

CHAPTER 2
The Books of Joshua and Judges
(Approximately: Thirteenth Century to Eleventh Century B.C.E.)

The Book of Joshua

The Biblical account of Joshua's conquest of the Promised Land in the thirteenth century B.C.E. suggests that he overwhelmed and thoroughly defeated and destroyed the native peoples. However, the archaeologists, following in Joshua's path and using their scientific methods, have put together a tale that challenges the Biblical version very significantly.

The Book of Joshua, taken literally, is one of the Bible's cruelest and bloodiest books. In it, the Lord extirpated one people after another, condemning them to perish at the hands of the Hebrew conquerors and to forfeit all property to them. Kings captured in battle were to be impaled and according to the Biblical record, Joshua carried out such a sentence upon more than two-dozen monarchs. However, some scholars see the Book of Joshua as the product of a much later period, the late seventh century under Josiah, King of Judah 639-09 B.C.E.). Although Josiah is not among those kings who have been verified extra-Biblically,¹ in *The Bible Unearthed*, Israel Finkelstein and Neil Silberman hold that many of Joshua's conquests in the *Tanakh* actually correspond to the expansion of Judah under King Josiah into portions of what had been the Northern Kingdom of Israel.²

There is further controversy about the political environment in the thirteenth century B.C.E., when Joshua is said to have been carrying out his conquests. Simon Dubnov, a great Jewish historian, holds that Joshua was able to carry out the conquest of Canaan because Egypt's hold on the western Fertile Crescent was weakening. This decline, he asserts, explains why Egypt did not intervene to halt the Israelite aggression against its Canaanite vassals.³ By contrast, the archaeologists Finkelstein and Silberman assert that Egypt's hold on Canaan remained firm and undiminished. They go on to state that Canaanite cities in that period were not even walled, since their defense was completely in the hands of

¹ See Chapter 4 and 5 below.

² Finkelstein and Silberman, pp. 92-93.

³ Dubnov, pp. 74 and 79.

Egyptian garrisons deployed throughout Canaan. Egyptian records for this period, when one examines them, contain no references to any Israelite conquests.⁴

In the earlier Books of Numbers and Deuteronomy, specific orders for conducting the conquest of Canaan had been given, first by God and then by Moses. In the first of these, the Lord spoke to Moses and Joshua, like a general instructing his troops:

Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you cross the Jordan into the Land of Canaan, you shall dispossess all the inhabitants of the land; you shall destroy all their figured objects; you shall destroy all their molten images, and you shall demolish all their cult places. And you shall take possession of the land and settle in it...But if you do not dispossess the inhabitants of the land...I will do to you what I planned to do to them (Numbers 33: 50-53, 55-56).

In the second of these, in Deuteronomy 20, immediately prior to the initiation of hostilities, Moses further instructed the Israelites as follows:

When you take the field against your enemies, and see horses and chariots – forces larger than yours – have no fear of them, for the Lord your God, who brought you from the land of Egypt, is with you. Before you join battle, the priest shall come forward and address the troops. He shall say to them, "Hear, O Israel! You are about to join battle with your enemy. Let not your courage falter. Do not be in fear, or in panic, or in dread of them. For it is the Lord your God who marches with you to do battle for you against your enemy, to bring you victory."

Then the officials shall address the troops, as follows: "Is there anyone who has built a new house but has not dedicated it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another dedicate it. Is there anyone who has planted a vineyard but has never harvested it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another harvest it.⁵ Is there anyone who has paid the bride-price for a wife, but who has not yet married her? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another marry her." The officials shall go on addressing the troops and say, "Is there anyone afraid and disheartened? Let him go back to his home, lest the courage of his comrades flag like his." When the officials have finished addressing the troops, army commanders shall assume command of the troops.

⁴ Finkelstein and Silberman, pp. 77-79

⁵ It is odd that Moses should be raising the subject of houses and vineyards when, as he knew, the Lord had commanded the Israelites to wander in the desert for forty years.

When you approach a town to attack it, you shall offer it terms of peace. If it responds peaceably and lets you in, all the people present there shall serve you as forced labor. If it does not surrender to you, but would join battle with you, you shall lay siege to it; and when the Lord your God delivers it into your hand, you shall put all its males to the sword. You may, however, take as your booty the women, the children, the livestock, and everything in the town – all its spoil – and enjoy the use of the spoil of your enemy, which the Lord your God gives you.

Thus you shall deal with all towns that lie very far from you, towns that do not belong to nations hereabout. In the towns of the latter peoples [the nearby tribes], however, which the Lord your God is giving you as a heritage, you shall not let a soul remain alive. No, you must proscribe them – the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites – as the Lord your God has commanded you, lest they lead you into doing all the abhorrent things that they have done for their gods and you stand guilty before the Lord your God.

When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the ax against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down. Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city? Only trees that you know do not yield food may be destroyed; you may cut them down for constructing siegeworks against the city that is waging war on you, until it has been reduced (Deuteronomy 20: 1-20).

One of the ironies of the Book of Joshua is that some of the peoples whom Joshua was supposed to have exterminated re-appear, both in the Book of Judges and in subsequent Books of the *Tanakh*, living peacefully alongside the Israelites or fighting battles, sometimes as their allies, and other times as their enemies. The Lord, recognizing this reality, repeatedly enjoined the Israelites from intermingling with these peoples, lest they end up worshipping foreign gods and otherwise being led astray.

Five major battles are described in the Book of Joshua, and each has its contradictions. They are the battles of Jericho, Ai, and the league of Amorite cities, the battles of Hormah and Arad, and Hazor.

The Book of Joshua records Jericho as Joshua's first objective.⁶ According to this account, he, his army and all the Israelites were on the east side of the Jordan River because that seemed the most

⁶ Jericho's walls at a somewhat earlier time were only seven hundred yards in circumference, enclosing an area of fifty-four acres (approximately two modern city blocks.)

accessible point from which to attack the town of Jericho. The priests, carrying the Ark of the Covenant, marched at the head of the column of Israelites crossing the river. As soon as the priests' feet touched the water, the river piled up behind them, and the multitude crossed over onto the west bank. The priests waited on the dry bottom of the Jordan until the armed men and the rest of the Israelites had all crossed. Then the priests themselves crossed over, and when the last had reached the west bank, the river resumed its flow (Joshua 3:14-17). This is the second miraculous crossing in the Bible of a body of water that parted for the Israelites.

Mordechai Gichon, the co-author of *Battles of the Bible*, seeks to conform the Biblical version even as he explains away the miraculous element of history. He says that instead of the Jordan River parting because of the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant, an earthquake held back the waters of the Jordan. He mentions that this is an area prone to earthquakes and bolsters his contention with this Biblical quotation, which he interprets as depicting an earthquake:

...And it came to pass when the people remove from their tents to pass over Jordan...that the waters which came from above stood and rose up in a heap (Joshua 3: 14-17)⁷

Once across the river, the conquest of Jericho is said to have taken place in this way:

The Lord said to Joshua, "See, I will deliver Jericho and her king [and her] warriors into your hands. Let all your troops march around the city and complete one circuit of the city. Do this six days, with seven priests carrying seven rams' horns preceding the Ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the horns. And when a long blast is sounded on the horn—as soon as you hear that sound of the horn—all the people shall give a mighty shout. Thereupon the city wall will collapse, and the people shall advance, every man straight ahead" (Joshua 6:2-5).

Despite what the Lord instructed Joshua to do, archaeologists have found not a shred of evidence that Jericho's walls ever collapsed in this way. In fact, archaeological evidence indicates that during Joshua's time, circa 1250, Jericho was uninhabited, had actually lain in ruins at least a century before the

⁷ Gichon, "The Campaigns of Joshua," in Herzog and Gichon, p. 46. The Biblical quotation cited above is also given here.

arrival of the Israelites, and may have been destroyed in the Early Bronze Age (3500 – 2200 B.C.E.), fully 1000 years before Joshua.⁸

The next battle after Jericho was at Ai. Joshua was informed that the number of men opposing him was relatively small, and so he sent a portion of his army to conquer the town (or village). But the Israelites were soundly defeated, and a number were killed. Joshua lamented to the Lord:

Ah, Lord God,... Why did You lead this people across the Jordan only to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites, to be destroyed by them? If only we had been content to remain on the other side of the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say after Israel has turned tail before its enemies? When the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land hear of this, they will turn upon us and wipe out our very name from the earth. And what will You do about Your great name? (Joshua 7: 7-9).

This defeat had occurred because one man in Joshua's army had taken some of the booty for himself, and the Lord had punished the whole army. The man was stoned to death, and the Lord's trust in Israel was re-established. Despite the foregoing account in the *Tanakh*, however, archaeologists have found no evidence that Ai was inhabited between 2200 and 1000 B.C.E. This is confirmed by Amichai Mazar.⁹

Joshua's third battle, according to the *Tanakh*, was waged against a league of Amorite kings, led by King Adoni Zedek of Jerusalem. This force was besieging the Gibeonites, who had allied themselves with Israel (Joshua 10: 3-4).

On that occasion, when the Lord routed the Amorites before the Israelites, Joshua addressed the Lord. He said in the presence of the Israelites:

'Stand still, O sun, at Gibeon
O moon, in the Valley of Aijalon'
And the sun stood still
And the moon halted
While a nation wreaked judgment on its foes (Joshua 10:
12-13).

⁸Gaalyah Cornfeld and David Noel Freedman, Consulting Editor, *Archaeology of the Bible: Book by Book*, (Cambridge, MA: Harper & Row, 1976), pp. 67 and 70.

⁹Mazar, p. 331.

This divine intervention allowed Joshua to continue his pursuit of the Amorite kings.¹⁰ In this battle, the Bible says that God actually assisted His chosen people on the battlefield by throwing down hailstones. More Amorites were killed from the hailstones than from the weapons of the Israelites. Archaeological evidence has not been able to confirm that any conquests took place in this area at this time.

Joshua was also supposed to have destroyed the two Canaanite cities of Hormah and Arad in the Negev. However, according to Yohanan Ahroni, another archaeologist, "No site of the late Canaanite period (sixteenth to thirteenth centuries B.C.E.) has been discovered in the whole region."¹¹ Ahroni asserts that the eastern Negev region, in fact, had no sedentary settlements at the time of the arrival of the Israelites, and that the Israelites settled that area peacefully, establishing a series of unfortified pastoral and agricultural settlements on the land.¹² He goes on to state that this pattern of Israelite settlement prevailed throughout Canaan, citing the archaeological discovery of many unfortified Israelite settlements in wooded, hilly areas throughout the country whose beginnings can be traced to the twelfth century B.C.E.¹³

The last famous battle that Joshua fought was in the vicinity of Hazor, against an alliance of Canaanite kings from the north. According to the Book of Joshua, Israel was opposed by a multitude, and the Lord, perhaps sensing the anxiety of Joshua and his soldiers, said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them; tomorrow at this time I will have them all lying slain before Israel. You shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots" (Joshua 11: 6). The Lord was correct. This is the first instance in which the Israelites encountered war chariots in battle.¹⁴ After the battle, Joshua destroyed the captured Canaanite chariots because he and his men did not know how to use them. The Israelites were in fact technologically backward in comparison with their Canaanite opponents. The Israelites were still using

¹⁰ Joshua 10: 3-4 and 12-14 are also cited in Gichon, "The Campaigns of Joshua," in Herzog and Gichon, pp. 54-55.

¹¹ Yohanan Ahroni, "Violence and Tranquility in Ancient Israel: An Archaeological View," in Salo W. Baron and George S. Wise, (eds.), *Violence and Defense in the Jewish Experience*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1977), p.64.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁴ Gichon, in Herzog and Gichon, p. 58. War chariots are actually mentioned earlier in the Tanakh, in Deuteronomy 20:1, as part of Moses' instructions to the Hebrews concerning how to defend themselves against chariots in battle.

Bronze Age weapons, while their opponents were in the Early Iron age, in terms of their weaponry. It was not until several centuries later, in the reign of King David, that the Israelites first made use of chariots, according to the *Tanakh*.¹⁵

The city of Hazor was the strongest of the Canaanite cities, and it was indeed burned, but was it Joshua and the Israelites who conquered and destroyed this gateway to the North, as the *Tanakh* says? Opinion among archaeologists is divided. Yohanan Ahroni asserts that there were no Canaanite settlements of the area in the Late Bronze Age (1550-1190 B.C.E.), and that Israelites could have settled there even if Hazor stood. Another archaeologist, however, Yigael Yadin, who believes in the Biblical view of a unified conquest of Canaan, argues that the destruction of the powerful city of Hazor was necessary if the Israelites were to settle in the Galilee.¹⁶

Who, then, destroyed Hazor? There was much turbulence in the area in the period before, during, and after Joshua's presumed conquest. The turbulence was caused by struggles between Egypt and the Hittites and Sea Peoples. This, in turn, led to many internal upheavals within Canaan, and Hazor could have been the victim of one of them.

From the Biblical description of the conquest of Canaan, it seems clear that each Israelite tribe or small group of tribes seized a portion of the land and settled down upon it without regard to the requirements of the other tribes. Some lands were also assigned by lot. There thus developed a patchwork quilt of Israelite settlements intermingled with the Canaanite settlements. Not all the Canaanites were dispossessed. According to the Book of Judges, many continued to inhabit their land, but as forced laborers. This is one more instance of the Israelites' not duly carrying out the Lord's instructions to exterminate conquered peoples.

The tribes of Judah and Simeon conquered Hebron and the area to the south, and did not participate in further conquests.¹⁷ The tribes of Gad, Reuben, and part of Manasseh settled on the eastern side of the

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 60. I have added the final phrase, "according to the *Tanakh*" because Gichon and Herzog accept the Bible as truth.

¹⁶ Finkelstein and Silberman, pp. 332-333.

¹⁷ Dubnov, Vol. 1, p. 77.

Jordan, but their warriors did participate in the ongoing conquests. Often the conquest faced setbacks. Historians believe that Egypt's loss of control over its Asiatic possessions, including Canaan, resulted from the impotence of Egyptian imperial power, following the collapse of the Nineteenth Dynasty (twelfth and eleventh centuries B.C.E.)

Joshua's reputation remains awesome, and folklore about him continued into Talmudic tradition, approximately fifteen centuries later.

Talmudic texts speak of the Amorites proceeding to Africa, undoubtedly echoing the historic memory of the Phoenician colonization of North Africa...In fact, deep into the Medieval period some of these North African tribes claimed to have been ousted from their native country by "Joshua the robber."¹⁸

The Book of Judges

Since both the Book of Joshua and the Book of Judges cover the conquest of Canaan, and the relationship between the Hebrews and their neighbors, they should be considered as a unit. The word "judge" is actually not a good translation. The Book of Ruth, which refers to this same period, translates the Hebrew word *shofetim* as "chieftains" (Ruth 11:1). This translation is more apt because that is what the "judges" were, that is, non-hereditary military chiefs.

If the Book of Joshua is the bloodiest in the *Tanakh*, the Book of Judges is one of the most interesting. During the two centuries following Joshua's death, thirteen judges or local military leaders "rose up" in succession to oppose the enemies threatening some part of the Israelite dominance. All of the Judges were courageous and performed heroic military feats. They all had charisma. Their life stories were varied and colorful. One was the son of a prostitute. Another slept with a prostitute. A third committed suicide. A fourth sought to make himself absolute ruler after disposing of seventy of his brothers. He was mortally wounded by a woman and fearing the disgrace that might arise after his death from this act, he struck the final blow himself. The time period of Judges extended over approximately two centuries, and was followed by the establishment of the monarchy.

¹⁸ Salo W. Baron, "Review of the History," in Salo W. Baron and George S. Wise, *Violence and Defense in the Jewish Experience*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1977), pp. 24-25.

Although the Book of Judges suggests that the era was one of unending hostility, archaeologists believe that this was not the case. They contend that except for two battles, that involving Deborah and that against the Philistines at Eben ha-Ezer, which are discussed below, the conflicts mentioned in the Bible consist mainly of border skirmishes. Peaceful settlement continued unabated. The main threat to Israelite sovereignty in the eleventh century was not the various local and Transjordanian tribes and kingdoms that the judges fought against, but the Philistines. It was their pressure that put an end to the Israelites' custom of building open, unfortified villages and brought about the appearance of fortified cities such as Beershiba and Arad.¹⁹

The first of the Judges was Ehud, who was a champion of the tribe of Benjamin. He arose after a combined force of Moabites, Ammonites, and Amalekites had held dominion over a portion of Israelite territory for eighteen years. Ehud was left-handed, a trait that paved the way for his victory. He led a party bringing tribute to the corpulent Moabite king, Eglon. He asked the king to dismiss the attendants because he had a secret to convey. When they were alone, Ehud pulled a dagger which had passed unseen on his right side and plunged it into the king's ample belly. Ehud escaped, roused the men of Ephraim and other tribes from the hills, and won a great victory by preventing the escape of thousands of Moabite soldiers fleeing across the Jordan to their homes. There followed a period of peace. (Judges 3: 17-22).

In the north, a Canaanite king was oppressing the Israelites, and the prophetess and second Judge Deborah, a leader who was said to have united the twelve tribes of Israel into a loose confederation, appealed for assistance to a Hebrew warrior named Barak, of the tribe of Naphtali. The Israelites were now strong enough to come down from the hill country they occupied and challenge the Canaanites for control of the fertile plain and trade routes.²⁰ Barak replied that he would grant her request if she accompanied him, and she agreed. Barak mustered an army from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun for the battle, which took place in the Valley of Jezreel, in Galilee. The Canaanite strategy was to lure the

¹⁹ Ahroni, p. 69.

²⁰ D. Harvey, "Deborah," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 1, p. 809.

Israelites out upon the plain, where the larger Canaanite army, with its chariots, could easily defeat the Israelites.²¹ Battle was joined, a sudden rainfall swamped the wheels of the Canaanite chariots, and the Canaanites panicked and fled.²² Their general, Sisera, abandoned his chariot and fled on foot to the tent of Jael, a woman who was sympathetic to the Hebrew cause. She invited him into her tent to rest. When he asked for water, she gave him some milk to drink. In order to explain what followed, Josephus says that the milk was sour, that is, fermented.²³ The Bible merely says that Sisera was sleeping from exhaustion. He slept so soundly that Jael was able to drive a tent pin through his temple with a mallet. She then invited the leaders of the Israelite forces to view his body (Judges 4). There is a "Song of Deborah" celebrating this outcome:

Let them chant the gracious acts of the Lord,
His gracious deliverance of Israel.
Then did the people of the Lord
March down to the gates!
Awake, awake, O Deborah!
Awake, awake, strike up the chant!
Arise, O Barak;
Take your captives, O son of Abinoam! (Judges 5: 11-12)

This is the second exception to the general rule that the Hebrews did not glorify war. (The first exception occurred when Moses and the Israelites crossed the Sea of Reeds, as discussed earlier.) Deborah's victory is celebrated because it seemed so unexpected, marking triumph over great odds. In the song, the ten Northern Tribes are mentioned, but not the Southern ones of Judah and Benjamin.²⁴ This may be an early indication of the cleavage that was to give rise later to two separate Hebrew kingdoms.

Another encounter took place with the Midianites. They were camel-mounted nomads who swept northward from the desert into the cultivated areas held by several of the Israelite tribes. These areas, particularly those bordering the Jezreel Valley, occupied by the Tribe of Menasseh, were considered good areas for plunder, as well as for access to the interior and the coast.

²¹ Cornfeld and Freedman, p. 74.

²² Ibid.

²³ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, Book V, 201-205, p. 253, par. 4.

²⁴ Cornfeld and Freedman, p. 115.

After the Israelites had done their sowing, Midian, Amalek, and the Kedemites would come up and raid them; they would attack them, destroy the produce of the land all the way to Gaza, and leave no means of sustenance in Israel, not a sheep or an ox or an ass. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, swarming as thick as locusts; they and their camels were innumerable (Judges 6: 3-6).

Gideon of the tribe of Menasseh was selected in an angelic revelation to lead the Israelite response to the Midianite onslaughts. He was another Judge. Gideon sent messengers to all the tribes of Israel, and they forwarded large contingents of soldiers. He, of course, was impressed with the numbers he was able to command, but God seemingly was not. The Lord said, "You have too many troops with you for Me to deliver Midian into your hands; Israel might [then] claim for themselves the victory due to Me..." (Judges 7:2). By one device and another, the Lord whittled down the number of troops from 32,000 to three hundred, and the three hundred did indeed vanquish the Midianites (Judges 7:2-24).

One of the saddest tales in the *Tanakh* deals with Jephthah, another Judge. His mother, incidentally, had been a prostitute. His father had legitimate children as well, and when they had all reached adulthood, they threw Jephthah out of the household, denying him any share in their patrimony. Jephthah moved away and seems to have gathered "men of low character" around him, and to have gone with them on raids (Judges 11:3). Presumably, he gained a reputation for military prowess, for when the Ammonites attacked, the elders of Gilead in Transjordan came to him, beseeching his assistance. At first, Jephthah taunted them, reminding them of how he had been made an outcast, but when they assured him that he could now be the commander of all of Gilead, he relented (Judges 11: 4-10).

Before joining battle with the Ammonites, Jephthah entered a dialogue with their king, and there followed an exchange about which side was the rightful possessor of the land. Jephthah pledged to God, "If you deliver the Ammonites into my hands, then whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me on my safe return from the Ammonites shall be the Lord's, and shall be offered by me as a burnt offering" (Judges 11: 31). That pledge had tragic consequences. Jephthah destroyed the enemy, and "When ..[he] arrived at his home in Mizpah, there was his daughter coming out to meet him with timbrel and dance! She was an only child; he had no other son or daughter. On seeing her, he rent his clothes

and said, 'Alas, daughter! You have brought me low; you have become my troubler! For I have uttered a vow to the Lord and I cannot retract'" (Judges 11:34-35).

A touching scene between father and daughter is described, in which she urges him to keep his vow to the Lord, which he indeed does (Judges 11: 36-39). This is an odd story to insert at this point in the Bible, given the injunction against human sacrifice enshrined in the story of Abraham's near sacrifice of his son Isaac. The story of Jephthah does not even provide us with his daughter's name! Jephthah granted his daughter permission to go to the hills for two months "...and there bewail my maidenhood." When she returned, Jephthah fulfilled his pledge to the Lord. "She had never known a man. So it became the custom in Israel for the maidens of Israel to go every year, for four days in the year, and chant dirges for the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite" (Judges 11: 39-40). Left unsaid is why God, in contrast to the Abraham – Isaac story, did not see fit to halt the sacrifice of this innocent girl. Was she not spared because she was a woman?

The last Judge was Samson, who also fought the Philistines. The Book of Judges in the *Tanakh* gives more space to Samson than to any of the other Judges. Although the Talmud almost ignores him (see introduction), the *Tanakh* gives him four full chapters, from Judges 13:1 to 16:31. Samson was of the Tribe of Dan. In contrast to the other Judges, he never led troops in battle. Instead, he is remembered for the super-human strength which he used against the Philistines, who were ruling over Israel at the time (Judges 14:4). In this sense his memory is an enduring symbol of victory over impossible odds.

Samson was consecrated by his mother as a Nazarite. His mother is never mentioned by name. She is always referred to as "the woman." His father's name is given, of course. Being consecrated as a Nazarite meant, among other things, that Samson would neither cut his hair, nor drink wine nor stronger beverages. This consecration gave him both a special relationship with, and extraordinary physical endowments from, God.

In fighting the Philistines, Samson engaged in single-handed combat against multiple enemies. Most of his adventures relate to intimate encounters. At his wedding to a Philistine woman, for instance, he propounded a riddle which was tied to a wager. The Philistine wedding guests thereupon hounded the

poor bride until she wheedled the answer from her new husband, and Samson had to pay the wager. He took his revenge by catching three hundred foxes and lashing their tails together, setting their tails on fire, and driving the foxes into the Philistine croplands, destroying the crops. The Philistines retaliated by burning Samson's new wife and father-in-law in their home.

In another encounter, Samson visited a Philistine prostitute in Gaza one night. The Philistines, expecting him to remain all night, gathered to capture him in the morning. He outsmarted them by leaving at midnight, taking the city gates with him, and carrying them all the way to a hill near Hebron, some forty miles away, according to the map.

As everyone knows, Samson's final act of combat against the Philistines and his suicide are connected with his love affair with Delilah. The Philistine woman may have been in love with Samson, but the offer of 1100 shekels from the Philistine authorities in exchange for her discovering and divulging the secret of his strength overpowered that love. In the end, the Temple of Dagon in Gaza was pulled down by the blinded Samson, when he destroyed himself in a final act of heroism.

Before proceeding to the consolidation of the Twelve Tribes under their first king, Saul, in the United Monarchy, a reconsideration of the books thus far examined is appropriate. Nineteenth century devotees of biblical "Higher Criticism"²⁵ perceived in Joshua and Judges, among the seven Book from Deuteronomy to II Kings, a unifying theme—namely that "The entire land of Israel should be ruled by a divinely chosen leader of the entire people of Israel, who strictly follows the laws handed down at Sinai."²⁶ These scholars believed that scribes working under the guidance of King Josiah of Judah (639-609 B.C.E.) put together in the year 629 a collection of "legends" with that unifying theme. (The word "legend" is used here to mean "historical but not verifiable.") That collection of "legends" is part of the present Bible, which has thirty-nine such parts or Books. The Book of Judges – as compiled by these scribes – states three times that, "In those days there was no king in Israel." This suggests not only that the writer is speaking in a time when there was a king, but that he is critical of the earlier times, when

²⁵ See Introduction.

²⁶ Finkelstein and Silberman, p. 92

there were no kings. From this standpoint it can be said that the troubles experienced by the Hebrews in the times of Joshua and Judges, as well as the earlier periods, were due to the absence of a central ruler capable of uniting the twelve tribes.

Let us now proceed to examine the three kings of the United Monarchy: Saul, David, and Solomon. The *Tanakh* provides an early example of how a society can be transformed by the fear of war or actual war itself. A tribe known as the Gibeonites sought to deceive Joshua. The Gibeonites, who were neighbors of the people of Jericho, had heard of Joshua's murderous exploits against that town as well as Ai (based upon the Lord's command not to allow any nearby peoples to survive (Deuteronomy 20: 1-10), and they came to him disguised as a people from afar. They offered to be the Israelites' "hewers of wood and drawers of water" if the Israelites spared their lives. The Gibeonites were allowed to live as slaves and forced labor.