

to do. What appeared impossible at the end of Exodus is not just possible, but certain, because it depends on what God does in the lives of his followers.

III. The Journey to the Promised Land (The Book of Numbers)

The Israelites break camp almost a full year after arriving at Mount Sinai (compare Exod 19:1–2 and Num 10:11–13), but only after final instructions, a census for the purpose of forming an army, and preparations for the trip across the wilderness to the promised land (Num 1:1–10:10; see Appendix V). Over the past eleven months, they have learned much about the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham and Sarah, the God who sent Moses, Aaron, and their sister, Miriam, to lead Israel out of Egypt (Mic 6:4). They have also entered into a covenant relationship with this God (Exod 24), learning more and more what the LORD is like and what they are called to become (Lev 17–26). But it is time to leave Sinai and test their young faith in Yahweh against the harsh realities of life in the wilderness. Now God's people must answer a simple and difficult question: Has Sinai changed you? Will you trust the God who not only saved you from Egypt, but who has committed himself to you in love? So, just as the Israelites were challenged to live

by faith on their way from Egypt to Mount Sinai (Exod 12–19), now, as they leave Mount Sinai, they must decide what their experience with the LORD at Sinai will mean for life away from Sinai: Now will they trust the LORD?

In the heart of the book of Numbers (12–21), the writer relates seven stories in which everyone in Israel—from the leaders to the people—are challenged to live by faith. The first story sets the pattern for what is to come in subsequent stories: the people complain about their troubles (11:1a), the LORD hears and becomes angry (11:1b), and his anger turns to punishment. Here, the LORD's fire begins to consume outlying parts of the camp (11:1c). The people cry out to Moses (11:2a), he prays to the LORD (11:2b), and “the fire subsided” (11:2c). This basic pattern holds for all but one of the seven stories (the political challenge in 12:1–16; see Figure 6.4).

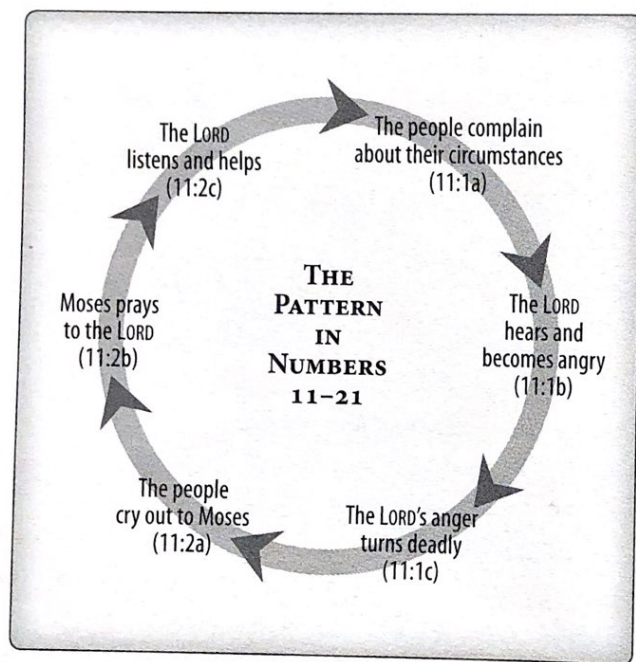


Figure 6.4. The Pattern in Numbers 11–21

Rather than rehearse each of the seven stories (see Figure 6.5), we focus on four key themes. First, the LORD has higher expectations for the people after Sinai than before. Prior to Sinai, the Israelites struggle with many of the same problems they face after Sinai: fear in the face of the Egyptian army (14:10–14), a lack of drinkable water (15:22–25), a lack of food (16:2–4), and no water at all (17:2–7). Before Sinai, in each crisis the LORD provides what the people need without

any punishment for their lack of trust. After Sinai, however, when the people complain about these same issues, the LORD becomes angry and strikes out against his people before providing what they want or need: a fire burns in the camp for the vague complaint about their troubles (11:1–2), a plague comes after their craving for meat (11:33), fear of the armies in the promised land costs the adult generation their lives (14:33–34), Moses and Aaron's failure to trust the LORD also costs them entry into the land (20:10–12), and Israel's impatience brings poisonous snakes (21:4–6). What the LORD overlooks and takes in stride before Sinai is not excused after Sinai. After the people have accepted the covenant and been taught the LORD's ways, the LORD has higher expectations for his people than for those who do not know the LORD.

Second, the people continue a trend set before arriving at Sinai of complaining to Moses and the LORD. See if you can identify themes that emerge when we put their complaints together before and after Sinai. At the beginning, facing the Egyptian army, the people said to Moses,

Weren't there enough graves in Egypt that you took us away to die in the desert? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt like this? Didn't we tell you the same thing in Egypt? "Leave us alone! Let us work for the Egyptians!" It would have been better for us to work for the Egyptians than to die in the desert. (Exod 14:11–12)

When the food ran out, they said,

Oh, how we wish that the LORD had just put us to death while we were still in the land of Egypt. There we could sit by the pots cooking meat and eat our fill of bread. Instead, you've brought us out into this desert to starve this whole assembly to death. (16:3)

And when the water ran out,

Why did you bring us out of Egypt to kill us, our children, and our livestock with thirst? (17:3)

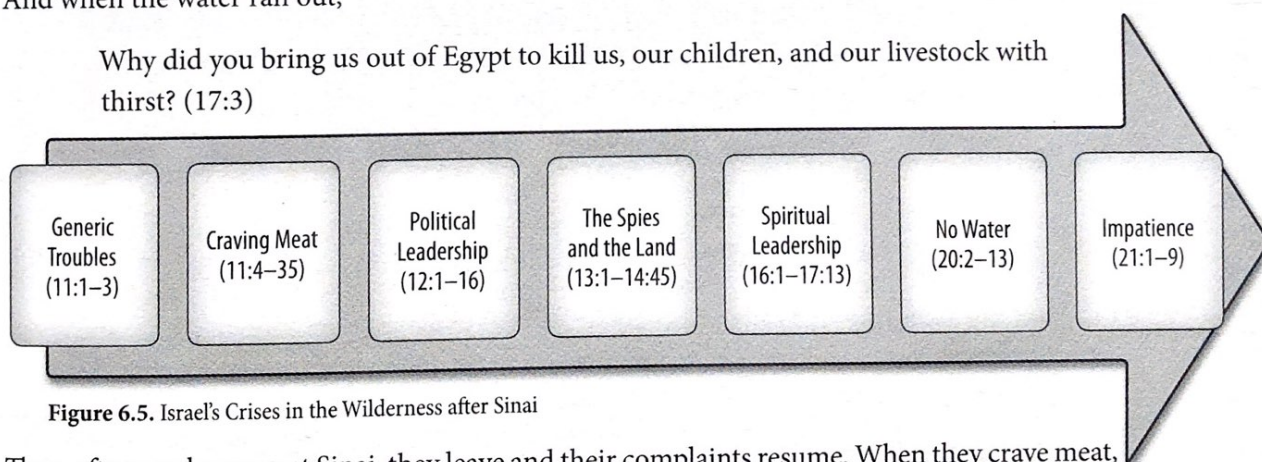


Figure 6.5. Israel's Crises in the Wilderness after Sinai

Then, after nearly a year at Sinai, they leave and their complaints resume. When they crave meat, they say,

The riffraff among them had a strong craving. Even the Israelites cried again and said, "Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for free, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic." (Num 11:4–5)

After the spies return with their negative assessment of invading the land,

All the Israelites criticized Moses and Aaron. The entire community said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt or if only we had died in this desert! Why is the LORD bringing us to this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our children will be taken by force. Wouldn't it be better for us to return to Egypt?" So they said to each other, "Let's pick a leader and let's go back to Egypt." (14:2-4)

When Korah and his group challenge Aaron's family over the priesthood, they begin with an accusation:

You've gone too far, because the entire community is holy, every last one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the LORD's assembly? (16:3)

And responding to Moses's request to come to the tabernacle,

We won't come up! Isn't it enough that *you've brought us up from a land full of milk and honey* to kill us in the desert so that you'd also dominate us? Moreover, you haven't brought us to a land full of milk and honey, nor given us the inheritance of field and vineyard. Would you also gouge out the eyes of these men? We won't come up! (16:12-14, emphasis mine)

Again, when the water runs out,

If only we too had died when our brothers perished in the LORD's presence! Why have you brought the LORD's assembly into this desert to kill us and our animals here? Why have you led us up from Egypt to bring us to this evil place without grain, figs, vines, or pomegranates? And there's no water to drink! (20:3-5)

Finally, when they become impatient they again speak against the LORD and Moses,

Why did you bring us up from Egypt to kill us in the desert, where there is no food or water. And we detest this miserable bread! (21:5)

I have listed and provided all these citations in order to identify common themes that emerge when we see all of these texts together. But instead of identifying the common themes that I see, let me provide some clues for what you might look for (please do not limit yourself to these clues):

1. What do they think about the past? How does their image of the past develop? Finally, what significant terminology do they use to describe their past life?
2. What do they wish for . . . over and over again? How do you read this wish, as literal or other?
3. Who do they complain against?
4. Why do they complain so often? And why with such strong language or dramatic flair?

The Message of the Old Testament

So many stories about so many people and so many events, sometimes it is not easy to see the big picture. So we pause to ask, "What's it all about?" or maybe, "What does it mean?" or even better, "Who is it all about?"

The LORD! The LORD! (Exod 34:6)

The LORD is the star, the hero of Genesis through Deuteronomy, not Moses or any other human. And despite a delay, for reasons only briefly explained (Gen 15:16), the LORD is determined to rescue his people: to enter their world, punch out any god with a claim on them, and bring them out of slavery (Exod 1–12). The LORD is determined to prove his reliability as Moses leads them to Sinai, no matter the crisis, and to show his love and ability to take care of his people (Exod 13–19). The LORD wants nothing less than to live with his people in a covenant relationship (Exod 20–24), even when the people shatter the covenant by turning to other gods (Exod 32–34).

*a God who is compassionate and merciful,
very patient, full of great loyalty and faithfulness,
showing great loyalty to a thousand generations,
forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion . . . (Exod 34:6–7)*

Still, the LORD is determined—too much is riding on the success of the LORD's plan (Gen 12:1–3; Exod 19:5–6). So the LORD forgives and pitches his own tent in the middle of the camp (Exod 40). That's not to say that the LORD just looks the other way when the people fail to live up to their promises—to be like their God.

*yet by no means clearing the guilty,
punishing for their parents' sins
their children and their grandchildren,
as well as the third and the fourth generations. (Exod 34:7)*

But even when there appears to be no way the relationship can last past Israel's next betrayal, the LORD makes a way (Lev 1–26). Disappointment after disappointment, the people struggle to trust, to understand that the LORD is not like all the other gods they've known (Num 10–36). But regardless, the LORD continues with them for the sake of his love, for the sake of the world.

Finally, not a common theme in the text, but a worthwhile consideration: Can you identify with the Israelites and their complaints? Can you understand where they are coming from and empathize with them?

The complaints witness to a claim the text makes about Moses: "The man Moses was very humble, more so than anyone on the face of the earth" (Num 12:3 NRSV). The strength to handle

all of the accusations made against him comes from humility, an awareness of who he is in relationship to the LORD. Moses recognizes that as long as he is in a leadership position of the LORD's people, their complaints against him are really complaints against the LORD. For example, early in his experience, "The people argued with Moses and said, 'Give us water to drink.' Moses said to them, 'Why are you arguing with me? *Why are you testing the LORD?*'" (Exod 17:2, emphasis mine). This humility, a strength from knowing who he is in relationship to the LORD, is the only thing that can account for Moses continually fighting for these people—praying to the LORD on their behalf over and over (e.g., Num 11:2, 12:11, 21:7), and going to bat for them when the LORD is ready to kill them and start over with Moses (14:13–19, 16:10–22, 16:45–50). Moses is not perfect; he has his moments when he has had all he can take from Israel and moments he also fails to trust the LORD (e.g., Num 1:10–15, 16:13, 20:6–13), but he is also an exemplary leader. He knows that Israel belongs to the LORD (not to himself) and that he is a servant of the LORD (he is not God). So, he works tirelessly for the LORD on behalf of the people, even when—especially when—he knows that he will never enter the land to which he has been leading the people for all these years.

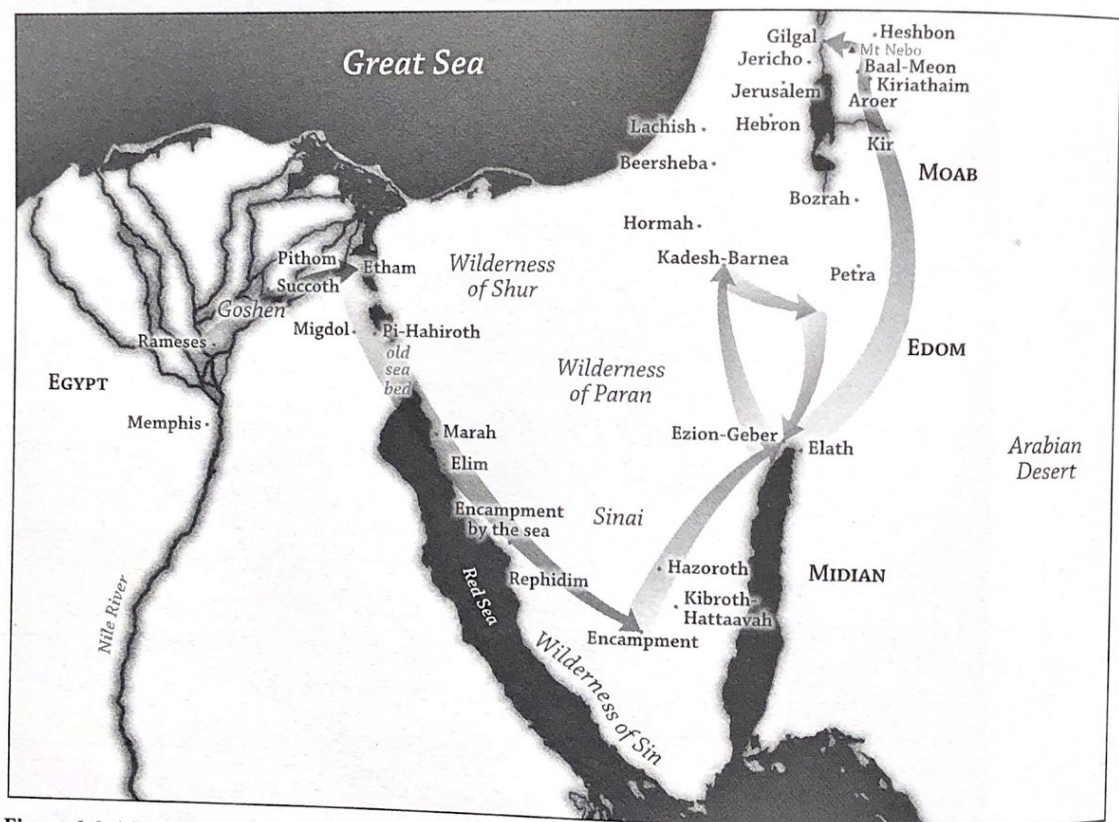


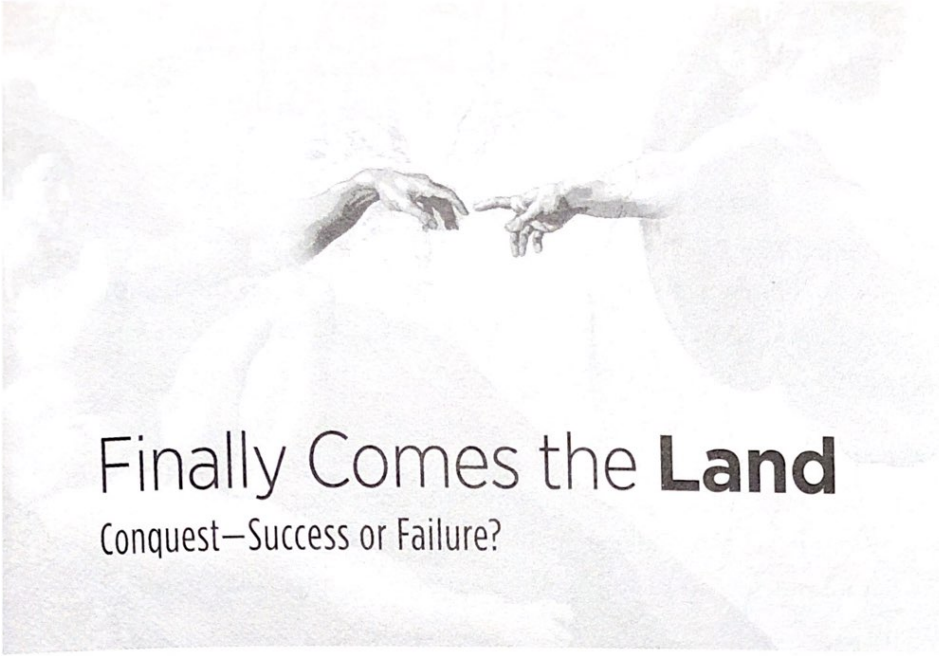
Figure 6.6. A Possible Route of the Wilderness Wandering

Conclusion

Four events at the end of Numbers position Israel for an invasion of the promised land. First, by the time Israel's complaints end, the nation has begun to move up into the **Transjordan** region, east of the Jordan, with the promised land on the other side of the river. Here, they begin to fight and take lands in which they settle: the conquest, for all practical purposes, has begun. Two kings are defeated, whose names become famous later in Israel's literature: King Sihon of the Amorites (Num 21:21–32) and King Og of Bashan (Num 21:33–35; see Ps 136:16–22). Another king is so alarmed by Israel's presence that he will do anything to save his kingdom. So Balak, the king of Moab, sends for a famous prophet to come curse Israel and stop them—Balaam, who lives at Pethor on the Euphrates River (22:1–7).

Balaam's story is filled with humor and irony (a talking donkey who can see better than the famous Seer, 22:22–35), mystery (why does God approve of Balaam's mission and then become angry with him for going? 22:20, 22–35), and frustration for King Balak who hired Balaam to curse Israel. Time after time, despite Balak's instructions, Balaam blesses Israel. Seven times he speaks a blessing: 23:7–10, 18–24; 24:3–9, 15–19, 20, 21–22, 23–24. Balak is infuriated by the prophet and revokes his “payment” for services (24:11), even though Balaam had warned him that he could only speak God's Word (see 22:38, cf. 22:20). For Balaam, however, there are other ways to curse Israel than by an oracle. So, at some point Balaam offers advice—the only way to curse Israel is to tempt the men to have sex with the women of Moab and worship Baal (25:1–3, see 31:16). This is exactly what they do, infuriating the LORD (25:3), hurting Israel, and later costing Balaam his life (31:8).

Second, a second census prepares the army, determines how much land each tribe will receive, and confirms that all of the prior adult generation has died in the wilderness (26:52–56, 63–65). Third, Joshua is appointed to be the next leader of Israel after Moses dies (27:18–23). And fourth, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh decide that the land east of the Jordan is perfect for their lifestyle and ask Moses for permission to settle here (32:1–5). After a serious misunderstanding on Moses's part (32:6–15), these tribes assure Moses they will help with the conquest of the remaining land (32:16–19), and Moses agrees to their plan (32:20–27). The Israelites are almost ready to begin taking the land promised to their ancestors hundreds of years ago. Almost—because Moses has some things to say before he dies.



Finally Comes the **Land**

Conquest—Success or Failure?

The Book of Deuteronomy is a hinge point, marking the end of the Pentateuch and at the same time beginning the **Deuteronomistic History (DH)**. On the one side, the writer composes the book as Moses's final speeches to Israel before he dies—concluding the Pentateuch. On the other side, Deuteronomy begins the Deuteronomistic History—a unified composition of seven books: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings. These texts take the reader on a wild ride with Israel, from just before her entry into the promised land (Deuteronomy) to her loss of the northern territory to Assyria (2 Kgs 17) and then Judah to Babylon (2 Kgs 24–25).

The DH is not, however, history in the modern sense of the term: an objective reconstruction of events. The DH is theological history: a retelling of select events from a theological (faith) perspective in order to establish ideas about God and the life of faith. Whether visible or behind the scenes, the DH views all of the events in its history through the lens of faith. How this works and what the DH is trying to teach its reader is the challenge before us in this chapter, and many to come. In this chapter, we will identify three central themes introduced into the DH by Deuteronomy; we will then take quick snapshots of Joshua and Judges from twenty thousand feet above, before diving down for a close look at examples of their essential ideas.



READING ASSIGNMENTS

DEUTERONOMY 1–10

JOSHUA 1–8, 23–24

JUDGES 1–5, 13–16

KEY TERMS

Collateral: property or goods given or promised as security for a loan

Concubine: a secondary wife, usually due to her family's lower economic status

Deuteronomistic History (DH): the books of Deuteronomy through 2 Kings, excluding Ruth

Deuteronomistic Theology: the basic idea that God rewards those who do what is right, but punishes those who choose to do wrong (a theme nuanced in the DH and other books)

Deuteronomists (Dtr): the authors/editors of the Deuteronomistic History

Herem: the Hebrew term translated as "the ban" (CEB) and used to command total destruction in a battle

Tribute: a tax imposed on a smaller or conquered nation by a superior nation or empire

Deuteronomy

As the first book in the DH, Deuteronomy is the headwaters for central ideas that begin in these chapters and grow like a river, becoming wider and deeper as each theme moves through the books ahead. Here, we identify three themes that unite the books of the DH and use events from the history of Israel to teach and illustrate each message about God and the life of faith.

Theme 1: Love for God

The single most important theme in the DH and Deuteronomy is the appeal for a single-minded allegiance to the LORD. This idea is stated powerfully in many texts, perhaps none more powerful than the *Shema*, so called because its first word in Hebrew is *Shema* (an imperative meaning, “listen,” or even “pay attention”).

Israel, listen! Our God is the LORD! Only the LORD!

Love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your being, and all your strength. These words that I am commanding you today must always be on your minds. Recite them to your children. Talk about them when you are sitting around your house and when you are out and about, when you are lying down and when you are getting up. Tie them on your hand as a sign. They should be on your forehead as a symbol. Write them on your house's doorframes and on your city's gates. (6:4–9)

Love, as a commitment (not a mere emotion), is also the answer to the question, *What does God really want or expect from his people?*

Now in light of all that, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you? Only this: to revere the LORD your God by walking in all his ways, by loving him, by serving the LORD your God with all your heart and being, and by keeping the LORD's commandments and his regulations that I'm commanding you right now. It's for your own good! (10:12–13)

So circumcise your hearts and stop being so stubborn, because the LORD your God is the God of all gods and Lord of all lords, the great, mighty, and awesome God who doesn't play favorites and doesn't take bribes. He enacts justice for orphans and widows, and he loves immigrants, giving them food and clothing. That means you must also love immigrants because you were immigrants in Egypt. Revere the LORD your God, serve him, cling to him, swear by his name alone! (10:16–20)

And once again:

It's true: if you carefully keep all this commandment that I'm giving you, by doing it, *by loving the LORD your God*, by walking in all his ways, and by clinging to him, then

the LORD will clear out all these nations before you. You will inherit what belonged to nations that are larger and stronger than you are. (11:22–23, emphasis mine)

Above all else, Deuteronomy calls for devotion to the LORD that comes from the heart, the very core of a person's being—a near infinite distance from the caricature of Old Testament religion as nothing more than actions divorced from attitudes. Instead, actions mean nothing to the LORD unless they are fueled by an inner commitment to him. The LORD's goal is a relationship with people that restores the intimacy lost in the Garden of Eden, an intimacy only possible by a single-minded allegiance to the LORD and the LORD alone.

The last citation from chapter 11 introduces a challenge for Israel and for the reader: the presence of other nations in the land and what to do about them. The first aspect of the challenge has been an obvious issue, since the LORD promised the land to Abraham. It is good land, so many people live there. The second aspect of the issue, however, makes me uncomfortable and leaves me with questions I cannot answer. To deal with the residents, the LORD orders *herem* (“the ban”), the destruction of every threat to Israel's well-being:

Now once the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to take possession of, and he drives out numerous nations before you. . . seven nations that are larger and stronger than you—once the LORD your God lays them before you, you must strike them down, placing them under the ban. Don't make any covenants with them, and don't be merciful to them. (7:1–2)

The practice of *herem*—total destruction of every living being—is often a reason cited by those who reject the Old Testament or the Bible. How could a good God order such violence? How could God destroy innocent children? Deuteronomy, however, defends *herem* on the basis of two principles: First, it is because of the wickedness of the people in the land. Because of their wickedness, including the practice of child sacrifice, that the LORD is destroying or driving them off the land (9:5; 12:31; 18:9–12; see also Gen 15:16 and Lev 18:24–25). The second principle is the danger the native population poses to Israel. Should Israel adopt their practices and worship other gods (7:3–4; 12:2–4, 31–32), the LORD will destroy Israel (6:14–15; 7:4b). Thus, Israel faces the same destruction if she does not keep a single-minded allegiance to the LORD, turning to other gods (see 13:1–18; 17:2–7). The LORD is consistent in invoking *herem*—against Canaanites and Israelites. In fact, as we will see, the Lord will drive Israel off the land for her failure to keep the first commandment: love and serve no other God.

The situation, however, is far more complicated than an image of Israel entering the land and killing everything alive. God doesn't invoke *herem* all that often, nor does Israel always keep *herem*. In fact, in time to come, some marriages to those outside of Israel will be celebrated (see the books of Ruth and Esther). In simple terms, we do not know all the details that might help us further understand the rationale behind *herem* (please see the recommended books at the end of the chapter in “For Further Reading”). Because of this, in a sense, we are

working in the dark and put in a position similar to Israel: Will we trust the LORD? Will we accept that the LORD knew what was best for Israel in her place and time? Or will we reject the LORD and take matters into our own hands? To some degree, the writer has set us up: now we must decide if we trust the LORD or not, and to some degree we feel the same struggle Israel lived with on a near-daily basis.

Theme 2: Love for Others

On the other side of the universe from the first theme Deuteronomy introduces, the second theme expresses concern for those who live on the margins of society (see also Exod 21-23 and Lev 19): love for the poor, widows, orphans, aliens, and Levites. Ideally, Israel was to practice a Sabbatical Year every seven years, in which all debts were forgiven (Deut 15:1-2) and debt slaves released with provisions for a fresh start that would keep families out of a continuous cycle of poverty (15:12-18); what meager evidence that exists, however, suggests that Israel rarely, if ever, kept the practice (see 2 Chr 36:21; Isa 58:13).

Deuteronomy urges those with wealth not to be tight-fisted, but to help those in need with loans (15:7-11), even if the Sabbatical Year is near and it is unlikely that the loan will be repaid before debts are cancelled. Collateral for loans was appropriate. However, those with wealth were not permitted to disgrace the poor by storming into their houses to collect the collateral (24:10-11), take a person's means of livelihood as collateral (24:6), or keep a person's only robe as collateral overnight (24:12-13). The wealthy should not refuse to pay workers at the end of the day (24:14-15), strip the harvest bare so that there is nothing for the poor to pick up or glean (24:19-22), or use their money to take justice away from the poor or aliens (24:17). In an ancient society, those with wealth could get away with all these things, pushing the poor around and becoming wealthier at the expense of the poor.

In the DH, how a society treats the poor and others on the margins of society is a reliable indicator as to how well a society loves their "neighbor" (anyone other than my family) and is faithful to the second half of the Ten Commandments (repeated in Deut 5:1-21, see esp. vv. 12-15).

Theme 3: The Deuteronomistic Theology

The third theme Deuteronomy introduces is what is frequently called the Deuteronomistic theology. In essence, this theology promises blessings from God for those who are obedient, and threatens curses for those who refuse to obey, especially those who turn to other gods. Toward the end of Deuteronomy, this theology is stated with force. Moses begins a speech:

Now if you really obey the LORD your God's voice, by carefully keeping all his commandments that I am giving you right now, then the LORD your God will set you high above all nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and find you if you obey the LORD your God's voice: You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the field. (28:1-3)

He concludes this section:

The LORD will make you the head of things, not the tail; you will be at the top of things, not the bottom, as long as you obey the LORD your God's commandments that I'm commanding you right now, by carefully doing them. Don't deviate even a bit from any of these words that I'm commanding you right now by following other gods and serving them. (28:13–14)

On the other hand, Moses warns the people:

But if you don't obey the LORD your God's voice by carefully doing all his commandments and his regulations that I am commanding you right now, all these curses will come upon you and find you. You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the field. (28:15–16)

That's how all these curses will come over you, pursuing you, reaching you until you are completely wiped out, because you didn't obey the LORD your God's voice by keeping his commandments and his regulations that he gave you. (28:45)

Even the promises to Abraham and Sarah will be suspended:

Once as countless as the stars in the night sky, only a few of you will be left alive—all because you didn't obey the LORD your God's voice. And just as before, the LORD enjoyed doing good things for you and increasing your numbers, now the LORD will enjoy annihilating and destroying you. You will be torn off the very fertile land you are entering to possess. (28:62–63)

This theology is supported elsewhere in Deuteronomy (e.g., 27:1–26), and God assures the people that what he asks of them is not so difficult that they cannot obey (30:11–20). Other books in the DH also support this theology, as over and over again God blesses the nation when it is trying to be obedient, and brings trouble when Israel turns to other gods.

At the end of Deuteronomy, Moses makes the trek up Mount Nebo where the LORD shows him the good land Israel will enter. Although it seems harsh and maybe even unfair, Moses will not go with the people because of his own failure to trust the LORD at Meribah (Num 20: 9–11) and perhaps earlier (Num 11:11–15, 21–23); although, Moses later blames the people for what happened (see Deut 1:37–38, 3:26, and 4:21). He argues with the LORD. Moses begs to enjoy the destination to which he has been leading the people all these years. But the answer is no, and finally the LORD tells Moses to stop: “That’s enough from you! Don’t ever ask me about this again!” (Deut 3:26). The man who argued so effectively for Israel so many times cannot get God to change his mind about his destiny. So, Moses hikes up one more mountain, Mount Nebo, to the peak of the Pisgah slope where the LORD shows him the land—from the far north, where the tribe of Dan will ultimately settle, to Judah’s land and the southern plain, even westward to the Mediterranean Sea (34:1–3). Here, on the mountain, Moses dies (see Figure 7.1).

Texts in Conversation

The book of Deuteronomy is strong in its assertion of the Deuteronomistic theology. Consequently, believers often hear the voice of Deuteronomy but do not hear other texts inside and outside of the DH. When this happens, it is easy for a reader to arrive at a gospel of health and wealth in which as long as a believer has enough faith, their lives will be filled with good things. They will be healthy, or overcome any serious illness; they will become wealthy, or lack any need. All because the LORD promises to bless them (28:13).

Other texts challenge such a one-sided view of life and faith, beginning with texts inside the DH. One of the best kings to follow David (the man who followed the Lord's heart, 1 Sam 13:4), was Josiah. He came to throne at an early age and soon after led a major religious reformation. The **Deuteronomists (Dtr)** write of Josiah, "There's never been a king like Josiah, whether before or after him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, all his being, and all his strength, in agreement with everything in the Instructions from Moses" (2 Kgs 23:25). A prophet even declared that though the nation would suffer a terrible end, Josiah would go to his grave in peace (2 Kgs 22:20). But he doesn't. This great spiritual man went to face Egypt in war and suffered a violent death in battle (2 Kgs 23:29).

Texts outside of the DH especially challenge a one-sided idea of "do good, get good" or "do bad, get bad" theology. One of the best kings to follow David was Josiah. This writer has seen that doing the right thing does not guarantee a reward, just as Job discovered that his righteousness did not oblige God to do anything. Job, "a person of absolute integrity" (Job 1:1) this innocent man suffers tremendous pain and loses children he never recovers (1:13–19), not because he did anything wrong or needed to learn something; all such causes are dismissed in chapters 1–2. His friends will argue for the Deuteronomistic theology: because it is the wicked who suffer, Job must have done something wrong and needs to confess his sin and turn back to God (8:3–7, 11:5–6, 13–17, 22:4–11, 21–28). Job, however, refuses to confess what he has not done and tells his friends what he has seen: the wicked often prosper while the righteous suffer (21:7–21, 27–33). And at the end of the book, God will side with Job as he speaks to one of Job's friends: "I am angry at you and your two friends because you haven't spoken about me correctly as did my servant Job" (42:7).

All of these texts, and many others we could read, warn us against a simplistic, one-sided reading of Deuteronomy and the DH. Yes, God blesses the righteous, but not all the time. Yes, the wicked suffer, but so do the righteous. Does wisdom agree that living a good life is still to be preferred over a wicked life? Absolutely! We will do well as long as we hear this promise against the background of these voices from the Books of Job, Ecclesiastes, 1–2 Kings, along with many other voices in the Book of Psalms who cry out to God—though they have done nothing wrong (see Chapter Fifteen)—and warnings from the Book of Proverbs that oppression often trumps God's blessing of the righteous (e.g., see 13:23, 28:6).

The Book of Joshua

Since Genesis 12, we have been waiting for the moment when Israel will enter the land promised to Abraham and Sarah. The family has had to wait four hundred years and has been oppressed by Egyptian slavery, until the current residents deserved to lose their land (Gen 15:13). But finally, after all the hype, all the talk about going to the promised land, when Israel finally gets to the land and begins the conquest, the book of Joshua has little to say. It's all much to do about nothing. The book of Joshua is composed of three types of material that we will explore in order: a narrative of the conquest (1-12), the allotment of land to the tribes (13-22), and Joshua's final speeches (23-24).

1. A Narrative of the Conquest (Josh 1-12).

In the conquest narrative, little is actually said about conquering the land. The first five chapters describe preparations for taking the land:

- God affirms Joshua as the new leader (1:1-18) and urges him "to be strong and courageous" (1:6, 7, 9, 18);
- Joshua sends spies to the first target, Jericho (2:1-24);
- Israel crosses the Jordan (3:1-4:24) just as their parents crossed the Sea of Reeds (14:21-25), bringing the era of wilderness wandering to an end;
- Joshua orders the circumcision of all the men in preparation for the Passover (5:1-9);
- the people celebrate their first Passover in the promised land (5:10-12);
- and finally, the commander of the LORD's heavenly forces arrives with instructions (5:13-6:5).

The conquest narrative recounts only three battles with any detail:

Battle One: The Battle of Jericho, which isn't much of a battle at all. While Jericho is under siege (6:1), the commander of the LORD's heavenly forces directs a ritual march around the city: circle the city once a day for six days (6:3) and then, on the seventh day, circle the city seven times; shout and watch the walls fall, then rush into the city. This is not military strategy, but what people in the ancient Near East might do on special worship occasions (see Neh 12:27-39).



Figure 7.1. The Memorial to Moses at the Top of Mount Nebo. Photo by David Anderson.

And so, the writer's message: the LORD gives Jericho to Israel (Josh 6:2, 16). Everything in Jericho belongs to the LORD, who has invoked *herem* (6:17–19).

Battle Two: The Battle of Ai. This battle differs from the ritual strategy at Jericho. Here, sound military tactics come into play. The first attempt fails because of Achan's failure to respect *herem* at Jericho: taking a robe, silver, and gold for himself (7:20–21). Once he is found out, he and his whole family are put to death (7:22–26)—a concept of corporate identity and guilt that we find almost impossible to grasp in our world. On the second attempt, Israel sets an ambush for Ai (8:1–29), and in this battle, the people are allowed to keep the cattle and other goods (8:27). If only Achan could have waited.

Battle Three: The Battle for Gibeah. The Battle for Gibeah involves a tale of deception by the people living in Gibeah (9:3–13, 15), Israel's failure to inquire of the LORD (9:14), and a battle to protect Israel's new allies—the people of Gibeah—when they are attacked (10:1–7). In this battle, we find a mixture of Israel's soldiers engaged in fighting and the LORD actively helping Israel—throwing large stones from the sky (hail stones? 10:10–11) and in some way extending the day so Israel could complete the rout (10:12–14).

So we have three stories: one in which the LORD is solely responsible for the victory, another in which Israel uses sound military strategy, and a third in which the LORD and Israel work together. Nothing more needs to be said about the conquest. These three battles say it all—the conquest of the promised land takes place in these three ways. All that's left to do is list the victories: in the south (10:28–43), the north (11:1–15), east of the Jordan by Moses (12:1–6), and then a final list of kings defeated west of the Jordan (12:7–24).

By all appearances, the invasion has been a rapid, decisive conquest of the land:

Joshua captured all these kings and their cities. He struck them down without mercy. He wiped them out as something reserved for God. This was exactly as Moses the LORD's servant had commanded. (11:12)

So Joshua took this whole land: the highlands, the whole arid southern plain, the whole land of Goshen, the lowlands, the desert plain, and both the highlands and the lowlands of Israel. (11:16; see also 11:23 and 18:1)

Israel has completed a decisive, textbook invasion.

Or have they? Alongside the texts that proclaim a decisive conquest are other voices that express a different opinion: the invasion was not complete at all, but fragmentary, stalled, and incomplete.

Now Joshua had reached old age. The LORD said to him, "You have reached old age, but *much of the land remains to be taken over*. (13:1, emphasis mine)

But the Israelites didn't remove the Geshurites or the Maacathites. So Geshur and Maacath still live among Israel today. (13:13)

But the people of Judah couldn't remove the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem. So today the Jebusites still live along with the people of Judah in Jerusalem. (15:63)

But they didn't remove the Canaanites who lived in Gezer. So today the Canaanites, who were used for forced labor, still live within Ephraim. (16:10; see also 17:12–13)

And when we turn a few pages over to the Book of Judges, news of the failed conquest overwhelms the first chapter (emphases in the following citations are mine).

Thus the LORD was with *the tribe of Judah*, and they took possession of the highlands. However, *they didn't drive out* those who lived in the plain because they had iron chariots. (Judg 1:19)

But *the people of Benjamin didn't drive out the Jebusites* who lived in Jerusalem. So the Jebusites still live with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem today. (1:21; cf. Josh 15:63)

The tribe of Manasseh didn't drive out the people in Beth-shean, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, Megiddo, or any of their villages. The Canaanites were determined to live in that land. When Israel became stronger they forced the Canaanites to work for them, but *they didn't completely drive them out*. (1:27–28)

The tribe of Ephraim didn't drive out the Canaanites living in Gezer, so the Canaanites kept on living there with them. (1:29; cf. Josh 16:10)

The tribe of Zebulun didn't drive out the people living in Kitron or Nahalol. These Canaanites lived with them but were forced to work for them. (1:30)

The tribe of Asher didn't drive out the people living in Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik, or Rehob. The people of Asher settled among the Canaanites in the land because *they couldn't drive them out*. (1:31–32)

The tribe of Naphtali didn't drive out the people living in Beth-shemesh or Beth-anath but settled among the Canaanites in the land. The people living in Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath were forced to work for them. (1:33)

The Amorites pushed *the people of Dan* back into the highlands because *they wouldn't allow them* to come down to the plain. (1:34)

The reader has good reason to be confused, even frustrated with the text. What's going on? Did Israel conquer the land or not? Some texts appear to say *yes, absolutely*, while others appear to say *absolutely not*. In some places Israel takes control, while in others the native residents remain in control; and, as for the tribe of Dan, it loses its allotted territory back to the Amorites (1:34). As a result of these texts and other evidence, some researchers propose different models for understanding Israel and her emergence in the land (see "For Further Reading").

To follow the information in Joshua and Judges, at the very least we need to revise our mental picture of what happened when Israel entered the land. On the one hand, the conquest was a much longer, drawn out affair than often assumed. Israel does fight key battles and take control of some areas (as claimed in the book of Joshua), but she has a long way to go in her claim upon all the land. Not until the time of King David (ca. 1000 BCE) does the nation finish dealing with non-Israelites in and around the promised land. Then, but only then, was the nation of Israel the largest and most powerful country it would ever be.

On the other hand, the book of Joshua assures the reader that God kept every promise ever made to the people:

The LORD gave to Israel all the land he had pledged to give to their ancestors. They took it over and settled there. The LORD gave them rest from surrounding danger, exactly as he had pledged to their ancestors. Not one of all their enemies held out against them. The LORD gave all their enemies into their power. Not one of all the good things that the LORD had promised to the house of Israel failed. Every promise was fulfilled. (21:43–45, emphasis mine)

The writer emphasizes that any failure of the invasion is not the LORD's fault. The LORD kept every promise and gave all their enemies into their power. But Israel failed to keep her part. Joshua recognized what was happening and in frustration asked the Israelites, "How long will you avoid going to take over the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given you?" (18:3; see also 17:14–18). And near the end of his life he said, "Look. I'm now walking on the road to death that all the earth must take. You know with all your heart and being that *not a single one of all the good things that the LORD your God promised about you has failed. They were all fulfilled for you. Not a single one of them has failed*" (23:14, emphasis mine).

2. The Distribution of the Land (Josh 13–22).

Although Israel has yet to conquer all the land, the LORD instructs Joshua to allot the land to the various tribes and to urge them to finish the conquest of their land (13:1–7). So, Joshua describes the borders for the tribes east of the Jordan (13:8–33), and then casts lots for the large tribes within the promised land (14:1–5): Judah (15:1–63), Ephraim (16:1–10), and Manasseh (17:1–18). The tabernacle is set up at Shiloh (18:1), where Joshua authorizes a survey of the remaining land for allotment to the seven tribes still without land, and reprimands these tribes for being lethargic about taking their land (18:3). Then, the final tribes are allotted their land: Benjamin (18:11–28), Simeon (19:1–9), Zebulun (19:10–16), Issachar (19:17–23), Asher (19:24–31), Naphtali (19:32–39), and Dan (19:40–48; see Figure 7.2).

Along with the allotment of land, Joshua also designates six cities as "cities of refuge" (20:1–9), three on each side of the Jordan. These cities function as places of sanctuary or safety for anyone accused of murder: the accused could run here (literally) before the family of the deceased could catch them and put them to death for the crime. Israel, like other ancient societies, had no police system—only family justice. But at a city of refuge, the accused would be safe until a trial

determined guilt or innocence. If guilty, the guilty person was handed over to the “blood avenger” from the family, who then put the murderer to death.

The cities of refuge were among the forty-eight cities given to the Levites, scattered among all of the tribes (21:1–42). These “Levitical cities” were needed so that all Israel had access to a Levite who could teach the law, as well as render decisions regarding what is holy or common and what is clean or unclean (Lev 10:10–11).

3. Joshua's Farewell Address (Josh 23–24).

From time to time, it becomes popular for couples to renew their wedding vows. Why? They are already married, sometimes for thirty, forty, or even fifty years. So what's the purpose of renewing vows already taken? I leave the question with you while we turn to the final scene in the book of Joshua: a covenant-renewal ceremony. Joshua summons the leaders of Israel to meet at Shechem (24:1) where the ceremony begins with a reminder of what God has done for Israel, reaching back to Israel's origins with Abram and Sarai, and culminating with God's gift of the land (24:2–13). On the basis of what God has done for them, Joshua calls for the renewal of Israel's vows to serve the LORD—and only the LORD—tossing aside all the other gods they have collected through the years (24:14). *Choose today whom you will serve—the gods of Egypt, the gods in the promised land, or the gods of the ancestors—but make a choice.* Joshua says, “But my family and I will serve the LORD” (24:15). Decide. You need to make your decision *and stick with it.*

The people say they will serve the LORD and no other god. They even add more to the story of what the LORD has done for them (24:16–18), to which Joshua replies, “You can't serve the LORD” (24:19)—a baffling response for a covenant renewal ceremony. What did he want the people to say?! We will pick up this question again in the “To Discuss” questions at the end of the chapter.

The Book of Judges

Joshua is a remarkable man: his death is recorded at the end of the book of Joshua (24:29), his death is recorded again in Judges chapter 1 (1:1), and yet again in chapter 2 (2:8–9). What a man! Of course, he only dies once, but the multiple references emphasize that: First, Joshua dies at the end of the book of Joshua; second, the book of Judges continues Israel's story, slightly overlapping with the book of Joshua; and third, Judges begins with a double introduction (1:1–2:5; 2:6–23), each of which starts with the death of Joshua.



Figure 7.2. The Twelve Tribes

Baal's Country and Baal's Story

As Israel crosses the Jordan River, a large billboard on the side of the road announces the struggle the nation will have for the next five hundred years.

Welcome to Baal's Country
Willkommen in Baals Land

Bienvenue au Country de Baal
Bienvenido a la tierra de Baal

Our best source of knowledge about Baal comes from fragmentary tablets written in Ugaritic, dated to ca. 1400 BCE, some found between 1929–1939 and others after 1950 CE at Ras Shamra (the ancient city of Ugarit) on the Mediterranean Sea (about thirty miles south of Antioch). Because of their fragmentary nature, the order of the narrative is uncertain and varies in different translations. In general, the story unfolds along the following lines (and at points is quite funny to me):

A dispute breaks out between Baal (god of the thunderstorm, rain, fertility, and life) and Yam and Nahar (gods of the sea and river, respectively) whose floods destroy life. Baal is victorious and takes Yam and Nahar captive and puts them under his control. He is not happy, however, that he—the ruler of the divine assembly, king of the gods—still lives with his parents. Baal wants his own place, so he complains to his sister, Anat (a fierce god of war), and asks her to go talk to his dad, Father El, about getting his own house. His sister goes and, with a mixture of flattery and threats, persuades their father to order the construction of Baal's own palace. Soon, Baal is enthroned in his very own house.

Despite Baal's position of authority and his control over life-destroying rivers and seas, he must continually battle with Mot (god of death and infertility). Every year, Mot picks a fight with Baal. He stops the rain from coming and dries up all of Baal's moisture from the land. This action signifies Baal's death, his descent into Mot's huge mouth, and the end of the growing season. With Baal's death, the gods attempt to find someone who can sit on Baal's throne, but no god is equal to the task. One god who tries to sit on Baal's throne discovers that his feet are far from touching the floor. He is like a child sitting on Baal's throne. The god of life is dead and all hope is lost.

Anat, however, refuses to believe Baal is really dead. So she hunts down Mot, finds him, and demands that Mot raise Baal from the dead, but he refuses. Months pass until she comes back and slaughters Mot, chops him into pieces with her sword, and sows him like seed in the field. Father El then has a dream and realizes that Baal is still alive. He laughs and tells the people to sow their seed in the dry fields because he knows Baal is alive and rain is sure to come.

Indeed, after a world-wide search for Baal, he returns to his throne, bringing life-giving rains to the fields. Once again, death has been conquered by life and fertility.¹

¹Summary with citations from Michael Coogan, "Ugarit," pages 18–28 in *A Reader of Ancient Near Eastern Texts: Sources for the Study of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Victor Hamilton and Don Benjamin, "Stories of Ba'al and Anat," pages 244–256 in *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East*, rev. and exp. 2d ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1997).

The first introduction to Judges describes the geo-political situation in Israel that we began to see in the book of Joshua: First, the conquest is faltering, with control of the land an unsettled question. In some areas, at best, the Israelite tribes are firmly in control with the native population peacefully living among them (1:21, 29), or even forced to work for them (1:27–28, 30, 33). Elsewhere, however, the tribe of Asher was unable to exert their rule and had to “settle among the Canaanites” (1:31–32). And at worst, the tribe of Dan lost its allotted land back to the Amorites and had to find new land to settle (1:34; see the story in 18:1–31). Second, the tribes are not united, and there is certainly no nation of Israel. Tribal independence was partly by plan (see 13:1–7, 23:1–13), but also a failure to rally to one another when needed (Judg 5:15–18, 23). Unfortunately, they pay a high cost for their lack of unity, with larger and stronger groups such as the Philistines picking one Israelite village off at a time. But we are beginning to get ahead of the introduction now.

The second introduction describes a six stage spiritual pattern in which Israel is trapped (2:11–19): First, Israel abandons the LORD for the gods of the land; second, the LORD becomes angry and “hands them over” to others who will punish Israel; third, Israel will groan and cry out to the LORD; fourth, the LORD will send a judge, or military hero, to lead Israel to freedom; fifth, the land will enjoy a time of peace until the death of the leader; and then sixth, Israel will start the pattern all over again.

The stories in Judges 3–16 come from throughout the tribes allotted land, each using the same basic pattern in order to demonstrate the widespread nature of the problem and to show how the spiritual problems in Israel are getting worse (see Figure 7.4). Israel is caught on a runaway roller coaster, picking up more and more speed, and growing more and more out of control. It is only a matter of time before Israel jumps the tracks and crashes in a heap. To illustrate the problem, we will examine the first and last story about the judges: Ehud and Samson.

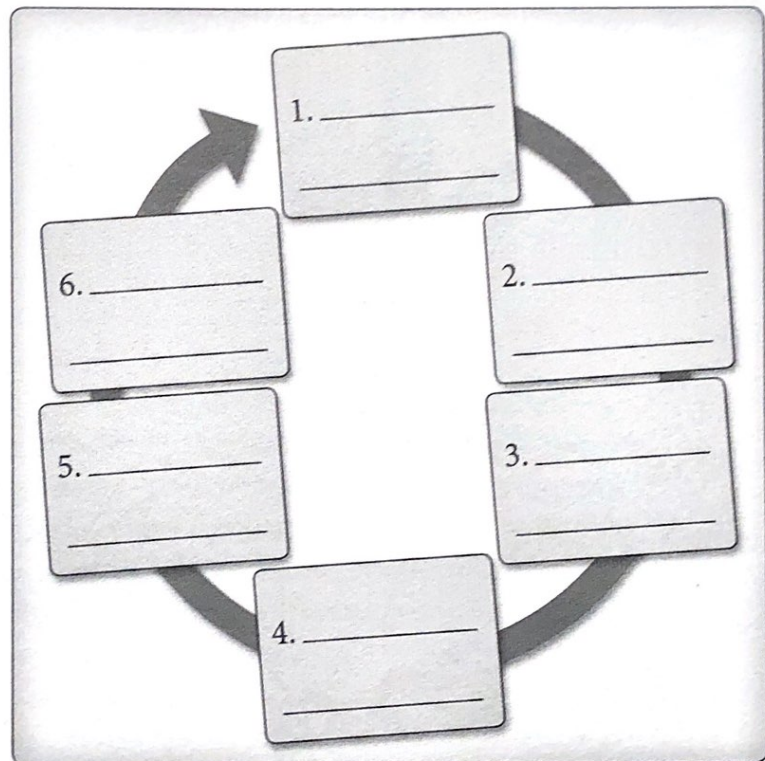


Table 7.1. The Recurring Pattern in the Book of Judges

Ehud

The first story is a raw comedy about a most unlikely hero: Ehud, a left-handed man from the tribe of Benjamin (which means ‘son of my right hand’). Ehud is a literary misfit. Because Israel did what was evil in the LORD’s sight, they had served Moab eighteen years (3:12–14). When



Figure 7.3. Map of the Judges in Israel

Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up Ehud (3:15). So one day, Ehud brought the tribute payment to Eglon, the king of Moab and a very fat man (in Hebrew his name is related to the word for “cow”). After giving the payment, Ehud told Eglon that he had a secret message. Kings love secrets, so everyone left the cool second story room (that doubled as the king’s restroom). Ehud delivered the secret message—a double-edged sword into Eglon’s belly, going in so far that the fat closed around it and caused Eglon’s “guts to spill out” (CEB) or caused his bowels to release (“the dirt came out” NRSV). Ehud closed and locked the doors, and made his escape to rally Israel (3:20–23).

A bit later, outside the cool upper room, the king’s servants didn’t know what to do. With the doors locked, they assumed that the king must have been relieving himself; the smell may have aided their assumption. Finally, so much time passed they opened the doors to find their king dead (3:24–25). But by this time, Ehud had rallied Israel (i.e., Ephraim) into fighting the Moabites for their freedom (3:26–30).

While Israel (and the reader) may find humor in mocking Moab’s king and how he died, Israel’s

constant turning away from the LORD to other gods is no laughing matter. The cost to Israel is enormous. God uses a wide variety of heroes to deliver his people: women (Deborah and Jael, chs. 4–5), a man afraid to move at first but then eager to set up his own monarchy (Gideon, chs. 6–9), a prostitute’s son who bargains for power (Jephthah, chs. 11–12), and finally, Samson (chs. 13–16), a man born to be a lifelong Nazirite and to lead Israel against the Philistines. Samson, however, has other plans.

Samson

Instead of leading Israel against the Philistines, Samson wants to marry a Philistine (14:1–2). A constant theme in Samson’s story is how God uses Samson despite Samson’s refusal to keep his Nazirite vows or even follow the LORD. For example, he becomes so angry at his wedding that he goes on a rampage killing Philistine men (14:19–20). When he returns later for his “wife” and discovers that she was given to his best man (15:1–2), he lashes out in anger again (15:3–5). Then, when his “wife” is burned to death, Samson becomes so angry that he picks up an old jawbone of a donkey and uses it to hack and kill more Philistines (15:14–20).

Samson's weakness is women; and here, he is as weak as he is strong. He first wanted the Philistine woman of Timnah that caused so much trouble (14:1–2). He visits at least one prostitute (16:1–3). And finally, Samson (his name means 'Sun' or 'Sunny') falls for a woman named Delilah (her name means 'Night' or 'of the night'). Her nationality is unclear (Philistine or Israelite?), as is how she feels about Samson. Does she love him, or love the idea of hitting the Philistine jackpot? All Delilah has to do is discover the source of Samson's strength and hand him over to the Philistines. In the process, we discover that Samson not only has a weakness for women, but he is also dumb as dirt—or so in love that he can't see what Delilah is doing to him. In what may be some type of sexual play, Samson lets Delilah do all kinds of things to him and to his hair (16:6–14). Finally, he was exhausted by her tears and constant nagging, so he confesses the truth, and once he is asleep, she calls a man to shave his hair and the Philistines finally have their Israelite Rambo (16:15–21).

Just as other incidents in his life were used by God to lash out at the Philistines, so too is Samson's imprisonment used. His hair begins to regrow and the Philistines ignore it; they are not so bright or attentive, either. So when the Philistines bring him out as a blind fool to push around and laugh at, Samson, with his only recorded prayer, asks the LORD to help him by restoring his strength. So Samson brings down the house, ending the show and killing more Philistines in his death than he had in his life (16:23–30).

Conclusion

With the landed tribes of Israel falling to other gods over and over, the reader can only hope for better news from the one tribe without land, the Levites, who serve local communities as something like local pastors and health inspectors. Surely the Levites are not like the other tribes. In fact, they are nothing like the tribes with land. *They are far worse.* Just as the book of Judges began with a double introduction, it ends with a double conclusion: two stories about Levites. In the first, a Levite sells his services to the highest bidder; what god he serves makes no difference to him (Judg 17–18). In the second, a Levite treats his **concubine** horrifically—pushing her out to a gang of men so that he can get some sleep while they gang rape her. The next day, he speaks to her as if nothing had happened (19:28), puts her on a donkey, goes home, chops her into twelve pieces, and sends them like telegrams to the other tribes (19:29). His actions cause a civil war that almost wipes out the tribe of Benjamin and leads to even more violence against women: kidnapping four hundred young women so the male survivors of Benjamin can have wives (21:1–24).

In these final chapters, the writer makes an appeal for Israel's only hope:

In those days there was no king in Israel; each person did what they thought to be right. (17:6)

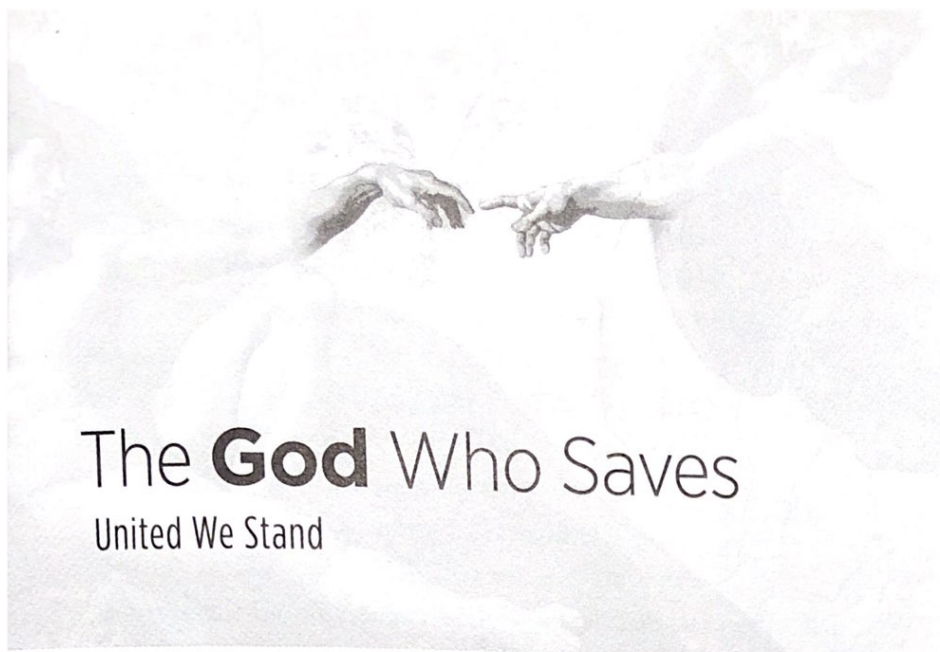
In those days there was no king in Israel. (18:1)

In those days when there was no king in Israel. (19:1)

And the final sentence of the book reads:

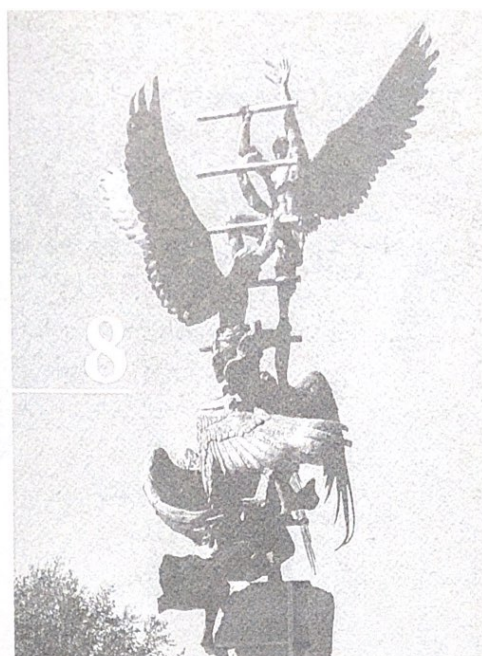
In those days there was no king in Israel; each person did what they thought to be right. (21:25)

These statements may mean several things: First, because Israel has no monarchy, no king, the people are going wild; second, what Israel needs is a king, a strong monarch to bring the people under control; or third, not even the LORD is king of Israel anymore—the people have rejected God to make their own decisions about what is right or wrong, to do whatever is in their own best interest without concern for others. Israel cannot continue on her current path; something must change. Israel needs both an earthly monarch and God as their king.



The **God** Who Saves

United We Stand



At the end of the Book of Judges, the nation of Israel is in crisis—again. At times it seems that Israel's story is little more than an escape from one crisis into another; or perhaps, since only the disasters make the headlines, our picture is somewhat distorted. At this point, however, it is arguable whether the *nation* of Israel really exists, or Israel is nothing more than a loose confederation of independent tribes living (with many other people) in the land once promised to their ancestors. They share a common history and an allegiance to a common God—at least in theory—and they share a common sanctuary at **Shiloh**, where the tabernacle has been set up (perhaps as a more permanent temple, see 1 Sam 1:3, 9). But whether a tribal confederacy or the nation of Israel, unless something drastic and far-reaching happens soon, they will not last for long. The tribes share pressures stacked against them, which threaten their existence in the land. Something must be done—fast, radical, and thorough enough to save the nation the LORD has chosen as his conduit of blessing to the rest of the world.

That radical move, described in the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel, is a united monarchy: a king who will unite the tribes, lead them in fighting their enemies, and return them to their God, the LORD. But such a sweeping change, we must keep in mind, is a major political change that does not come easy (as we should know from recent efforts to change systems of government in the Middle East), and it is this move that is at the heart of the events we will be looking at in this chapter. We will begin by identifying the forces or factors, external and internal,

READING ASSIGNMENTS

- 1 SAMUEL 1–8,
DEUTERONOMY 17
- 1 SAMUEL 9–15
- 1 SAMUEL 16–17

KEY TERMS

Lyre: a small harp

Peace Offering: a type of sacrifice in which part of the meat is returned to the person who brought the sacrifice and to the priest

Pentapolis: five city-states bound together as one entity or group by way of a treaty

Prophet: often, a person who conveys messages from the LORD to select person(s)

Shiloh: the first centralized place for worship in ancient Israel, with the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant

Theocracy: government led by God or by divinely inspired kings or priests

bearing down on Israel and pushing her to adapt or perish. Next we will look backward to discover and examine the LORD's plan for Israel's king in the Book of Deuteronomy. Then, finally, we will observe Israel's initial efforts to establish a united monarchy with Saul and David, and try to understand why Saul failed while David became the great hero of the nation.

The Forces set against Israel

External Forces

The Philistines

The Philistines settled in Palestine around 1190 BCE, just after Israel's entry into the land (most likely around 1250 BCE). While the Philistines' origins are still uncertain, some came over land, destroying Hittites and the city of Ugarit in their path, and some came by ship via Crete ("Caphtor" in Jer 47:4). Amos, a prophet of the LORD, later tells Israel that the LORD brought the Philistines from Caphtor, just as he brought Israel out of Egypt (Amos 9:7). Their initial goal was to settle in Egypt, but in 1190 BCE, Rameses III defeated them and pushed them into the coastal towns of Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ashdod (see Deut 2:23). Within forty years, these towns overthrew their Egyptian overlords and formed the Philistine Pentapolis of Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ashdod with the two cities already settled by Philistines: Ekron and Gath (see Figure 8.1). Each Philistine city became a city-state, consisting of a "royal city" ruling over other regional villages, and in league with the other Philistine cities.

As was often true, the source of the Philistines' great power was their mastery of a new technology: the art of forging iron (1 Sam 13:19–21). Consequently, for the next 150 years,

the Philistine Pentapolis was the most powerful force in this area of Palestine, ruling over an area that extended from Joppa in the north to Raphia in the south, and from the Mediterranean coast in the west into the hill country initially allotted to Israel, then pushing inland as far east as Bethlehem (2 Sam 23:13–17, see Figure 8.1). They even caused the tribe of Dan to seek new land in the far north of Israel (Judg 1:34; 18:1–31).

The Book of Judges attests to the constant threat of the Philistines against any Israelite tribe near them. All of Samson's life as a judge was spent in conflict with the Philistines (Judg 13–16). But his help was spotty at best, acting more like Rambo than as the leader of organized Israelite forces. Consequently, at the beginning of 1 Samuel, the Philistines are still a major threat to Israel. This eminent threat quickly

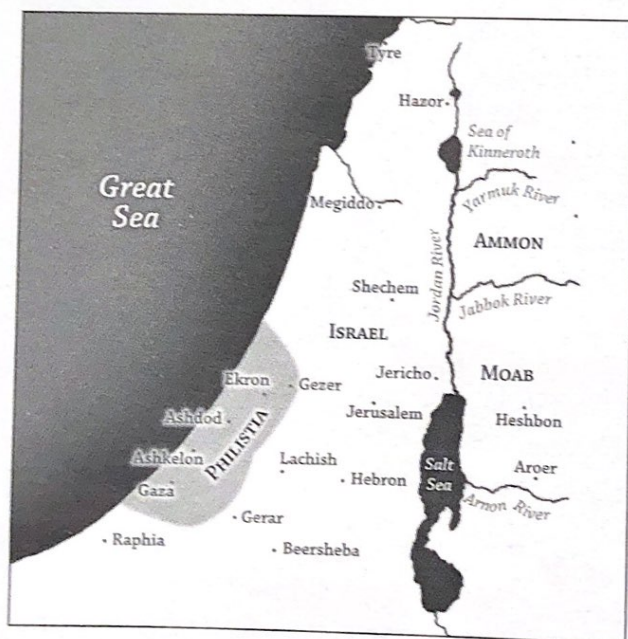


Figure 8.1. The Land of the Philistines