 4 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 34–54.

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