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THE HISTORY OF THE TRIBE OF
BENJAMIN FROM THE ENTRANCE
INTO CANAAN UNTIL THE
DIVISION OF THE
KINGDOM.

A Thesis

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for the Degree of Rabbi

by



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INTRODUCTION

Few historical studies are as needed or as interesting as that study which treats of the history of the early tribal groups in the land of Canaan. The traditional accounts have long since ceased to be adequate in the light of present day historical inquiry, higher criticism, and archeological research.

This thesis attempts to portray the history of a single tribe of Israel--Benjamin--from its entrance into Canaan until the division of the Kingdom. Drawing its materials from those sources which are presently considered most critical, it endeavors to reconstruct early tribal historical episodes and later more fluid historical sequences into a united and meaningful whole.

It is hoped that the reading of these pages will prove as enlightening and interesting to the reader as the writing thereof was to the writer.

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I. THE PERIOD OF THE JUDGES

A. Early Benjamite Relationships

The first mention which we have of the tribe of Benjamin within our most authentic Biblical source for the period of the Judges--the Book of Judges-- is made in Jud.1:21. But one cannot boldly plunge into the history of a tribe so famous and so significant as that of the tribe of Benjamin, without taking into account the elements which went to make up the historical background of the tribe before we find it located with the other tribes in the Plain of Jericho¹, ready to invade the country of Canaan. Certainly this is the more true since the very verse in which we find the first actual mention of the tribe whose history is being traced, is much contested as to its original form and meaning². We shall, therefore, first take note of Benjamin's traditional stand among the tribes which are commonly associated with it.

In Genesis 35, Benjamin is given his traditional origin³. Thus Benjamin or, as his mother called him, "Ben-Oni"--the son of my sorrow--is the son of Jacob's old age; the son of Jacob and Rachel. This making Benjamin the son of an old man far beyond his fertile years--to say nothing of his wife's own impotence--is, of course, simply an effort to explain the meaning of the name, Benjamin. Though it ~~means~~ means no more than "Ben-Jamin", Son of the Right Hand, and has to do with Benjamin's location in relation to the other tribes on the Canaanitish territory⁴, the effort has here been made to interpret

1) Jud. 1:16 ; 2:1

2) Ibid. 1:21

3) Gen. 35:18 ff.

4) The name, Benjamin undoubtedly has this meaning. As to when the tribe

Benjamin as being a variant form of the Hebrew for "Son of Old Age".. or "Son of Days"..sic: Ben-Jamim. This last interpretation is obviously to seek harmony with the story which makes Benjamin the son of Jacob's and Rachel's old age.

While these various¹ problems which are found pursuant to the consideration of Benjamin's name and meaning are quite interesting yet they are not quite as important as other facts which come to us as we ascertain more exactly the traditional status of the tribe of Benjamin. For it is determined from other chapters which enter into the making of the Joseph Saga that Joseph was the elder brother of Benjamin by the same mother, Rachel⁵. Thus Joseph and Benjamin become known as the "Rachel Tribes", and a traditional feeling of unity is supposed to exist between them. Joseph, however, we know to be the name which represents two distinct tribes, namely, Ephraim and Manasseh.. they being the two sons who were born unto Joseph while he was in the land of Egypt. According to the account in the Book of Genesis, these two, Ephraim and Manasseh, were children born in the land of Egypt unto Joseph by an⁶ Egyptian woman, Asenath, who was the daughter of Poti-

as a whole gained the name, it is not easy to say. Ehud was known simply as Haj^emini (Jud. 3:15) i.e., a dweller in the land which lay to the south. That J^emini has the meaning of Southern or Southern One is inferred from the ordinary meaning of Jamin--right hand--which, taken in terms of orientation, i.e. facing the rising sun, is the south. In the first quotation (vide supra) J^emini is a Southerner. 1 Sam. 9:4 and 2 Sam. 20:1 indicate that J^emini means Southern. Evidently the earliest name for a Benjamite was Ish J^emini or, possibly, just J^emini. This must have been followed by Ben-Jamin and, later, Ben-Binjamin. Mindful of the vocal twists of the Central Palestinians--or at least of the Ephraimites--(Jud. 12:5, 6) and of the traditional name of Joshua Bin-Nun, we might guess that Ben-Jamin was really originally Bin-Jamin. The name of the dweller was given to the land and Ben-Binjamin followed. ~~Further notes on Benjamin's name are given in the text on Page~~

5) Gen. 30: 22-4

6) Gen. 41: 50 ff.

phera , an Egyptian priest who ministered to the god On.

All this is part of the traditional account which we read in the Book of Genesis, and there is much left to be said as to the validity of whatever has been given out in the text. While much material which is included within the covers of the Book of Genesis may be struck out as lacking in historical validity or value, yet, at least as far as the tribe of Benjamin is concerned, the evidence seems to indicate that there was of old an ancient relationship between Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin which made for a feeling of unity in these three aforementioned tribes. That is, for a feeling of unity between Benjamin and the Beth Joseph. It is a matter of some doubt as to whether Benjamin is tacitly understood to be referred to every time mention is made of the House of Joseph. There is, of course, the bald statement of Shimei ben Gera who says: "I am come today, the first of ⁷ all the House of Joseph". This statement was made during the time of David, and quite a bit later than the civil war in which Benjamin separated from Ephraim and Manasseh--as will be shown later. Still, over and against the statement of Shimei ben Gera, we must note that after the mention of Benjamin in Jud. 1:21--a mention which will be shown to be valid--there is the declaration , "And the House of Joseph went also up against Beth-el." ⁸ In this passage the Beth Joseph is held quite distinct from Benjamin. In the Blessing of Jacob ⁹, Joseph is given separate mention from Benjamin. There can be no definite solution to such a vexatious problem, still from these various references as well as from consequent history, it is to be hypothesized that Benjamin as a tribe early committed to

7) 2 Sam. 19:21

8) Jud. 1:22

9) Gen. 49:22 ff.

an old allegiance of some sort, considered itself to be one with the House of Joseph; but later writers, interpreting or editing, saw in the civil war between Benjamin and the Beth Joseph the last claim Benjamin had to inclusion within the term, Beth Joseph.

These considerations of Benjamin's relationships with other tribes do not, however, exhaust the study by any means. For in such a state of society as the tribes presented when they began the slow incursion into the Canaanitish territory, there must have been many small and great interdependancies which have been left unrecorded in the literary records which remain to us. There were probably tribes, clans, camp-followers, anomolous groups--a veritable host of tribal classifications. These certainly could not have been independent, but were undoubtedly in a state of interdependence or inter-relationship of some kind. The question which naturally arises is whether or not Benjamin was allied with any [other] tribe or tribes other than Ephraim and Manasseh. Benjamin had within itself, as did any other major tribal group, many smaller clans, but did it have other important external relations?

It is here held forth as a tentative theory that between the tribe of Gilead and the tribe of Benjamin there existed some sort of pact or understanding either before Benjamin's entrance into the land beyond the Jordan, or immediately after it. This understanding, as Benjamin's later history shows, did fair to rival the pact between Benjamin and Beth Joseph. It may be said that though, as tradition indicates, Benjamin held some sort of blood relationship to the Beth Joseph, or possibly a common religious feeling¹⁰, the feeling it had for Gilead was more firm than the feeling it had for the former. Future arguments bearing upon the Benjamite-Gileadite relationship

10) See treatment of Song of Deborah, page 19ff.

will bear this out. It is difficult to ascertain from the text just when this understanding took its beginnings. It is possible to suppose that the location of Gilead as a transjordanian tribe with its opportunity to protect Benjamin from the intermittent invasions of Ammon or, later, Midian, might have led to the strengthening of an earlier friendship and subsequently to an editorial understanding of an ancient pact. Critical commentators such as Moore and Burney are of the opinion that the Gileadite-Benjamite friendship dates from the time of Saul¹¹ when, as the familiar story of the men of Jabesh-Gilead tells us, Saul relieved the oppression of Gilead by Nahash, the Ammonite. After that time the friendship is supposed to have grown to such strength that the men of Jabesh-Gilead steal the bones of Saul in order to save them from dishonor¹². The fact that, upon the death of Saul, Abner hurried Ishbosheth over across the Jordan River and into the land of Gilead where he knows that a Benjamite will be received in good grace, and where a civil war will find a good operating base, is, of course, merely a verification of the friendship that existed,. But there is evidence in an earlier source that Gilead's friendship antedated Saul's time, and that it came very early in tribal history. It is evident in the reference to Jabesh-Gilead which we find in the account of the Civil War¹³ that the Gileadites were at that comparatively early date not disposed to enter into battle against the Benjamites. In a negative way, we shall see in the course of our study of the history of the tribe of Benjamin that, granting the original hypothesis of an early Benjamite-Gileadite pact, certain very important historical episodes are given greater meaning¹⁴.

11) I Sam. 11

12) I Sam. 31:11 ff.

13) 2 Sam. 2: 9

14) See Page 24 of this thesis.

B. Settlement and Boundaries

Just how the Benjamites fared in that slow, laborious conquest of the Canaanitish hill-country cannot be determined from the only reference to Benjamin before the Ehud narrative¹⁵. We must rely upon other passages to give us a hint as to the probable situation in the land immediately after the tribal groups entered. "Immediately" must be taken, in the light of most group movements, to mean about fifty years or even more. When the tribes entered the land¹⁶ they did not succeed in driving out the inhabitants completely. . . . Wherever the Canaanites could use their chariots to the best advantage, there they maintained themselves against the onslaughts of the invading Israelites; or wherever their fortresses were too strong for the marauders, there they held their original strength. Therefore it was that Beth-shean was not captured, nor Taanach nor Megiddo. Each army or warring group retained its strength in that locality where its respective military strategems and methods could best be used. On this account, too, Jebus did not fall to the Benjamites but there came about only an interfusing in the course of time. Though it says, "But the Jebusites dwelt with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day", the reversing of "Jebusites" and "children of Benjamin" would be far more in keeping with historical logic. . . . At any event, though the Israelites managed to nominally conquer the land, the situation was really that they dwelt in and among the Canaanites, as the dominant group putting the Canaanites to work in labor gangs¹⁷. Though there is no mention of the fact (neglecting Jud. 1:21)

15) Jud. 1:21

16) Ibid. and v. 29

17) Ibid. vv. 28, 29

Benjamin must have had the same general experience with the Canaanites. We may picture the invasion as beginning in the plain of Jericho, sweeping westward and northward. Over a period of years, the tribal groups Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh had utterly taken the small towns incapable of defense, it stands to reason, and had, in a longer period of time, infiltrated into the larger cities where they probably formed a respectable minority.

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We read in Judges 1:21 a statement to the effect that the Benjamites did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem, but the Jebusites dwelt with the children of Benjamin 'unto this day'. Aside from the implications which the last part of the verse contains as to the date of the writing of the verse, if we can accept this statement as it stands..i.e., the whole verse..we have here the first reference to the tribe of Benjamin in the Book of Judges. But since both Burney and Moore express in their respective commentaries on the Book of Judges, doubt as to the validity of the present form of the sentence, it would do well here to pause in order to investigate their arguments. First, let it be pointed out, there is no quarrel as to its truth. That is, it stands as a matter of historical fact that Jerusalem, known of old as Jebus, was never in the hands of Israel until the taking of it was reckoned as an achievement of David¹⁸. As rampart to this fact stands the verse in Judges which states that Jebus was not an Israelitish city¹⁹.

But aside from this, both Moore and Burney are of the opinion that the original form of the sentence never contained a

18) 2 Sam. 5:6-9, also *Jud. 1:8*.

19) Jud. 19:12

reference to the tribe of Benjamin. It is their opinion that a later hand changed an original "Judah" to "Benjamin" in order to accord with Joshua 18:16 which, in describing the lot of Benjamin, makes the border run south of Jerusalem so as to include the city, and mentions it as being among the cities which belonged to that tribe²⁰. The revised verse would thus parallel Joshua 15:63 very closely. If this were the case, then we should have to admit that there is here no mention of the tribe of Benjamin. But is this the case? There are several logical reasons for suspecting the validity of Moore's and Burney's emendations. In the first place, the change would imply that Jerusalem was attacked from the south for it was from that direction that the tribe of Judah came into the land. But we know from the topography of the land that it is ^{extremely difficult} impossible to attack Jerusalem from that side. If Jerusalem was to be taken it was necessary to approach it from the north or northwest. Are we to suppose, too, that Judah, a tribe which then existed as a group of loose clans and which never attained full unity or strength until the days of David, was so foolhardy and audacious as to attempt an attack on Jerusalem? It is not to be imagined that these Judaeans shepherd folk, so different from the bold and daring northerners, were even anxious to attain the mastery over Jerusalem. The Benjamites, on the other hand, were no fools, and though the city of the Jebusites presented a strong front, it was necessary to at least attempt the conquest of the city which stood as a fortress guarding the only really available passage between the mountainous highlands of Benjamin and the ^{more} more fertile soil of the south where Judah was to attain her glory. A recent map of South-Central Palestine--a map based upon careful study and modern excavational endeavor²¹--shows the ancient road as leading through Benjamin,

20) Jos. 18:28

21) AASOR vol. 4 p. 75, 6

past Jerusalem on the west, into Judah, and down to Bethlehem. The immensely strategic position of Jerusalem is quite evident, and clearly explains why it was important for Benjamin to have something of a grip on Jerusalem. They did not, however, take it. As long as Jerusalem was dominated by the Jebusites, Benjamin must be on the look out.

It was necessary for Benjamin to have some sort of protection against an attack from Jerusalem in the event of a Jebusite rebellion. It is therefore probable that somewhere around this time Benjamin took care to become friendly with the Gibeonites, the traditional pact with whom is set forth in Joshua ²². The Gibeonites who were Hivvites ²³, were united together with the inhabitants of ^{Hah}Ch^ephirah, ²⁴B^eeroth, and Kiriath-J^earim ²⁵. It is a point of interest that late research makes the Hivvite tetrapolis a Horite group. It seems that these four cities were united for no less a reason than ⁿmilitary defence. In that case it would be quite to the advantage of Benjamin to have access to these cities which stood strategically within the land. Such a union stood as a protection against any possible on-slaught from either north or south. Gibeon retained its original ²⁶ character as an alien city until the time of David, we know. In the first reference quoted infra, Gibeon is neutral territory; in the second it states clearly that "...the children of Israel had sworn to them. This would seem to verify the tradition as given in Joshua 9.,

22) Jos. 9:27

23) Ibid. v. 7

24) Ibid. v. 17

25) AASOR vol. 4 p. 104, note 13

26) 2 Sam. 2:12 ; 21:2 ff.

and may well be accounted for by the supposition that in the conquest of the land such covenants were common, in the interest of establishing themselves in the land with a fair amount of assurance and peace. The cities were probably united of old to resist attacks from the Canaanites in Jerusalem, for the residents of the Horite cities were seemingly of somewhat different stock or clan from the Canaanites. The former were Amorites²⁷ who, we recall from the reference in Numbers²⁸, were classed as mountain dwellers; whereas the Canaanites were dwellers of the Plainlands. This, however, seems to be contradicted by Judges 1:34 where it is plainly stated that the Amorites were dwellers in the lowlands: "...for they (the Amorites) would not suffer them (the Danites) to come down to the valley. But the Amorites were resolved to dwell in Harheres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim; yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed so that they became tributary". The identification of Amorites and Canaanites is the result of E and D editorship, for it was their custom to use the term, Amorite, as a comprehensive name for the pre-Israelite people of Palestine.

What is to be noted here is the mention of the House of Joseph. That the hand of the House of Joseph did "grow heavy" upon the cities mentioned above is verified to a degree by 1st Kings 4:9 which indicates that the places did come under Israelite dominion before the division of the Kingdom, since they are mentioned in one of Solomon's prefectures.

All this ²⁹propos the verse which, since it has real historical value, is meritorious of examination as to its implications and historical concomitants. The verse is quite valid, and stands

27) 2 Sam. 2:12
28) Nu. 13:29
29) Jud. 1:21

as an indicator of Benjamin's attempt to gain the city which stood as guardian of the pass between modern Wadi es-Şarar and Wadi en-Nar³⁰.

Finally these tribes of Central Palestine became fairly settled in the new land. The group which comprised Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh were well separated from the other tribal groups both to the north and to the south. On the north as Jud.1:27 indicates, and as chapters 4 and 5 later proved, there was a series of towns which remained unconquerable. These towns--Taanach, Megiddo, Ibleam, and Dor represented the Canaanites determined refusal to permit the invaders to possess the Plain of Esdraelon. For who held that Plain held the land and its highways from the north to Egypt on the south. So it happened that these four ancient Canaanitish cities together with their respective dependencies remained Canaanitish despite the fierce strength of the invading tribes. On the south Benjamin was separated from what then constituted Judah by not only the many Wadis which broke up the land but by the string of fortresses which comprised Harheres, Aijalon, Shaalbim, and Gezer³¹. The situation then was such: "The larger cities with few exceptions, the fertile valleys, and the seaboard plain remain in the hands of the Canaanites. For long, the Israelites were really masters only in the mountains of Southern and Central Canaan, and the two strongest tribes, Joseph and Judah, were completely separated from each other by a line of Canaanite strongholds having Jerusalem as its salient."³² With regard to this quotation let it be said, as was pointed out elsewhere³³, Judah was not yet a strong tribe. So much then for the relative positions of the so-called Rachel tribes. We have still to give our attention to Benjamin's northern and southern boundary lines.

30) AASOR vol.4 P.75

31) Jud. 1:29,35

32) 100 to Jud. p.8

33) Page 9 of this thesis

Our attention will first be given to the southern boundary line. Reading in Joshua 18:15 ff., we trace the following line of demarcation between Judah and Benjamin:

From Kireath Jearim to the Fountain of Nephtoah to the valley of Hinnom, and, following this on the south side of Jerusalem, to En-Rogel; thence northward to En-Shemesh to Geliloth to the stone of Bohan; then a dip into the Arabah northward unto Beth-Hoglah, and finally to the Salt Sea.

On a recent map which Guthe employs³⁴ to illustrate an article on Palestine, the following identifications are made:

Kiriath // Kuryet el-Enab

Nephtoah // Lifta

En-Rogel // Bir 'Eiyub

Stone of Bohan // Hajr el-Asbah

Beth-Hoglah // Ain Hajlah

Though neither En-Shemesh nor Geliloth are given positive identification, yet their relative position with regard to Adummim which is identified with Talat ed-Dumm, leaves no great mystery to be solved.

There is, as can be seen, no serious difficulty in determining the southern boundary of the tribe of Benjamin. Guthe's reputation as a geographer leaves little fear as to the validity of identifications.

Concerning the northern boundary, there is much more to be said. In the forthcoming argument and conclusions, I follow Albright who has made a special study of the problem of the northern boundary of Benjamin³⁵. The problem as stated³⁶ is this: The northern

34) New Standard Bible Dictionary: Ed. Jacobus, Nourse, Zenos: ~~Enk~~.
Article on Palestine.

35) AASOR vol. 4, p. 150 ff.

36) Ibid.

border of Benjamin has consistently been placed too far north, in order to include all the towns which seem, according to a superficial examination of the list of Benjamite towns in Jos. 18:21-8, to have been assigned to that tribe. Albright consequently set about the task of revising the text in which was contained the description of Benjamin's northern border. As the result of these emendations,
37
the revised text reads as follows :

"And the border of the Benjamites on the northern side was from the Jordan; and the border went up to the north of the ridge of Jericho (var. east of the waters of Jericho), and went up into the wilderness, and its outgoings westward were in the hills of Beth-aven toward Luz, to the southern side of the ridge of Luz (which is Beth-el); and it went down to the border of the Archite (at) Attaroth Adar, and as far as Beth-horon the Upper; and it went down westward to the border of the Japhletite, as far as the hill which is south of
38
Beth-Horon the Nether."

Concerning the implications of this newer boundary line which he has established, ^{albright} he has this to say:

"A consideration of the material just given shows clearly that the boundaries of Benjamin were located further south than has generally been thought. Beginning with the Jordan east of Jericho,

37) The revised form was obtained by first comparing the present text of Jos. 18:12-13 with the 'actual' text of Jos. 16:1-3 i.e., adding 16:5b which "has obviously fallen out and been inserted in the wrong place" (AASOR vol. 4 p. 150). Mizrahan is emended to Mimizrah, and Beth-el of the second passage is corrected to Beth-aven (vide. Ibid p. 141 ff.) The economy of Albright's form is such that further abbreviation and abridgement is impossible. The complete argument is given in AASOR vol. 4, p. 150ff.

38) AASOR vol. 4, p. 151

the northern border skirted 'Ain es-Sultān and the northern slope of
 Tell es-Sultān, leaving Jericho in Benjamin³⁹. From Jericho it ran
 west into the mountains between the W^adi es-Sweinit and the W^adi
 Rummaneh... This is a very important point; Naarah, which belonged to
 Ephraim⁴⁰, was formerly placed by scholars further north, on the
 - 'Auja. The fact that it^t lay several miles to the southwest shows that
 Benjamin^d did not extend so far to the north as we had been assuming,
 - and tends to throw suspicions on the supposed projection^c of Benjamin
 into Mount Ephraim between Jericho and Beth-horon. Was there any
 such projection at all? The answer must be in the negative..⁴¹"

The basis of the validity of the negative answer is based
 chiefly upon the fact that though Ophrah is listed among the towns
 of Benjamin⁴², its presence in the text is due to a scribal error.
 If Ophrah were actually in Benjamite territory--Ophrah being identi-
 fied with the modern et-Taiyibeh⁴³--then the projecting of Benjamin i
 into Ephraimitic territory would be a necessary fact. But since it is
 proven to not be listed correctly, then Ophrah is in Ephraimite terri-
 tory. To quote Albright:

"Hereafter Ophrah must be assigned where it belongs, to
 Ephraim, and no one need wonder what has become of Rimmon, Ai, and Mich-
 mas, which lie south of Ophrah, and therefore should be included in the
 list of Benjamite towns..⁴⁴"

39) Jos. 18:21

40) I Chron. 7:28

41) ASSOR vol. 4, p. 153

42) Jos. 18:23

43) AASOR vol. 4, p. 129

44) Ibid. p. 154

C. The Ehud Episode

After verse 21 of chapter 1, there is no mention of Benjamin until the story of Ehud. This tale which is contained within the margins of vv.12-31 of chapter 3, is quite interesting in character, and gives a few leads as to Benjamin's position in those days. Neglecting the Deuteronomic portions of the introduction, we read that due to the Moabitish oppression which lasted for a period of eighteen years, there arose a deliverer, one Ehud by name, who was the son of Gera,⁴⁵ a clan name well known in the tribe of Benjamin. It is mentioned that Eglon, the king of the Moabites called in the aid of the Ammonites⁴⁶ to help him in the subjugation of the territory which he conquered, and which was presumably Ephraim and Benjamin, recalling that the "City of Palm Trees"⁴⁷ is Jericho⁴⁸. We may believe, then, that if Ehud killed the strong ally of the Ammonites who were Gilead's greatest⁴⁹ foes (because Gilead stood between Ammon and the Jordan), Gilead's friendship with Benjamin would be strengthened...all the more so since⁵⁰ Moab was encamped in Gileadite territory.

It is related that after Ehud's daring act, he escaped to S^eirah,⁵¹ and "he blew a trumpet in the hill-country of Ephraim". The arguments given out on page 14 ff. of this thesis show that Har Ephra-

45) Thus also Shimei ben Gera (2Sam.19:21): Gera son of Bela (I Chron.8³)

46) Jud.3:13

47) Ibid.

48) Jud.1:16

49) I Sam.11

50) Jud.3:19,28

51) Ibid. v.27

im, was in no wise in Benjamite territory. We must conclude, therefore, that Ehud gained a following from Ephraim as well as from Benjamin. There is no reason either for supposing that "the children of Israel" ⁵² refers to any others than the Epharimites and Benjamites. For after all, everything seems to indicate that the Moabitish oppression affected Ephraim and Benjamin chiefly, and, possibly, Manasseh.

Writes Moore, in making comment upon this story:

"It is natural to suppose that the memory of Ehud's exploit was kept alive among the tribesmen of Benjamin: his story retold on holidays at Gilgal. It has the qualities of the best Hebrew folk-stories, and is beyond doubt one of the oldest in the book... The events are in no wise improbable. It would indeed be strange if the success of the Israelites in establishing themselves west of the Jordan had not tempted others to follow. The Moabites, whose territory except in the time of the greatest expansion of the Israelite power east of the Jordan, extended to the northern end of the Dead Sea or beyond, may very well have brought under their power the Plain of Jericho and the adjacent parts of Mt. Ephraim. The well-designed and boldly executed ruse by which the tyrant is slain, and in the ensuing confusion his retainers cut off, has altogether the note of reality" ⁵³.

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52) Jud. 3:27

53) I 66 to Judges p. 90-91

D. The Taanach Episode

The next we hear of the tribe of Benjamin and the role it played in the history of the land, is in the ~~afamed~~ ⁵⁴ Song of Deborah which she sang to commemorate the victory at Taanach .

What may be said to have been the situation in the land at the time of this great battle wherein, after the primary wave of the invasion was over, Canaan lifted her head again to try to shake off the power of the Israelitish invaders? Judah is not mentioned in the Song. The simple reason is that Judah was not yet 'officially' recognized as a tribe. It was still a loose group of clans. Besides, it was not interested in the struggle which did not concern it. As for the rest, we may well imagine that the highlands were in the possession of Benjamin, Ephraim and Manasseh. And we may infer from the part taken in the fight by the northern tribes that Issachar^g, Zebulun, and Naphtali were gaining a firm grip on the Plain of Esdraelon. But though they were increasing in power as they grew in tribal strength, the Canaanites were still masters of the Plain. Their fortifications and strongly walled cities which were mentioned earlier in this thesis, as guardians of the Plain of Esdraelon, still commanded the passes which entered the Plain and the passes which traversed it. Their chariotry kept the highland footmen in awe and fear.

"With increasing numbers and strength, it was inevitable that the Israelites should turn their eyes to the fertile fields and ~~am~~ the rich traffic of the Plain. After a period of probably peaceful expansion, the Canaanite city-kings, alarmed perhaps at the steady encroachment of Israel, took the offensive. They blockaded the main roads and cut off communication; from their cities they sent out bands

54) Jud. ^g1, 5

and harried the country so that unwalled cities were deserted.

"Incited by Deborah, most of Israel's tribes concertedly took up arms to put an end to this intolerable state of things. From the south of the Plain came the three branches of Joseph, Ephraim, Benjamin and Machir; from the north Zebulun, Issachar, and Naphtali"⁵⁶.

The tribes immediately bordering the Great Plain were being annoyed⁵⁷. Benjamin may have been affected like the rest--and it may not have been. But it was undoubtedly looking for booty. So at the call of Deborah, they answered who thought it would be to their advantage...either for relieving the oppression or for the sake of getting the spoils of war. So, going north and south respectively, they met the Canaanites on ground greatly to the advantage of Canaan-⁵⁸ itish military methods..for they were charioteers, and were used to fighting in the open. Luckily for the Israelites, the maneuvers of the Canaanites were rendered impossible by the overflowing of the river Kishon⁵⁹. Their leader, Sisera, defeated, their horsemen unable to ride because of the condition of the ground, the Canaanites were routed; and the battle was left as a victory for the Israelites. We may say that as far as the Israelites were concerned, the power of the Canaanites was broken.

The whole tenor of the poem is one of triumph. But triumph let it be noted, for Yahweh. If this is so--basing the forthcoming thesis on the ancient nature of the Ode--then we might assume that the Central and Northern tribes felt a certain unity by this time through the common belief in one concept of Yahweh. Or it might be reasoned in a more particularized manner that if Deborah's home was really

56) ICC to Judges p.133

58) Jud.4:13

- 57) Jud. ⁵4:6,7

59) Jud.5:21

between Beth-el and Ramah , then the Yahweh of which she spoke was known to the group Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh if not to the northern group, Naphtali, Issach^{er}, and Zebulun. They might not have had the same Yahweh cult, but that would not keep her from exulting in the power of her Yahweh to whom she would naturally attribute the victory.

At any rate, it is interesting to note that, granting the use of the Ephod as an instrument for consulting Yahweh, Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin all made use of the Ephod. Thus Gideon,⁶¹ Manassite, made an Ephod⁶² as did Micah, the Ephraimite. The priests⁶³ of Nob wore or used the Ephod. Nob is accredited to Benjamin. It would seem to follow that tribes having a common oracular technique might possibly have had the same Yahweh cult. If such were the case, we might explain the feeling of unity existing between the Joseph tribes and Benjamin as having a basis in a common religious concept. Such an hypothesis cannot be proven from the meager sources which we have at hand but as a tentative theory it helps to explain one of the problems within the thesis.

60) Jud.4:5

61) Ibid.8:27

62) Ibid.17:5

X 63) a. I Sam.22:18 b.Neh.11:32

E. The Civil War Episode

Before proceeding to the next and, by far, most interesting account of Benjamin's fortunes, namely, the record of the civil war⁶⁴, let us examine the story of Jephthah⁶⁵. Although there is no mention of Benjamin in the account of Jephthah's delivery, there are certain elements in the story which may be adduced for developing the history of the tribe of Benjamin.

After relating in chapter 11 how the Ammonite oppression began and how Jephthah subdued the Ammonites, it is related in chapter 12 that the Ephraimites reproached Jephthah for not having called them in to take part in the battle⁶⁶. There are several things which may be inferred from this passage. In the first place, we gather that the Ephraimites felt themselves sufficiently in the lead of the tribes to be called in to take part in all battles. Battles meant booty and increased territory. This feeling of importance was irritated all the more if we concede on the basis of our arguments relative to the Benjamite-Gileadite friendship, that Benjamin was probably partner to the Gileadites in the battles against the Ammonites. That it was very natural for the Gileadites to seek the aid of their neighbours who dwelt just across the Jordan and especially near the fords of the Jordan, can be seen from a later historical example when just such an appeal to the Benjamites is actually made⁶⁷. It was simply history repeating itself. There was, then, in the Ephraimite note of protestation

64) Jud. 19-21

65) Ibid. 11:1-12:7

66) Ibid. 12:1

67) I Sam. 11

a decided tone of jealousy. This feeling of jealousy which was born of rivalry was probably the beginning of the later break which is recorded in chapter 20 of Judges. All the more would this hatred exist if we suppose that not only were the Benjamites allies of the tribesmen who slaughtered Ephraim at the fords of the Jordan⁶⁸, but possibly even aided in the slaughter. Where else shall we seek for the origins of the enmity which motivated the civil war?

With this understanding in mind, we may find the real roots of the account given in the closing chapters of the Book of Judges. Here, however, though the entire tale is about Benjamin and its separation from the other tribes, there is still so much of later interpolation and redaction that we must examine carefully all the facts involved in order to educe the elements of truth lying behind the story.

The story as it is presented may be outlined thus:

The concubine of a Levite who has made his home in the highlands of Ephraim, deserts him and returns to her father's home in Beth-lehem of Judah. He follows to bring her back. After tarrying for several days, they set out on their return late in the afternoon, and are constrained to halt for the night in Gibeah where they find lodging in the house of an old man who is not a native of the place. The men of the town set upon the guest--as did the Sodomites upon Lot's guests⁶⁹--; the Levite surrenders his concubine to them, and in the morning finds her dead, upon the threshold. He proceeds to his home, cuts the woman's body into pieces, and sends messengers throughout the land, calling upon the whole of Israel to avenge the outrage. The Israelites assemble, hear the cause, and determine to punish the men of as they deserve. They demand of Benjamin the surrender of the guilty men; but the Benjamites refuse and prepare for war. After consulting

68) Jud. 8:5

69) Gen. 19:1ff.

the Oracle, the Israelites join battle but are worsted. The second day they have no better success; but on the third day, by a strategem, they capture Gibeah and cut the Benjaminite ^aArmy to pieces; a remnant of six hundred men escapes to the wilderness. The towns of Benjamin are burned, and all their inhabitants--men, women, and children--put to the sword. From the slaughter, the Israelites return to Beth-el, in great distress that a tribe is lacking in Israel. For though six hundred men survive the combat, all the Israelites have sworn not to give their daughters in marriage to Benjamin's men. They send an expedition against Jabesh-Gilead which alone of all the cities in Israel, failed to send a contingent to the Israelite forces, with orders to slay all except the virgin girls. In this way they procure wives for four hundred Benjamites. The remaining two hundred are taken by the Benjamites, upon counsel of the others, from the girls who dance in the vineyards of Shiloh. The plan being successfully carried out, the Israelites disperse to their homes.

It would be impossible to accept the story as it stands now. The numbers are exaggerated to absurdity--not only of the men ⁷⁰mustered on both sides, but of the men who were slain in battle ⁷¹. The spontaneous and united action of all Israel ⁷² is just as improbable as the figures. There was in the period of the Judges not one moment when Israel was so united for any reason whatsoever. In the Song of Deborah, all Israel does not rise at her call to defend the land. Reuben, Gad, Dan, and Asher stand aloof. But in this account all

70) Jud. 20:14, 17

71) Ibid. vv. 21, 24, 35

72) Ibid. vii, 8,

Israel responded to the call against Benjamin, "From Dan to B^eer⁷³ Sheba, and the land of Gilead". The mere fact that the men of Gil-
ead are slain for their failure to respond to the call would give the
lie to 20:1. Moore contends that though chapter 19 presents a likely
story, chapter 20 and the first 14 verses of chapter 21 must be ser-
iously doubted or suspected as good sources for historical material⁷⁴.
While I concede that the facts of chapter 20 are improbable, and show
throughout a very late point of view, I do not believe that the first
14 verse of chapter 21 are disqualified for use. Their importance
will be pointed out presently

How much of what was probably the original truth can be
derived from these three chapters? There is no reason for denying the
possible truth of the narrative which is given out in chapter 19.
That the outrage at Gibeah reproduces to some extent the story told
in Genesis 19, may mean no more than that the similarity of the situat-
ion led to more or less extensive conformation of the narrative in
Judges to the narrative in Genesis, though Wellhausen argues that the
story is a late imitation of Genesis 19. The story has all the points
of normal folklore including such redundancy as we note in vv. 5-15
of chapter 19. Those verses need not necessarily indicate a composite
source although Burney has succeeded in tracing through chapter 19
two separate strands. Certainly the phrase "In twelve pieces"⁷⁵ seems
to be a much later interpolation

Chapter 20, however, is not so easily acceptable. Whatever
the original account of the war between the Benjamites and the other
tribes may have been, it is obvious that post-exilic hands have hope-

73) Jud. 20:1

74) ICC to Judges p.405

75) Jud. 19:29

lessly garbled it. The conception of the people as an Edah colors the entire chapter and veils completely the original actions of the warring factions. The Edah concept is, of course a later projection which makes of Israel of the period of the Judges a federated whole. This state of affairs--i.e., tribal unity--is quite in glaring contrast to what the previous chapters of Judges have revealed to us. But that is scarcely the only incongruity; it is inconceivable that a tribe which is supposed to have been almost exterminated in one period of its history should, a few generations later, be called upon to break the Philistine yoke. While there may be left in the chapter certain military strategems which possibly survived later emendations and interpolations, very little else can be accepted as it stands. All which we may say with impunity is that a break occurred between the tribe of Benjamin and some other tribes, as a result of which Benjamin remained independent of former alliances.

With which tribes did Benjamin actually separate? Certainly not with the whole of Israel; there was no such thing then. The federation of the tribes had not yet occurred. It is fairly certain that it was with the tribe of Ephraim, or with the tribes of the Beth Joseph together that Benjamin separated. But civil war does break out ex tempore with no raison d'etre. There must have been seething for some time an undercurrent of ill feeling between the warring tribes. It will be very difficult to establish reasons for the war unless we establish them on the following grounds: It will be remembered that in two instances ⁷⁷ Ephraim gave evidence of jealousy for its power, for it reproaches Gideon and Jephthah for not having called it in when they were fighting the ⁷⁸ Midianites and Ammonites respectively. I have pointed out above that with regard to Jephthah (Gilead), there

was no soothing of injured pride but rather a deeper irritation in the form of pitched battle and consequent massacre. In regard to Gideon, however, Manasseh and Ephraim straightened up their accounts to the satisfaction of both ⁷⁹. Granting the hypothesis that Benjamin and Gilead were now firmly allied, Ephraim was ever alert for an excuse to attack this tribe which was being weaned away from the old relationship and which was probably growing in strength to an extent which made the Ephraimites fear somewhat for their own lead. There is no textual evidence to lead us to believe that Ephraim and Benjamin were at any time too friendly. Benjamin was very likely growing so rapidly from a pristine position of dependance which held before it entered the land of Canaan where it could thrive on its own soil, that it too was being stirred within by feelings of annoyance. From the moment of a vague feeling of boundary lines between the tribal groups, Benjamin and Ephraim must have silently contended for the post of leader in Central Palestine. Benjamin had the Jordan's fords. Ephraim had territory. Add to this Benjamin's probable intercourse with Gilead...and Ephraim would see a union of tribal groups which threatened a possible future domination and absorption. Consequently, when the affair of Gibeah occurred, Ephraim saw its opportunity to weaken Benjamin's growing power.

What certainty other than the previous arguments can we have that it was with Ephraim that Benjamin engaged in civil war? To whom else would the Levite go for an avenging troop if not his brethren in Ephraim? The text has it that he sends out notice to all Israel ⁸⁰, but that is obviously of late origin. There is no definite mention of his having called only Ephraim or Manasseh and

79) Jud. 8:2,3

80) Jud. 19:29

Ephraim, but we cannot ignore the evidence offered in vv. 18 and 26 of Chapter 20 of Judges, where it is mentioned that the Israelites retired to Beth-el to consult the Lord with regard to the policy to be pursued with reference to the Benjamites. It may be argued ~~that~~^{for} that the mention of Beth-el is the work of a scribe ^{whom} Beth-el was the national sanctuary. But it may be counter-argued that Beth-el was actually the sanctuary for the tribe of Ephraim and, possibly, of Manasseh, too.

Even were the whole matter to be the work of a later author who struggles between the recording of disruption in Israel, and a feeling of solidarity which he is prone to project back into history, there is still an undercurrent of feeling which is Ephraimitish. That is to say, the hand which reworked the text was very likely Ephraimitic in its sympathies at origin. Guedemann (Quoted by Moore⁸¹) is of the opinion that the whole story was motivated by Judaeen animosity against Saul. This he bases on the fact that the towns which are pilloried in this story are Gibeah, Saul's home, and Jabesh-Gilead, by the relief of which Saul became king...while the Levite who is so outrageously treated comes from Beth-lehem, David's home. Moore ~~is led to this criticism, however:~~ The crime at Gibeah is narrated in the old story, while mention of Jabesh-Gilead is only in the post-exilic supplement. He adds: "It is by no means impossible that the history of Saul may have furnished the association which led the later writer to fix on Jabesh-Gilead as the place which, at least by neutrality, showed its sympathy with Benjamin; but the connexion is entirely secondary, and the coincidence upon which Guedemann's theory rests is not original"⁸². Even though Moore rules out Guedemann's theory, which is further supported by Jud. 20:18, ...and bas^es such

81) ~~100~~ to Judges p.408

82) Ibid.

ruling out on the so-called post-exilic nature of the context of the Jabesh-Gilead references, I myself am of the opinion that verses 1-14 of chapter 21 are not essentially post-exilic. For instead of being a reflexion of Saul's relationship with the Gileadites, we may understand it as being an expression of a relationship existing before Saul. To the various arguments presented earlier in this thesis in re the Gileadite-Benjamite covenant or understanding, I may add at this point the fact that when the men of Jabesh needed aid against the Ammonites, they came directly to the Benjamites. Remembering that Jabesh was in the northern part of Gilead, it is indeed surprising that they came all the way down south to Benjamin for aid. For they were right across the river from Manasseh; almost in a straight line east of Beth-shemesh⁸³. But to Benjamin they came, nor was there bargaining or dickering with the people. They presupposed assistance, and found it; Benjamin was as much in sympathy with their plight⁸⁴ as Jabesh showed itself to be with them when it refused to fight against them in the civil war. Though they did not fight on the side of Benjamin, they at least remained neutral.

It is the motives for the destruction of Jabesh which are post-exilic. It was to be destroyed, and its virgins taken because it had refused to make itself part of the K^elial Yisrael. What could be more typical of the thought tendencies of the post-exilic writers? God had commanded the destruction of Benjamin; Jabesh refused the summons; Jabesh was traitor. But who can expect Jabesh to come to the aid of a tribe whose members its ~~own~~ ancestors had massacred not very many years previous? Jabesh's refusal to side against Benjamin has a real historical basis.

The significance of the quotation from Moore is this: Even were there some weight to Guedemann's arguments about the Judaeon

83) Identified with ed-Deir, (reference?)

authorship of the account, there is, nevertheless, evidence of Ephraimitic enemy as opposed to the idea of "all Israel". It is better, I believe, to grant an Ephraimitic authorship for it would account for several things. In the first place, it would explain why the only hospitable man in Gibeah, as far as the Levite was concerned, is an Ephraimite⁸⁵. It is all the more unusual when we consider that the Ephraimite was an old man far from his native territory. We would scarcely expect an old man to come all the way from Ephraim to southern Benjamin to work in the fields...for the old man was a Ger,⁸⁶ a temporary dweller.

Then, too, it explains or dovetails with the residence of the Levite in Ephraim⁸⁷; it explains the mention of Beth-el;⁸⁸ it explains the neutrality of Jabesh of Gilead⁸⁹.

While it also explains the carrying off of the girls who danced in the vineyard at Shiloh⁹⁰, it may possibly be contended that an Ephraimite would not report the 'rape' of girls of Ephraimitic stock. But I see no reason for not interpreting this story as an historical variation of an ancient custom. That is to say, following the meaning read by Dr. Morgenstern⁹¹, the account of the theft of the virgins is a later historical interpretation of actual choosing of wives from among the girls who danced. Verse 22 of chapter 21 is obviously an attempt to harmonize and rationalize.

84) I Sam. 11:4

89) Ibid. 21:9

85) Jud. 19:16, 18

90) Ibid. 21:19 ff.

86) Jud. 19:16

91) HUCA vol. 1, p. 23

87) Ibid. v. 1

88) Ibid. 20:18

II. UNDER THE PHILISTINES

A. Saul's Kingship

Early in the period of the Judges, the Philistines had begun to make their presence in Palestine felt, as far as the Israelites were concerned. It was inevitable that the Philistines, masters of the Coastal Plains of Palestine, should enter into conflict with the Israelites, masters of the Hill-Country. Already in the time of Samson they had subjugated the territory immediately adjacent to their own chief cities, Ashdod, Ekron, Gath, Gaza, and Ashkelon⁹². Thus they oppressed the land for forty years⁹³. The whole of the Samson Saga seems to indicate that the oppression was a private matter between the Philistines and the Danites. It probably did not extend very far north- or eastward,

By the time Samuel attained maturity and the reputation which made him something of a figure in Central Palestine, the Philistines were still very much a threatening group in the land, and one which boded no good for the Israelites. The inevitable happened, and Israel was forced to go to war with the Philistines. "And the word of Samuel went out to all Israel, and Israel went out to join battle with the Philistines; and they encamped at Eben-HaEzer, and the Philistines camped at Aphek. And the Philistines put themselves into battle array against the Israelites; and when the battle had let up, Israel had been smitten before the Philistines, and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men."⁹⁴ These two verses tell in a very graphic way the complete defeat of the Israelites. The ark was taken,

92) Jos.13:3

93) Jud.13:1

94) I Sam 4:1,2

Israel was humiliated before the Coastal Plain dwellers. If ever the Central tribes needed a power of some sort to release them ^{from} the grip of a dominating military people, it was now. According to the traditional account, God's majestic thunderings and the wrath of his plagues effected the return of the ark ⁹⁵⁾. Be that as it may, the Philistines were still masters of the situation. But whence was to come the deliverer? The fact that it became Saul's duty to undertake that office leads to the inference that the power of the tribe of Benjamin had been left unbroken by warfare with the Philistines. This could never have happened had the Benjamites also entered into the combat at Eben-HaEzer, for it too would have suffered the same fate as the others. It is true that a Benjamite is supposed to have been in the Israelite army at Eben-HaEzer ⁹⁶ but it does not necessarily follow that the whole tribe of Benjamin was involved..

Samuel, recognizing the fact that Benjamin was the only tribe which retained its pristine strength, saw that the salvation of the afflicted tribes lay in the power of Benjamin alone. It was for this reason that he was led to the anointment of Saul. We realize from this situation the falsity of the account in Judges 20 and 21 where Benjamin is supposed to have been hopelessly crushed by the civil war. Samuel, an Ephraimite, had to rise above any vestiges of tribal ill-^{of} feeling in the interest of the salvation of the land. Benjamin accordingly occupies a central position under the leadership of Saul until when

thesis
interference
symbolic
cal { Samuel sees that Saul has not succeeded in fulfilling the task which he had hoped he would, he rejects him as 'king'.

Since the history of the life of Saul has no particular meaning for this thesis except insofar as it reflects the general

95) I Sam.5

96) Ibid.4:12

history of the tribe of Benjamin, no attempt will be made to go into the details of his life as we find it given in the "Sl." document of the Book of Samuel⁹⁷. This account, the Saul narrative, as it is analysed by Smith, is set up in contradistinction to the "Sm.", or Samuel narrative of the Book of Samuel, (and) which tends to glorify the character of Samuel. Each account has a record of Saul's election; both make Samuel the instrument of his anointing; each gives an exploit of his; each narrates his rejection. Sl. is the earlier document, for it shows not only a near and clear view of personages and events, but also a lack of a dominating theological idea which runs through the Samuel account.

After Saul's secret anointment by Samuel⁹⁸, and his popular acceptance by the people after the Ammonite affair, Saul led Benjamin, and, possibly, Ephraim also, in rebellion against the Philistines. This was the task for which Samuel had undoubtedly chosen him, and it was incumbent upon him to fill his new position of king-deliverer. We may be certain that Saul found a following in his own tribe, but did he find one in Ephraim as well? The position of Manasseh in the rebellion is nowhere indicated but we do have a hint as to the part Ephraim may have played. Acting upon the supposition that when the scene of battle is in a tribe's territory, it will respond to a call for defense, I should say that Ephraim did give Saul support in his battles. The initial warfare began when Jonathon smote the Prefect of the Philistines, who was stationed at 'Geba'⁹⁹⁾. Now, earlier¹⁰⁰ we learned that the garrison of the Philistines was at Gib'ath Ha'Elohim. That place is fairly well identified with Burj Beitin, and was in Ephraimite territory¹⁰¹.. Since Geba is unfavorably situated for a Philistine ~~war~~

97) ICC to Samuel, p. xviii

98) I Sam. 10:1

99) I Sam 13:3

100) I. Sam. 10:2 ff.

101) AASOR vol. 4, p. 112 ff.

post controlling the hill-country of Central Palestine, We must read either Gibeah or Gib^eath Elohim for Geba. But Gibeah today shows no sign whatsoever of a fortress so we are compelled to read Gib^eath Elohim which is altogether in keeping with reason.

After Jo^anthon made this initial act of rebellion on Ephraimite soil--for Gib^eath Elohim is near Beth-el¹⁰²--Saul gave notice of that fact to "all Israel"¹⁰³. All Israel or "all the Land" was probably Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh. But there is much difference between a call and an answer. Benjamin probably answered loyally; Ephraim part out of allegiance to a leader chosen by their hero, Samuel, and partly out of sheer necessity for defending their land.¹⁰⁴ The result of it all was that the tribes were routed in great distress. Thus ended the first combat with the Philistines. It was no combat at all but a complete retreat before a too powerful army.

At this point comes an important phase in the history of Benjamin; Saul their leader is rejected as king¹⁰⁵. The rejection is the first account of the breach between Samuel and Saul. The second account is to be found in chapter 15. Which is the earlier account? The typical Deuteronomic pragmatism which colors the whole of chapter 15 leads to the only possible conclusion with regard to the passage in chapter 13. The first of the accounts is the original one of the rejection. It is quite obvious that the editor of the S¹. document carefully prepared for the story of the rejection by introducing verse 8 into chapter 10. Though he is not as pragmatic as the editor or author of the S^m. narrative in which chapter 15 falls, still

102) I Sam 10:3 ff.

103) I Sam 13:4

104) Ibid.v.6

105) Ibid vv.8-15

in his zeal for Saul it is not to be expected that he would put the blame on him rather than accredit his rejection to the will of God. In the original account one cannot be sure whether or not Saul is at fault. In chapter 15 there can be no doubt as to the guilt of the king

So it came about that Saul is rejected as king. This is a little early in the history for a rejection. All the more so since he continues in his capacity as a deliverer. But we may explain the location of the rejection story by noting the reference to Saul's presence in Gilgal¹⁰⁶, a reference which provides capital opportunity for -brining in the story of the rejection of the kingship, which took place at Gilgal. Saul fought on in the effort to free Israel of her foes and oppressors. As it is recorded:

"And Saul took over the kingship over Israel, and he fought roundabout with all his enemies; with Moab and the Ammonites and with Edom and the kings of Zobah and with the Philistines; and wheresoever he turned, he worsted them. He did valiantly, and he smote Amalek, and¹⁰⁷ - he delivered Israel from the hands of them that spoiled it."

Saul may have worsted a few minor tribal groups for the while, but he certainly never succeeded in breaking the power of the Philistines. Obviously the passage quoted is a late evaluation of Saul's military experiences. Optimistic and bright as it is, it does not succeed in hiding the simple fact that Saul was harrassed on all sides - and that his whole career^e was one of hopeless skirmishings.

106) I Sam. 13:4

- 107) I Sam. 15:47-49

B. David and After

death
With Saul's rejection came the decline of the power of the tribe of Benjamin. Whatever prestige it may have held before slowly drifted away in fact if not in the minds of the Benjamites themselves. Just exactly at what time in the history of Saul's kingship the rejection came cannot be determined. Whether the rejection took the form described even in the Sl. document is a matter of doubt. It surely could not have come so early in his career for then he would not have found the stimulus to go on. Whatever may have been the real facts in the case, we may just as well believe that the two accounts of his rejection serve no less a purpose than to pave the way for the David story. All of Saul's life just seems to lead up to the entrance of David into the history of the land.

And truly with him the history of the land really begins.
After his dismissal¹⁰⁸ by Saul, his activities in the Negeb led to the unifying of the loose clans of Judah into a tribal whole. In this way he began to build up his future nation. In the meantime where was Benjamin? What ^{here} was its position and its relation to David after the death of Saul? True, Saul pursued David with what seemed a relentless hatred, but did Benjamin as a tribe take the attitude which Saul took personally? Only subsequent history gives the answer. That the Benjamites were not wholeheartedly in back of the House of Saul by ~~th~~ this time becomes evident from the fact that Ishbosheth, Saul's son, had to be hurried over to Gilead¹⁰⁹ where there was from olden times goodwill towards Benjamin. Under the leadership of Abner and the nominal Kingship of Ishbosheth, civil war was carried on bitterly¹¹⁰.

108) I Sam. 19:ff.

109) 2 Sam.² 8 ff.

110) 2 Sam. 2 ff.

But, as is significantly added: "And David waxed stronger and stronger¹¹¹ but the House of Saul waxed weaker and weaker"¹¹². Abner turned traitor, and offered to betray Benjamin to David¹¹³. Benjamin was encouraged to yield to David, and the end of Abner, the opportunist, was that he was slain by Joab in revenge for the death of his brother, Asahel, whom Abner had slain¹¹⁴. Finally Ishbosheth, the last real stumbling block in the path of David's ascension to the throne, was murdered¹¹⁵, and with his death Benjamin's rank becomes a myth. Those who were loyal to the House of Saul must have nursed their loss as best they could, As for the rest of the northern tribes who either awaited an opportunity to show their regard for David after following Saul half-heartedly, or those who never were in sympathy with Saul, they came to David and pledged their allegiance to him¹¹⁵. Benjamin was now passe; Judah was the tribe in power.

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There are passing references to Benjamin but little more is revealed to us than that which we may infer from the text. There is the story of Shimei ben Gera¹¹⁶ who is mentioned as being a man of the family of the House of Saul. That fact alone may account for the bitterness of his invectives against David. It does not

111) 2 Sam.3:1

112) Ibid 3:6ff.

113) Ibid 2:23 ; 3:27

114) Ibid,4:5 ff.

115) Ibid 5:1-4

116) Ibid.16:5 ff.

necessarily follow that all of Benjamin shared the same feelings against David that the member of a dispossessed house would. And it may even be symbolical that later ¹¹⁷, Shimei ben Gera, the same mentioned in chapter 16 is repentant of his former attitude and desires to express his allegiance to the king. In all likelihood, Benjamin was loyal eventually to the House of David, and felt a greater attachment to the southern tribe than they did to their brethren on the north of them. It is true that there was the matter of the rebellion instigated by Sheba ben Bichri, and that he found something of a following among the Israelites other than Judahites. But in a kingdom as new as David's we may expect than in such an irritable situation as arose when David seemed to show preference to the Judahites ¹¹⁸, there would be some malcontents.

Yet one must not be too sure about ascribing perfect loyalty to David on the part of the Benjamites. The very geographical situation of the tribe would tend to make it a buffer state between the north and the south. So perhaps it would be best, in absence of adequate materials upon which to rivet our attention, to say that Benjamin was probably split in its allegiance. In the conflict and warfare between Asa and Baasa, Benjamite territory seemed to be a sort of military playground for both sides ¹¹⁹.

It was probably in this status that Benjamin found itself at the time of the division of the Kingdom, which is the terminus ad quem of this thesis. From the entrance into Canaan to the division of the Kingdom, there was no other tribe which was so privileged by Destiny to go through a complete cycle of life. Childhood and dependence; youth and rebellion; prime and responsibility; old age and decline.

117) 2 Sam. 19:17 ff 118) Ibid. v. 41 119) 1 Kings 15:16 ff.