

THE WAR OF GIDEON



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incursors who infiltrated the land to pillage and destroy. Under these conditions there developed a system of rule by local leaders who were called “Judges.”

The judge was chieftain of a tribe, or of several neighboring tribes. Usually, he was called on to lead in an hour of great danger, and after he succeeded in overcoming the enemy and distancing the threat, he would be recognized as a leader even in times of peace, to “judge Israel.” However, there were also judges who did not start out as war heroes. Recounted in the Book of Judges are Othniel, son of Kenaz; Ehud, son of Gera; Shamgar, son of Anath; Deborah the Prophetess; Gideon, son of Joash; Abimelech; Tola, son of Puah; Jair the Gileadite; Jephthah the Gileadite; Ibzan; Elon the Zebulunite; Abdon, son of Hillel; Samson; Eli the Priest; and Samuel the Prophet.

The “great” Judges, considered to be saviors, were Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah the Prophetess, Gideon, Jephthah the Gileadite, Samson, and Samuel the Prophet. Othniel, Ehud, Gideon, and Jephthah fought mainly against the neighboring nations in Transjordan, who attempted to infiltrate Israel, and against desert marauders who would pillage the land’s cities and produce. Othniel defeated the king of Aram-naharaim, an invader from Mesopotamia. Gideon defeated the Midianites. Ehud repelled the attempts of the Moabites to expand their borders at Israel’s expense, and Jephthah repelled similar attempts made by the Ammonites.

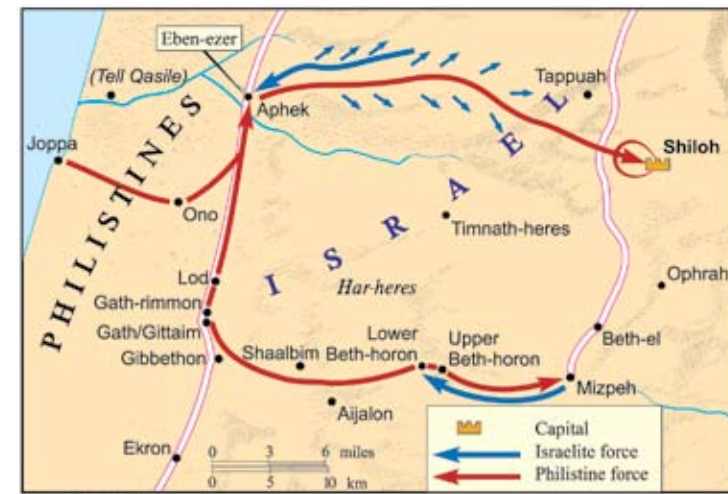
The names of Shamgar, Samson and Samuel are associated with the wars against the Philistines, who dwelled along the southern coast of the land of Israel and who, because of their administrative and military superiority, attempted to subdue the tribes of Israel.

The most serious confrontation between Israel and the Philistines occurred in the mid-eleventh century, between Aphek and Eben-ezer, known as the “battle of Eben-ezer.” The war ended with the defeat of the allied tribes of Israel. The Ark of the Covenant, which had been brought from Shiloh to the battlefield, fell into Philistine hands, and Shiloh itself was destroyed and ceased being a spiritual center. Only after some wonderful wanderings was the

Ark returned to Kiriath-jearim, remaining there until King David brought it to Jerusalem.

A special chapter in the period of the Judges is the story of the three-year kingdom of Abimelech. Abimelech attempted to succeed his father, Gideon Jerubbaal, as ruler, and to turn his leadership into a kingdom with the help of the Shechemites, who

THE BATTLE OF EBEN-EZER



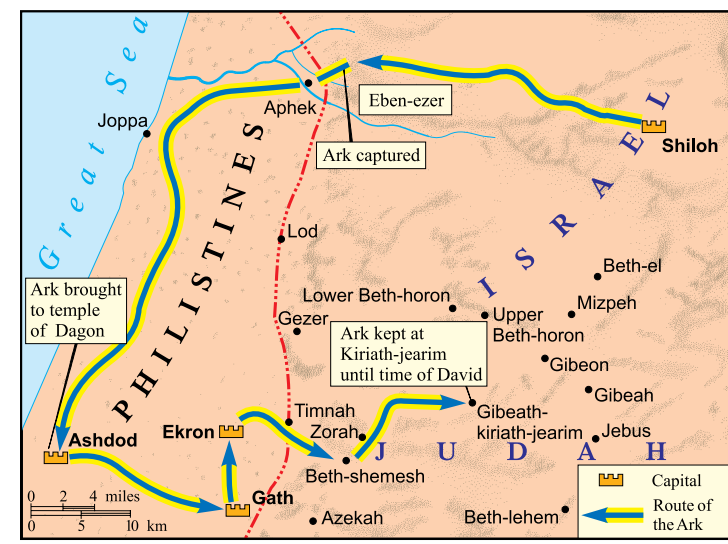
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considered him one of their own because of his mother’s lineage. However, the people of Shechem refused to accept his rule as king of Israel. Abimelech destroyed Shechem and died during the siege of Thebez.

The Book of Judges ends with the narrative of the “concubine in Gibeah.” This is the story about the fraternal war between the tribe of Benjamin and the other Israelite tribes. The war was bloody and the tribe of Benjamin was almost completely annihilated. The tribe was returned to the fold and was restored only after a way had been found to provide wives for the remaining Benjaminites, who had fled to the wilderness “unto the rock Rimmon.”

The last of the Judges was Samuel the Prophet, whose story is told in the biblical book named after him. He was also the only judge to be described as the leader of all Israel and symbolized the transition toward the establishment of the monarchy. He anointed King Saul, and afterward replaced him with King David.

THE WANDERINGS OF THE ARK OF THE COVENANT



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The United Monarchy

(End of 11th century–end of 10th century)

The United Monarchy is the term ascribed to the kingdom of Israel in the days of Kings Saul, David, and Solomon. Unlike the Judges before them and the kings of Judah and Israel after them, these three kings ruled over all the twelve tribes of Israel. The monarchy arose as a result of the people’s demand to crown a king, apparently in order to cope with the Philistine threat. The United Monarchy lasted for about one hundred years and was divided after the death of Solomon.

Saul, the first king of Israel, was the son of Kish of the tribe of Benjamin. His reign is described in the Bible in three versions: in the beginning, he was secretly anointed king by Samuel the Prophet, then he was chosen (by the casting of lots) at Mizpeh to reign over the tribe of Benjamin, and, after the victory at Jabesh-gilead, he was coronated at Gilgal to rule over the whole of Israel. He reigned from approximately 1025 to 1006. Saul began with a war against the Philistines, driving them from the hill country