

# Unspeakable Crimes: The Abuse of Women in the Book of Judges

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## Introduction

Few today would deny that the abuse of women has reached epidemic proportions in American society in general and the church in particular. The malady seems to be no respecter of persons, infecting all levels of society, from the courts of the President to the poor ghettos of our cities and the hollows of Appalachia. As alarming as the scope of the problem is the diversity in its manifestations. The forms of abuse against women chronicled by our newspapers range from psychological violation of innocent young girls to rape and murder of the elderly. While scientific analyses of the problem have been conducted from every conceivable angle, this tide of violence and exploitation has not been stemmed. Explanations for the problem vary, depending upon the discipline in which the research is conducted. For those geneticists who attribute the propensity to commit crimes against women to a fundamental defect in the genes of some males, genetic engineering holds a promise of a cure. Psychologists tend to relate the issue to low self esteem among males, and respond to the crisis by promoting therapy designed to enhance a male's self-worth. Sociologists see crimes against women by men as natural expressions of fundamentally oppressive patriarchy, and insist that the problems will not be solved until androcentric hierarchical structures are demolished and replaced with truly egalitarian forms.

Since outsiders generally conceive of

the church as a major contributor to the problem, it is not surprising that people of the cloth and religious institutions are increasingly marginalized in serious discussions of crimes against women. However, this does not mean that we should be silent. On the contrary, the people of God must seize the initiative in analyzing the social problems of our time and then in proposing solutions that address root causes and not merely symptoms of the malady. This study is offered as a small contribution in the pursuit of this agenda.

I shall begin by examining the biblical book of Judges for evidences and forms of abuse against women in ancient Israel. Then I shall seek to discover the biblical explanation for the problem proposed by this literary document. I am limiting this study to the book of Judges for three reasons. First, although evidence could be drawn from all of the historiographic writings of the Old Testament, space constraints for this article require a severe restriction of the sources and social context to be considered. Second, the book of Judges offers a self-contained composition, deliberate in its literary style and coherent in its theological agenda. Third, the book of Judges presents the contemporary church in North America with the clearest biblical mirror with which to examine itself.

Contrary to prevailing scholarly opinion, the book of Judges was not written primarily to demonstrate the need for a king in Israel in general nor as a defense

of the Davidic monarchy in particular. Contrary to prevailing popular opinion, the book of Judges is not about human heroes.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, heroic human figures are rare in the book. We should recognize a clue to the book's purpose in the Jewish canon, which classifies the writings that make up Joshua to 2 Kings as the former prophets. This book does indeed sound a prophetic cry, exposing the fundamental spiritual problem in Israel and pointing the reader to Yahweh who, by his grace and in keeping with his own purposes for the nation, repeatedly intervenes on Israel's behalf. Specifically the book describes the Canaanization of Israelite society in the period immediately following the conquest of the land of Canaan after the death of Joshua (Jdg 2:6-3:6).

According to the author of this book, in the centuries between Israel's arrival in the land and the emergence of kingship the spiritual landscape of Israel came to look increasingly like the landscape of the people whom they had been charged to displace. Evidences of this degeneration may be drawn from many sides. Failure to occupy the land assigned to the respective tribes and failure to eliminate the evidences of Canaanite population and culture speak to Israelite complacency. The hesitancy of some men to assume leadership in Israel (Barak, Gideon) and the promotion by other Israelites of pagan cult forms (Gideon, Micah and his mother, the Danites) indicate a waning dedication to Yahweh. Violence to one's own countrymen (Gideon) and the exploitation of power for personal advantage (Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson) show the displacement of the divine agenda and the interests of Israel in completely self-centered aims. The assumption of pagan styles of rule (Gideon) and the adoption of pagan

forms of negotiating with God (Jephthah, Micah, and the Danites) help blur Israel's distinctiveness as the chosen people of God. Immoral behavior such as fraternization with the enemy (Samson), thievery and deceit (Micah), disintegration of social mores (the Benjamites), homosexuality and rape (the Benjamites), and intertribal jealousies and war (the Ephraimites) showcase the sinfulness during the period of the judges. In short, the effects of the Canaanization of Israel are evident not only in the religious life of the nation, but especially in its social world, particularly in the way men relate to women.<sup>2</sup>

The book of Judges was not written as an evangelistic tract, calling upon pagans to find life in the God of Israel. It was written to Israel, a nation who claimed to be the people of Yahweh and who demanded that he rescue them in their time of need. By extension the book offers an analysis of a compromised people of God in any age, including the church in America at the end of the twentieth century. Like the Israel of the early Iron Age, many who claim to be the people of God today have been thoroughly Canaanized. Not only has the church taken on features of the pagan world around it, but it also suffers from the same social ills that plague the outside world. Specifically, the differences between the incidence and nature of abuse of women by men inside and outside the church are slight. What then is the answer? Perhaps an analysis of the problem in the book of Judges may point us in the direction we might go.

### **The Faces of Abuse in Judges**

Given the androcentric perspective of biblical writings as a whole, it is no surprise that most of the dominant characters in the book of Judges are male. However,

judging by the frequency with which women participate in events, and the nature of their participation, it seems the author of the book was especially concerned about the place of women in ancient Israel.

He mentions by name two Israelite women (Achsah, Deborah) and two non-Israelite women (Jael, a Canaanite; Delilah, a Philistine). The narrator identifies some women by their association with specific men: *as wives* (Achsah, the wife of Othniel [1:11-15], Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth [4:4], Jael, the wife of Heber [4:17-22], Gideon's many wives [8:30], Gilead's wife [11:2], Manoah's wife [13:2-23], Samson's wife [14:15-15:6], wives of the 600 Benjamites [21:1-24]); *as concubines* (Gideon's concubine [8:31], the Levite's concubine [19:1-20:6]); *as lovers* (Delilah [16:4-17]); *as mothers* (Sisera's [5:28], Gideon's [8:19], Abimelech's [9:1-3;18], Jephthah's [11:1-2], Samson's [13:24-14:16], Micah's [17:1-3])<sup>3</sup>; *as daughters* (Caleb's [1:11-15], Jephthah's [11:34-40], the Philistines' in general [14:2], Samson's Philistine father-in-law's [14:15; 15:1-6], the man of Bethlehem's [19:1-9], the old non-Benjamite man of Gibeah's [19:24], the men of Israel's [21:1,7,18]).

Others are referred to *by status* (princesses [5:29]), *by profession* (harlot [11:1-2, 16:1]), *by geographic locale* (of Timnah [14:1], of Gaza [16:1], in the valley of Sorek [Delilah, 16:4], from Bethlehem [19:1], of Jabesh Gilead [21:12], of Shiloh [21:21-23]), or *by their accomplishments* (Jael [4:17-22; 5:24-27], a "certain woman" of Thebez [9:53-54]).<sup>4</sup> In several instances the narrator notes simply that a group of people included both men and women (9:49, 51, 16:27; cf. 21:10).

The roles played by these women vary greatly. The most noble figure in the entire book is Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth.

She functions as a prophet of Yahweh and is instrumental in the call of Barak to military leadership (4:4-14).<sup>5</sup> In the eyes of the narrator, two others, Jael and the unnamed woman of Thebez, appear as authentic heroines because of their initiative in slaying undesirable characters like Sisera and Abimelech. But none of these women suffers particular abuse at the hands of men. On the contrary, the narrator seems to be amused by the way they subvert traditional male roles in this upside-down period of the judges.

Modern egalitarians may wince at Caleb's offer of his daughter Achsah as a wife for any man who will capture Kiriath-sepher (Debir). Does her opinion on whose wife she becomes count for nothing? However, the images of Caleb and Othniel portrayed elsewhere in the book and in the Old Testament as a whole are uncompromisingly positive.<sup>6</sup> In fact, Achsah represents a role model of womanly propriety in this patricentric environment. She willingly accedes to her father's plan, but then demonstrates resourcefulness in convincing Caleb to give her a blessing in the form of a well-watered field in addition to the territory he had given to her husband. While she remains gracious and respectful, in a world of men she will not be merely a passive object of their deals. She seizes the opportunity to achieve something that neither her father nor husband had contemplated, but she does so without overstepping normal and normative bounds of female propriety. At the same time, the men in her life treat her with utmost respect. Indeed their treatment of her presents a sharp contrast to the violence and abuse perpetrated by males against female characters in subsequent chapters. In later narratives the author will exploit the behavior of men

toward women to expound his overall theme of the progressive Canaanization of Israelite society in the course of the book. Ironically, perhaps none of the men in this little episode is a native Israelite. They are Kenizzite proselytes<sup>7</sup> who have been so thoroughly integrated into the faith and culture of the nation that Caleb could represent the tribe of Judah in reconnaissance missions, and all three characters model the life of Yahwistic faith in the face of the Canaanite enemy.

Male treatment of women deteriorates precipitously in the course of the book. As the narrator recounts male/female interaction, we have a myriad of examples of the violation and mistreatment of women. Based on the record, one cannot say that Barak abused women, but one can say that he could not accept the possibility of a woman casting a larger shadow than he casts. He does indeed win a decisive victory over Jabin's Canaanite forces (4:12-13), but only after he has been challenged by the prophetess Deborah not to let the victory fall to a woman (4:9). Indeed he spends the rest of this chapter trying desperately to subvert the prophecy and seize the honor himself. In the end, the fulfillment catches both him and the reader by surprise.

Gideon's disposition toward women is more problematic. Despite his pseudo-pious utterance to the contrary (8:23), after his victory over the Midianites he adopts the regal style of any ancient extra-Israelite monarch, claiming the bulk of the spoils of war for himself, demanding the symbols and garments of royalty, erecting a national shrine to centralize pagan worship, establishing a harem, and naming one of his sons Abimelech, "[my] father is king" (8:22-31).<sup>8</sup>

As an institution, the royal harem was fundamentally abusive. Politically, the

harem served not only to cement alliances with other rulers, but also to impress them when they came to visit the court. The women in a harem served as ornaments, reflecting the glory and stature of the king. It was even better if they could provide the king with many sons, as was the case with Gideon. Personally, the function of the women who made up the harem was to satisfy the sexual pleasure of the king. In both respects the harem violated the dignity of the women, treating them as mere property to be exploited for the indulgence of the king without respect to their own equally endowed honor as images of God.

As if the establishment of the harem was not enough, Gideon also took a woman of Shechem as his concubine. While many questions concerning the nature of concubinage in Israel remain, concubines were purchased as slaves or claimed as booty in war. Apart from Gideon's violation of an explicit prohibition on Israelite intermarriage with Canaanites (Dt 7:1-5), the fact that the name of her son is remembered and that he bears a royal name could not hide the indignity she experienced as a second-class wife.

The problems escalate in the story of Jephthah. First, Jephthah's past is marred by male exploitation of women inasmuch as he represents the fruit of Gilead's rendezvous with a prostitute. Prostitution is commonly recognized as the oldest independent female profession. Nevertheless, this does not hide the fundamentally demeaning effects of the institution/practice on women. At the societal level, prostitution symptomized the general moral and spiritual malaise in ancient Israel. Most prostitutes did not enter this way of life by their own choice. Either they were sold into prostitution by male figures (Lv 19:29)

or they were driven to it by sheer necessity when parental and marital social structures designed to secure the economic support of women broke down. Prostitution was also demeaning at the personal level. The institution desecrates the sex act and sanctions the treatment of women as mere sex objects to be used for male gratification. Accordingly, while the Old Testament is relatively sympathetic towards prostitutes, it reserves its strongest condemnation for men who resort to harlots for recreational purposes. To treat a girl or woman as a prostitute was both an offense to family honor<sup>9</sup> and a violation of the marriage covenant with one's wife.<sup>10</sup> In Jephthah's case the effects of this form of abuse extended beyond the woman to her son, who was expelled from the home as an outcast precisely because he was the son of a prostitute.

If Jephthah's past was colored by male violation of female dignity, his future was cut off for another brutal variation of the theme. Jephthah's own abusive conduct is summarized in one terse statement: "He did to her [his daughter] as he had vowed" (11:39). This is the problem with abuse—men treating women as the men please. It must be recognized that he thought he was performing an act of piety by fulfilling a vow that he had made to Yahweh. He did have several options, though. First, he could have sacrificed his own well-being and refused to fulfill his vow. At least he would have spared his daughter this crime. Second, he could have taken advantage of the Mosaic provision for getting out of certain kinds of vows (Lv 27:1-8). But in his response feminists have rightly recognized the ugly side of that form of patriarchy that places the highest value on the maintenance of male dominance. In such contexts women have

no value except as tools, chattel to be manipulated and disposed at will in the interests of and for the honor of men. Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter represents the ultimate in abuse. He hereby not only violates the human race by eliminating one of its members, an image of God with inherent dignity equal to his own, but also he violates his own flesh and blood. If homicidal crimes may be classified, pedicide must rank as the most heinous. This young woman, whose memory was celebrated in Israel for generations, and whom we still honor by grieving over her death, was a victim of faithfulness to an unfaithful vow. In her fate she represents all the courageous daughters of abusive fathers.<sup>11</sup>

Samson's abuse of women is not as obvious as Jephthah's, but it is no less real, insofar as his treatment of women is based entirely on what his eyes see, that is, his sensual appetites. We cannot excuse him by noting that, except for his mother, the women in his life are all Philistines. They are still women, special creations bearing the image of God with dignity and majesty no less than Jephthah's own (cf. Ps 8). He demands the first [Timnite] woman because he likes what he sees (14:1-2) and "she seems right in his eyes" (14:3). Apart from a totally calloused disposition toward the theological implications of his actions, he abuses his parents by running roughshod over their concerns about marrying a woman from the uncircumcised Philistines.

Samson is characterized as an insolent, impudent, and independent person, without any sensitivity toward others. His disparaging disposition towards his wife is reflected in his reference to her as "his heifer" (14:18), which is as offensive in Hebrew as it is in English. But Samson abuses her further by abandoning her in a

huff (14:19), and then thinking he can buy back her favor with a gift of a young goat, the ancient equivalent of a dozen roses. In chapter 16 the stage for Samson's philandering moves to Gaza, where he first consorts with a prostitute, only to abandon her at dawn (16:1-3), and then becomes involved with Delilah. For the reader of the latter story it is difficult not to interpret this as a fascinating tale of ironic justice. He thinks he can play the game of love with anyone and in any manner he chooses, but finally a woman gets the better of him. He falls victim to his own abuse, and only by the grace of God does the sun rise on him one more time.

The story of Micah in chapters 17-18 is equally discouraging. In the case of this man the abuse is not against his wife/lover or daughter, but against his mother. The portrait of the woman painted by the narrator of this account is hardly complimentary, but this does not excuse the young Ephraimite. In violation of the fifth and eighth commandments, Micah robs his mother of 1100 shekels of silver. The paucity of accounts of crimes against mothers in the Old Testament throws into sharper relief the reprehensible nature of this deed.

Few accounts in Scripture match Judges 19-21 for the heinousness of male criminality against females. Apart from the institution of concubinage,<sup>12</sup> which is taken for granted in this episode, the Levite from the hill country of Ephraim originally appears to be a gracious man. Even though his concubine had been unfaithful to him and left him, he goes to great lengths to maintain positive relations with her family and to bring her back to his house. The moral degradation of Israel is hinted at in 19:20, but it comes to the surface in verses 22ff. In a scene remi-

niscient of Lot's experience in Sodom (Ge 19),<sup>13</sup> the men of the town come to the house where the Levite, his concubine, and his servant are lodging, demanding homosexual relations with the men. Aghast at the vileness of the townsfolk, the host offers them his own virgin daughter and his guest's concubine. Again, women are expendable in defense of both male pleasure and male honor. The rights of one's own daughter must take second place to the rights of one's male guests.

The abuse does not end here. After the men of the town had raped and violated the concubine all night, they deposited her for dead on the doorstep of the house where the men were staying. When the Levite gets up the next morning he displays no compassion at all toward his concubine. Instead of weeping over her desecration and trying to help her, he orders her to get up so they can be on their way. It is not even clear that she is dead at this point. The way the story is recounted at least leaves open the possibility that she is still alive. Indeed it cannot be precluded that his own knife, with which he cut up her body into twelve parts, had been an instrument of murder. Admittedly, in his speech (20:4-7) the man seems to accuse the people of Gibeah of the murder, but the speech as a whole is self-serving and totally devoid of any feeling toward the woman. Once more a woman has been sacrificed on the altar of male honor.

Images of abuse and crimes against women persist to the very end of the book. Indeed they climax in the final episodes. To punish the Benjamites for defending the criminals in Gibeah, the rest of the Israelite tribes launch an all-out war against one of their own tribes—the kind of war they should have been waging against the Canaanites. As a result of a series of battles

the tribe of Benjamin is virtually wiped out. As in the previous events, once again men are observed making a series of decisions involving women without respect to their dignity or their feelings. First, the crimes begin with the slaughter of innocent Benjamite women (and children) for crimes committed by men against the concubine.<sup>14</sup> Second, the men of Israel take an oath by Yahweh that none of them will give his daughter to be the wife of a Benjamite man (21:7,18). The proscription they should have been applying to Canaanites (Dt 7:1-5) they apply to their own people. Third, they slaughter all the men, women, and children of Jabesh Gilead (21:10-11), except 400 virgins, on trumped up charges of complicity with the Benjamites. Fourth, the Israelites unilaterally decide that these virgins shall become the wives of the Benjamites and present the women to them at Shiloh, the principal cult center in the period (21:12-15). Fifth, the Israelites felt sorry for the criminal Benjamites (v. 15), but have no heart at all for the innocent female celebrants at the annual festival in Shiloh (vv. 16-23). Accordingly, the men of Israel authorize the remaining men of Benjamin to lie in wait in the vineyards, and then seize the young maidens while they are dancing. One can only imagine their terror at this violent seizure. Sixth, to defend their action, the men of Israel offer a rationalization to the fathers of the girls, reminding them that they are not guilty of violating the oath since they have not given their daughters (they have been seized by force!), but they are certainly put in a bad light if they protest. Seventh, the Benjamite and Israelite men all returned to their territorial homelands as if everything was normal (v. 24).

All of the women in this chapter are

violated. The 400 virgins of Jabesh Gilead lose their families, are dragged from their homes, and forced to live with the cursed Benjamites. The women of Shiloh are ambushed and violently captured, removed from their families, and forced to live with the cursed Benjamites. Not once are the women's interests considered and all forces of protest are stifled. The rape of the individual (concubine) has grown to the rape of 400 victims of war and 200 celebrating maidens.

### **The Underlying Causes of Abuse**

Having chronicled the abuse of women in the period of Israel's settlement in Canaan, we turn now to a consideration of its causes. Given the fact that the abuse runs almost exclusively in one direction, that is males abusing females and not vice versa, the first impulse is to attribute this problem to oppressive male patriarchal structures. Indeed few books have provided feminist scholars with a mountain of proof evidencing the fundamentally abusive character of patriarchy more overwhelming than Judges. In any hierarchical system those with physical, economic, and political power tend to act in their own interests and at the expense of those below them in the social ladder. Accordingly, Jephthah sacrifices his own daughter in defense of his honor, the men of Gibeah gang rape the Levite's concubine for their own pleasure, and the men of Israel violate the virgins of Jabesh Gilead and the female celebrants at Shiloh in the interests of other men, even though the latter are criminal. According to feminists, the solution to these criminal acts is the eradication of all hierarchical structures and their replacement with thoroughly egalitarian socio-political institutions.

However, this approach to the book of

Judges suffers from two fundamental flaws. First, a totally egalitarian society is a utopian pipe dream nowhere envisioned in the Bible. Societies must and have always elevated some of their members to positions of authority. The moment this happens, the door is opened to the abuse of power and exploitation of the economic and socio-political inferiors in the interests of the superiors.<sup>15</sup> This potential for abuse is not a function of gender. Matriarchy could potentially be as abusive as patriarchy; females can be as abusive as males.

Second, this interpretation of Judges assumes the book offers a normative portrayal of Israelite society in general and the operation of patriarchy in particular. Nothing could be farther from the truth. From start to finish the authorial purpose is to describe a nation in a state of serious and progressive recidivism. The author declares his literary agenda in a host of ways, beginning with the prologue (1:1-2:5), which portrays a nation fracturing politically and disintegrating spiritually. The survey of tribal conquests begins with Judah, which is successful, but the tone of the reports becomes ever more discouraging, ending with Dan, which fails completely in their response to the divine mandate to seize the land apportioned to them.

The introduction to the "Book of Deliverers" (2:6-3:6), which functions as a thesis statement for the bulk of the book (3:7-16:31), emphasizes not only how quickly after the death of Joshua the spiritual rot set in, but also the progressive intensification of Israel's apostasy with each succeeding narrative cycle that follows. The causes cited for this recidivism are intermarriage with the Canaanites (3:6) and the failure to retain a fresh and vital memory of Yahweh's saving acts (3:7). The introductions to each of the deliverer

cycles<sup>16</sup> summarizes the narrator's underlying analysis: the descendants of Israel "did evil in the sight of Yahweh."

The narrative cycles are deliberately arranged and shaped to highlight the intensification of Israel's spiritual problem during the days of the Judges. The cycles begin with Othniel, who is presented in positive and paradigmatic form, and end with Samson, who embodies all that is wrong in Israel. Between these borders the characters of the Judges (Ehud, Barak, Gideon, and Jephthah<sup>17</sup>) decline precipitously. Commonly regarded as appendices, chapters 17-18 and 19-21 actually bring the development of the author's thesis to its intended climax and conclusion. Whereas the preceding deliverer cycles had demonstrated that the judges themselves were increasingly a part of Israel's problem, chapters 17-19 describe how the Canaanization of Israelite society has infected the Levites and the religious institutions of the land. The author brings his treatment of the subject of Israel's Canaanization to a climax in chapters 19-21. The account of the rape of the concubine by the Benjamites of Gibeah deliberately echoes Genesis 19 where the depravity of Sodom is so graphically portrayed. In the mind of the author the nation of Israel has taken on the character of Sodom. It is no wonder that God is silent in the final chapters of the book. The nation has been given up to suffer the consequences of its own folly and spiritual infidelity. Jewish tradition is correct in interpreting this as a prophetic book, the author calls upon the people of his day and all subsequent generations to recognize the degeneration, to think about it, to consider it, and to speak against it!<sup>18</sup>

The portrayal of male abuse of women in the book of Judges parallels Israel's



general spiritual decline and the Canaanization of her society. It is not the author's intention to present the ways in which men treat women in the book as either normal or normative any more than Gideon's abusive treatment of his Transjordanian countrymen and his self-serving exercise of kingship, Jephthah's foolish vow, and Samson's philandering with Philistine women are to be understood as normal. The narrator offers the episodes of criminal acts against women as further evidence of the nation's internal rot. Israel's problem is spiritual, not economic or structural. Accordingly, the prescription for her ills is not the abolition of patriarchy but the spiritual rejuvenation of the nation. If the people of Yahweh will seek his face, humble themselves, and turn from their wicked ways, then he will forgive their sin and heal their land. Then men will treat women with the respect and dignity they deserve as co-images of God himself. The normative biblical model of fatherhood and husbandhood would have men exercising these functions not from positions of power but out of compassion and a sense of responsibility. The call to leadership is a call to servanthood, a call to sacrificing personal interests for the sake of those for whom one is charged to care. Ideally, even physical power is to be exercised on behalf of the weak, and hierarchical structures represent natural institutions to achieve this.

With this conclusion the author may also have come upon the solution for the abuse and exploitation of women by men in our own time. The manner in which men treat women today serves as a barometer of the spiritual climate of a nation, society, church, or family. Like the nation of Israel in the pre-monarchic pe-

riod, the American church has been thoroughly "Canaanized." According to the polls of George Barna and George Gallup, apart from cultic events and formal proclamations, the manner in which those who claim to be the people of God live today differs little from the life of the unbelievers. In the words of J. B. Phillips on Romans 12:1, we have been squeezed into the mold of the world. The extent to which the same problems of male exploitation and abuse of females plague the church offers an instrument by which that Canaanization may be measured. The author of the book of Judges calls upon us to repent of our sin, to return to Yahweh, and to let the memory of his gracious saving acts motivate us to new levels of holiness and obedience. Until we do, the unspeakable crimes which men commit against women will only increase in number and intensity, and the fragments of women sacrificed for male honor will continue to fill the landscape.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>These two points are developed at length in my forthcoming commentary, *Judges and Ruth*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999).

<sup>2</sup>See further Daniel I. Block, "The Period of Judges: Religious Disintegration Under Tribal Rule," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, ed. A. Gileadi (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988) 39-57; and Block, "Echo Narrative Technique: The Rhetorical Use of Genesis 19:1-11 in Judges 9:22-26," *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990) 27-50.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Also the reference to Deborah as "a mother in Israel" in 5:7.

<sup>4</sup>Significantly both of these are non-Israelites.

<sup>5</sup>Contrary to common opinion, Deborah does not function as a judge like Ehud, Gideon, or Jephthah. For detailed discussion see Block, "Deborah among the Judges: The Perspective of the Hebrew Historian," in *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context*, ed. A. R. Millard, et al (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbauns, 1994) 229-253.

<sup>6</sup>The narrator's placement of the Othniel and Cushan-Rishathaim cycle (3:7-11) at the head of a series of cycles of apostasy, foreign oppression, cry for relief, and deliverance is deliberate, based upon his own acknowledgment of a progressive deterioration of Israelite spirituality in the course of chapters 3-16. This problem is also reflected in the progressive moral and spiritual degeneration of the deliverers engaged by Yahweh. By the scheme summarized in 2:11-23, Othniel represented the most noble deliverer, Samson the most despicable.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Nu 32:12 and Jos 14:6,14, which identify Caleb as "the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite." According to Ge 36:11, 15, and 42, Kenaz was an Edomite chieftain, a descendant of Esau.

<sup>8</sup>This conduct should be evaluated in the light of Dt 17:17.

<sup>9</sup>Ge 34:31, 38:23; Am 7:17; 1 Ki 22:38.

<sup>10</sup>In this regard prostitution should be distinguished from adulterous acts, which are scathingly denounced, whether the perpetrators are male or female. Whereas adultery involves violation of the marriage covenant, prostitution often became an economic necessity.

<sup>11</sup>For a study of this text see Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Theology, Overtures to Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 92-116.

<sup>12</sup>On the problems of concubinage see

above.

<sup>13</sup>For a comparison of these texts see Block, "Echo Narrative Technique," 27-50. Cf. above n. 2.

<sup>14</sup>This is nowhere explicitly stated, but it may be deduced from the fact that no Benjamite women were left for the 600 Benjamite men. Cf. 20:48.

<sup>15</sup>The Scriptures themselves recognize this problem. Cf. Pr 30:21-23.

<sup>16</sup>3:7, 3:12, 4:1, 6:1, 10:6, 13:1.

<sup>17</sup>The account of Shamgar (3:31) falls outside this scheme. The brevity of this note reflects the narrator's embarrassment that leadership is so scarce in Israel a non-Israelite has had to come and rescue the nation from the Philistines.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. the response of the people to the dismemberment of the Levite's concubine in 19:30.