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THE SUPERB HOMEMAKER AND THE DISMEMBERED WIFE:
A TRANSLATION AND RENDERING OF JUDGES 4-5 AND 19-21

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ABSTRACT

This capstone is a translation and rendering of two narratives in the Book of Judges; Judges 4-5, which features the war between the Israelites and King Yavin of Canaan, and focuses on the leadership of Deborah, and the death of Sisera at the hands of Yael, and Judges 19-21, which features the narrative of the dismembered concubine and the war between the Israelites and the Benyaminites. The translation is designed to highlight the challenges of the act of translation. The rendering is designed to stylistically impart the narrative in alignment with certain goals, such as the depiction of violence and desensitization in the Book of Judges.

INTRODUCTION TO THE CAPSTONE

This capstone is a translation and a rendering of two narratives in the Book of Judges: Judges 4-5 and Judges 19-21. The translation of these narratives is an effort to showcase the work of translation, and the decisions that translators must make. The rendering is an effort to showcase some of the ideology of the Book of Judges, and is, in effect, a translation of the translation.

In this capstone, I will introduce a framework for how to read the Book of Judges, discuss the act of translating, and provide my theory of translation and rendering. The translation and rendering itself follows, which is heavily annotated. Finally, I have provided a reader's version of the rendering.

HOW TO READ THE BOOK OF JUDGES

In order to translate and render narratives from the Book of Judges effectively, it was necessary for me to understand first how to *read* the Book of Judges effectively. When we embark on any task to work with a piece of literature, we must first be aware of its text world. Doing so enables us to understand how a text might have been received in the time in which it was written, and in all the eras in which it was read since then. In her book *Text World Theory: An Introduction*, Joanna Gavins describes what she calls the text world of a given piece of literature as “a discourse framework...[which] means that it is not concerned just with how a particular text is constructed but how the

context surrounding that text influences its production and reception.”¹ A literary work’s text world is the combination of the world in which it was written; the context of the author, the culture of their time period, and the conceptual identity of the author. Once a literary work is published, the text world expands to include the world in which the text was received; the context of the readers, their culture and identities, and their interpretations of the text. The text world continues to grow to encompass the world in which it has been received since it was published; different understandings and approaches to analysis over time, the cultures of those times, and the varying context. Finally, the text world includes the context in which it is currently being received. Each person who reads a given text supplies their own model of the text in their minds, which influences the meaning of the text for that individual. Many individuals may create similar models due to similar contexts and circumstances, but we all bring our own personal experiences to a text, which results in different interpretations. This causes the text to grow and change from its initial context and impact, and can cause the text to have a wider meaning and impact than its initial text world may have involved.

The Book of Judges, like most literature, has a vast text world. The context in which the Book of Judges was written is not the context in which we can read the book of Judges, and countless other cultural contexts have impacted its interpretation in the interim. When translating and rendering, we endeavor to bridge the divide between the

¹ Joanna Gavins, *Text World Theory: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 8.

time in which the text was written and the moment in which the translation is performed. All the while, we remain aware of and respond to the text world of the literary work that exists in between.

To translate and render, I started by analyzing the interpretations of a number of biblical scholars . Much of this interpretation contributed to my understanding of the narratives at hand and informed both my translation and my rendering. In *Judges and Method*, several different critical interpretive methods are applied to the Book of Judges: social-scientific, feminist, structuralist, deconstructive, ideological, postcolonial, gender, and cultural criticism are employed in order to better understand Judges. These styles of criticism can offer a view of how the Book of Judges has been received and analyzed over time, which can allow for deep understanding of the Book of Judges' text world, which influenced my translation and rendering. I found that narrative criticism, feminist criticism, and ideological criticism were the most relevant, and had the greatest impact on the project.

NARRATIVE CRITICISM

In his essay on narrative criticism and the Book of Judges, Richard G. Bowman notes that moments in which the biblical authors imagine the inner life of the biblical actors are “understood as indications of the narrator’s omniscient assessment of the events that are related through the story. As such, these comments are regarded as

information that is essential for a deeper understanding of the story.”² In the moments in which readers are offered an insight into the inner world of biblical actors, the biblical authors are able to assert their voices and perspectives, since access to a character’s internal monologue or private thoughts and behaviors demonstrates omniscience. Bowman describes the different elements of a narrative that can be analyzed in this type of criticism, including the narrator and point of view, the narrated discourse and direct discourse, the structure of the narrative, the plot, the setting, and the characters involved.

Bowman describes how “the narrator imposes order and coherence on the recounted events through the organizational structure of the story.”³ This coherent order is represented by the structure of the Book of Judges as a whole. The first three or so chapters of the Book of Judges make up the prologue, the vast majority of the book, through the end of chapter 16 make up the era of Judges, and the epilogue includes chapters 17-21. The middle section, Bowman notes, consists of stories that adhere to a repetitive plot structure, in which Israel is unfaithful in its relationship with God, which leads to Israel being oppressed by its enemies. This, in turn, leads to Israel petitioning God for assistance, at which point God appoints a judge to lead Israel.⁴ Bowman reports that this repetition is important in that it “indicates the structure of the narrative, signals key themes, and provides emphasis to central

² Richard G. Bowman, “Narrative Criticism: Human Purpose in Conflict with Divine Presence,” in *Judges and Method*, ed. Gale A Yee (Fortress Press, 1985), 19.

³ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴ *Ibid.*

ideas.”⁵ This structure can be seen in Judges 4 and 5. In Judges 4 a broad scale military conflict is described, and in Judges 5 it is distilled into a personal narrative, but both follow the pattern of oppression to liberation under a judge’s leadership in partnership with God.

The epilogue, according to Bowman, serves to characterize God in a new fashion. Bowman notes that the deity that emerges in the epilogue of the Book of Judges:

[R]efrains from intervention in order to preserve the exercise of human freedom, even if that exercise results in innocent victims...the narrator’s portrayal stresses human responsibility, not divine accountability, and emphasizes human interaction, not divine intervention.⁶

This emphasis, after a series of narratives in which God does intervene, represents a shift for the author, who may be trying to draw attention to the lawlessness of the period in contrast to the monarchic period. The author proves this through the narrative, in which “human beings are irresponsible in exercising their freedom, [and therefore] God does not intervene.”⁷

Bowman’s narrative analysis of the Book of Judges serves as a baseline for understanding the structure of the book as a whole, and for understanding the self-contained narratives within. Understanding the entire scope of a narrative is vital

⁵ Ibid., 28.

⁶ Ibid., 43.

⁷ Ibid.

when translating. If the greater context of the narrative and of the book itself is not understood, the translation will lack coherence.

FEMINIST CRITICISM

In her essay on feminist criticism and the Book of Judges, J. Cheryl Exum describes the Book of Judges, and the entire Bible, as androcentric literature, meaning that it was written from the perspective of men, which was and is the dominant perspective. She notes that:

The starting point of feminist criticism of the Bible is not the biblical texts in their own right but the concerns of feminism as a worldview and as a political enterprise. Recognizing that in the history of civilization women have been marginalized by men and denied access to positions of authority and influence, feminist criticism seeks to expose the strategies by which men have justified their control over women. And because women's cooperation in this state of affairs is necessary, to varying degrees, feminist criticism also seeks to understand women's complicity in their own subordination.⁸

As such, she pushes for readers to understand the Book of Judges from a feminist perspective, in which it is understood that the women in the narratives may act against their own self interests in order to further the androcentric aims of the book.

⁸ J. Cheryl Exum, "Feminist Criticism: Whose Interests Are Being Served?," in *Judges and Method*, ed. Gale A Yee (Fortress Press, 1985), 65.

Exum describes precisely how a feminist critique can illuminate the androcentric elements of the narrative in Judges 4 and 5. She describes how:

For all their military might...both Sisera and Barak fall short of what is expected of a hero-warrior... because Barak behaved in a womanly way, showing uncertainty...he will suffer an insult to his male pride: a woman will snatch his glory from him...Similarly, Sisera fails to be genuinely heroic: he flees the battle scene on foot rather than fighting to the end with his army.⁹

Sisera is eventually brought to an end by Yael. The women in these narratives serve androcentric aims, since they are described in such limited terms and are only used to bring the narratives of the men to their conclusions.

According to Exum, the androcentric ideals at work in the Book of Judges are also inflicted on the concubine in Judges 19-21. Through a feminist critical lens, the concubine's distance from the Levite as an expression of sexual freedom that is dangerous to the androcentric worldview. Exum identifies three options in which the narrative could have progressed once the Levite has reached Gibeah, noting that:

...male-male rape is too threatening to narrate, and, in terms of gender-motivated subtext, it would leave the woman unpunished,...if we understand [the concubine's] abuse as her narrative punishment [for her sexual freedom], then the sparing of the virgin daughter makes sense: she is not mistreated because she...has not committed a sexual offense against male authority.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid., 71.

¹⁰ Ibid., 84.

This leaves just one option of the narrative, the [concubine] is punished and the message is conveyed that “...if you do anything that even remotely suggests improper sexual behavior, you invite male aggression.”¹¹ This, again, cements the androcentric worldview at the cost of the safety of the women in the biblical narrative.

While Exum’s analysis of the Book of Judges is often extreme, I incorporated specifically the issue of the concubine exerting her independence from the Levite in my translation and rendering of that narrative. The other issues of gender and androcentrism are present in the background of my translation and rendering, but are not the focus.

IDEOLOGICAL CRITICISM

In her essay on ideological criticism and the Book of Judges, Gale A. Yee describes how this critical method “uses literary methods within a historical and social-scientific frame in a comprehensive strategy for reading biblical texts.”¹² She further elucidates the way these two frames work together, noting that:

On the one hand, the social sciences and historical analyses help to reconstruct or ‘unmask’ the material and ideological conditions under which the biblical text is produced. On the other hand, the literary-critical methods address how

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Gale A. Yee, “Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body,” in *Judges and Method*, ed. Gale A Yee (Fortress Press, 1985), 138.

the biblical text assimilates or ‘encodes’ these conditions in reproducing a particular ideology.¹³

These two frames combine to illustrate and enforce an ideology within the biblical text. Ideologies can “...unify social groups... rationalize certain interests, beliefs, and behaviors... legitimate these beliefs by sanctioning them... universalize historically specific values...[and] naturalize them by identifying them with common sense.”¹⁴ The authors of the Book of Judges were certainly writing with an ideology in mind. The ideology that Yee identifies throughout the Book of Judges is that the events within the book would not have happened and would not have been necessary had there been a king in Israel. Yee notes that the repetition of the phrase “[i]n those days, there was no king in Israel” is strategically done in order to illustrate this ideology.¹⁵

Yee proposes that the ideological comment of Judges 17-21 is that violence and anarchy in Israelite society is explained by the lack of a king. She describes how:

Ideology constructs a reality for people, making the oftentimes perplexing world intelligible; it is not, however, the actual state of affairs in its entirety. While it helps people to understand or make sense of the world, ideology concurrently masks or represses their real situation or standing in the world.¹⁶

In this case, the ideology of the Book of Judges is meant to encourage readers to appreciate and uphold the monarchic system. The repetition Yee describes of “[i]n

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 140-141.

¹⁵ Ibid., 144.

¹⁶ Ibid., 148.

those days, there way no king in Israel” is often paired with “each man did what was right in his own eyes.”¹⁷ Yee posits that the horrifying circumstances described in Judges 19-21 show that each man doing what is right in his own eyes, in this case the rape of a [concubine] and her dismemberment, is a way of life that can only lead to catastrophe, like the near destruction of an entire tribe of Israel.¹⁸ This destruction is prompted by lies on the part of the Levite. Yee describes how:

The only truthful statement the Levite makes is that he took his wife and cut her into pieces and sent her throughout Israel’s territory...And the truth is not honorable: instead of providing a decent burial—the least he could have done for his wife—the Levite hacks her up and sends her out in a clearly self-serving act. He thus prolongs the villainy against her. The tribes supposedly gather to hear her story, the one behind the bloodied arm, hacked leg, and battered head that they received. Her limbs cry out in agony, only to be censored and silenced by her husband’s rhetoric.¹⁹

This illustrates the ideology of the Book of Judges. Yee’s describes how the Book of Judges, and particularly its epilogue, is making a comment that this is not how civilized people behave, and this is not a way of life that Israel should strive to embrace ever again.

¹⁷ Ibid., 154.

¹⁸ Ibid., 155.

¹⁹ Ibid., 156.

I believe that modern readers, when confronted with narratives like the one that appears in Judges 19, or its twin in Genesis 19, cannot look past the horror of the action that takes place. However, it is important to recognize that the biblical author does not condone the violence that takes place, and in fact, Judges 19 can and should be read as a dark satire in which this violence is abhorred by the author. While I do not hold the regard for the overlay of “in those days there was no king in Israel,” that Yee does, I agree that these narratives are a searing critique of a society that is desensitized to violence. This theme features heavily in the translations and renderings that I completed for this project.

These critical essays are never directly referenced in the translations and renderings. Nevertheless, a thorough understanding of the interpretive scope of the Book of Judges was necessary prior to translation, and much of the analysis within *Judges and Method* contributed to this understanding. This, in turn, contributed to the translation and rendering I produced, albeit latently.

THEORY OF TRANSLATION

INTRODUCTION

The translation for this capstone project occurred in two stages. The first was a direct translation, in which I attempted to provide a faithful and coherent translation of the original text. The second was an interpretive rendering of the text, in which I attempted to offer an interpretation of the text in line with specific goals and bearing in mind authorial intent. This section will discuss the act of translation as a whole, and will cover the goals, challenges, and considerations of both of these stages.

THE ACT OF TRANSLATION

The Italian phrase *traduttore, traditore*, means “the translator is a traitor.” This turn of phrase is an exemplary place to start when one considers the role of the translator and the act of translation. There is no way to create a perfect one-to-one correspondence in translation from one language to another. There are always sacrifices that must be made, decisions that must be worked through, and things that must be missed. In this way, to translate is to turn traitor to the original language, and sometimes to the language of translation as well. Try as we might to craft faithful translations that capture the entirety of the experience of reading in the original, translators must interpret, and therefore must betray the original language.

A pun in one language will never translate as smoothly as it reads in the original language. This is even true of the phrase *traduttore, traditore*, the paronomasia in the Italian is subtle while being apparent, but no translation can ever capture this as

efficiently as the original. Syntax, gendering, conjugation, and so many other factors can differ greatly from one language to another. Some languages may even differ on the way words or sounds are constructed. The assonance that one may experience when reading poetry in the original language may turn into a cacophony when translated into another. Translators are asked to make decisions about what is the most important to them so that they are able to adequately communicate the message of the original text into the translated language. Therefore, the translator, merely by making those decisions, becomes an interpreter of the text.

If this is true in the act of translation between modern languages, how much more must it be true of the act of translating an ancient text into a modern language? Not only are translators of ancient text asked to make decisions about language, they must also become cultural translators as well, and translators across eras. One word or phrase might have one meaning at one point in time, and might take on different interpretations and connotations in different time periods. Very quickly, translating something as ancient as the Hebrew Bible becomes a quagmire of translational difficulties and cultural confusions.

Despite all of these difficulties and the seeming impossibilities when it comes to the act of translation, it is still a worthy endeavor. Translating brings us very close to the people who wrote the text in question, translators are forced to make assumptions about what the author believed and what they meant to communicate through the narrative in question. By translating the Hebrew Bible, this adds a new layer of connection to those for whom this is an essential religious text. Additionally, the act of

translation can allow for some deeply moving interpretation. If a translator allows themselves to interpret with a specific goal in mind, they can draw out different aspects of the text, and make translational decisions that suit that goal, resulting in a translation that can teach and guide.

There are different motivations for these types of interpretive translations. For instance, in Maria Sahvana Headley's introduction to her translation of *Beowulf*, she notes that:

As much as *Beowulf* is a poem about Then, it's also (and always has been) a poem about Now, and how we got here. The poem is, after all, a poem about willfully blinkered privilege, about the shock and horror of experiencing discomfort when one feels entitled to luxury.²⁰

In order to bridge this divide between "Then" and "Now," Headley innovates in the voice of her narrator. In developing the voice of the narrator of *Beowulf*, she notes that she spent "a lot of time imagining the narrator as an old-timer at the end of the bar, periodically pounding his glass and demanding another. *I saw it with my own eyes.*"²¹ Her translation reflects this narrative style, bringing the text up to our own day and age.

In her introduction to her translation of *The Odyssey*, Emily Wilson describes her approach to interpretive translation, which bridges matching the authorial intent with the gravitas the text itself brings to the table. She writes that:

²⁰ Maria Dahvana Headley, *Beowulf: A New Translation* (New York: Mcd X Fsg Originals; Farrar, Straus And Giroux, 2020), ix–x.

²¹ Ibid., xvi.

Homer's language is not colloquial, and it avoids obscenity, but it is not bombastic or grandiloquent. The notion that Homeric epic must be rendered in grand, ornate, rhetorically elevated English has been with us since the time of Alexander Pope. It is past time, I believe, to reject this assumption... I have frequently aimed for a certain level of simplicity, often using fairly ordinary, straightforward, and readable English.²²

Wilson thereby seeks not to elevate the rhetoric of the text merely out of deference, but rather to balance an esteem for the text with what she believes to be the author's original intent.

In his introduction to his translation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Sophus Helle discusses his interpretations of the lacunae that exist as a matter of necessity in the text, due to its missing pieces. Helle writes that:

In the blank spaces, readers can get a sense of the epic as it really is. They show the seams of a story that has been stitched together from multiple manuscripts, none of which holds the entire text...We cannot possess the ancient text, we cannot grasp it and make it ours, since the original form that was sung in ancient Uruk will forever escape us. The missing sections show the unsurmountable distance that remains between us and the epic, and that distance can be engaging.²³

²² Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Emily Wilson (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), 83.

²³ Sophus Helle, *Gilgamesh* (Yale University Press, 2022), xxv.

Helle therefore asks his readers to engage with the text even when the text is lacking, to imagine the entirety of the text world in which the epic has existed.

Each of these translators offers their own interpretations on the original text. They read these ancient texts in their original languages and reacted to the emotions and connections that the text elicited in them, and in turn sought, through their translations, to elicit similar emotions and connections in their readers.

When I translated Judges 4-5 and Judges 19-21, I did so in two stages, each with their own interpretive goals. I have detailed those goals and the methods I employed to achieve them in the sections below.

THE TRANSLATION

My goal for the initial stage of translation was to provide a faithful and coherent translation of the original text. This translation is meant to be clear and readable, but should bring out specific attributes of the Hebrew text and the difficulties in translating them. In any act of translation, certain decisions must be made when the original language has factors that do not translate directly to the language of translation. I did my utmost to feature those difficulties while still attempting to provide a coherent translation. In effect, though all translating must have some interpretation, this translation is meant to be as straight forward and neutral as possible.

There are several issues that come up time and time again when translating the Hebrew Bible into any other language, but English specifically. Some of these issues

come up specifically in my translation of chapters 4 and 5 and 19-21 of The Book of Judges. When relevant, I will provide references to specific verses in which these difficulties are prevalent, and will describe the choices I made as translator when facing these difficulties.

One major issue that translators will face when translating from Hebrew to English is the issue of syntax. Put simply, syntax refers to how words are arranged in phrases and sentences in any given language. Most sentences in English follow subject-verb-object order, meaning that a simple sentence might read “she read the book.” In this example “she” is the subject, “read” is the verb, and “the book” is the object. In Hebrew, this becomes more complicated. In Judges 4:19 it states וַתִּפְתַּח אֶת־נֹאֵד הָהָלָב which I have translated as “So she opened up a skin of milk.” In Hebrew, the first word, וַתִּפְתַּח, is both a verb that is marked to indicate the subject’s gender and number, and then the object of “a skin of milk” follows. However, sometimes the verb and the subject are separated even further. In Judges 4:21 it states וַתִּקַּח יַעֲלֵ אִשְׁת־חֶבֶר אֶת־יִתְד הָאֵהָל, which I have translated as “Yael, the wife of Chever, took the tent peg.” However, the first word, וַתִּקַּח, means “she took,” which serves as the verb. The name יַעֲלֵ follows, which means “Yael,” the subject of the sentence. Finally, the object, here “the tent peg,” is listed. Therefore, the Hebrew sentence features a verb marked for gender, the subject, and then the direct object. I chose to translate this in the standard English format of subject, verb, object, for the sake of coherence. In this translation, my decision-making process generally favors coherence in target language rather than the characteristics of the original language.

Occasionally, when the syntax in the Hebrew felt strange, I attempted to convey something of the strangeness in the translation. For instance, in Judges 5:19, the text reads *בָּצַע כֶּסֶף לֹא לָקְחוּ* which I have translated as “but a profit of silver they did not take.” In this verse, the subject is far removed in the first stich of poetry, but is recalled in the marked verbal form *לָקְחוּ* found at the end of the verse. The stich in question, and therefore the phrase in question, begins with the object, which is irregular but not uncommon. To reflect this irregularity, I chose to translate this phrase with the object first, since that is irregular in English as well.

Hebrew prepositions are often derived from words that are more than small particles of speech, as is typical in English. In Hebrew, many prepositions are related to body-parts. For instance, in Judges 20:23 the text states *לִפְנֵי־יְהוָה* which I have translated as “before YHVH.” However, the Hebrew word for “before” contains an illusion to faces, *פָּנִים*. While it’s unclear whether or not this was understood as a bodily connection by contemporary readers, it clearly means “before” in simplest terms. Therefore, I translated these types of prepositions without referencing anything related to the body.

Another issue faced by translators of the Hebrew Bible is deciding how to translate words which communicate a great deal in Hebrew into a language that may not be as marked. For instance, certain Hebrew words are marked for gender, number, and person, and some are marked for tense or aspect as well. A single Hebrew word can therefore communicate a great deal more than a single English word, and therefore may require multiple words in the language of translation to communicate the same

message. In Judges 19:4 the text reads וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ וַיֵּלִינוּ שָׁם which I have translated as “they ate, they drank, they stayed over there.” However, the subject of “they” is communicated within the verbs themselves in the Hebrew, therefore the repetition of “they” in the English feels a little obtrusive. In Hebrew, it is possible to subtly communicate who is performing an action, and any ambiguity that might be held in the subject “they” maintains that subtlety. However, in English, the same thing cannot be accomplished so smoothly. Whenever a series of verbs like this came up in the original text, I maintained the subject repetition in the English translation to call attention to this issue in translation. This type of subtlety and translation difficulty also applies to relational words like possessives, which are marked and attached to words different in Hebrew than in English, and are therefore communicated more efficiently.

The tetragrammaton is a challenge for anyone wishing to translate sections of the Hebrew Bible. This comes up immediately in this translation, in Judges 4:1. It is important to remain consistent throughout a translation like this. When it came to the translation of the tetragrammaton, I wanted the translation to reflect that the name has come to be unpronounceable in Jewish tradition, but that it is simply a proper name like any contemporary deity would have had. For this reason, I chose to translate the tetragrammaton as “YHVH” to mark the proper name of the deity in as neutral a fashion as possible.

Some issues in this translation are cultural. There are temporal words and phrases like in Judges 19:8 and 19:9 that refer to the passage of time and the specific time of day. This may have been better understood by a contemporary audience in the

time in which it was written, but I can only make my best guesses as to what is meant by some of these phrases. In this straightforward translation, I chose to translate these as directly as possible, which leads to phrases like “the day has waned” and “the day declines” in 19:9. The same is true with some of the verses that refer to things that are not in my cultural repertoire. In Judges 19:21 the text states וַיִּבְרֹא לְחֻמּוֹרִים which I have translated as “mixed feed for the donkeys.” Donkey feeding practices are outside of my cultural repertoire, and I therefore must make my best guess as to what phrases like this might mean.

All of these translation issues and more needed to be addressed in my translation of Judges 4-5 and 19-21.

THE INTERPRETIVE RENDERING

When it came to my interpretive rendering of the text, I had several goals. First, I wanted to consider the authorial intent. It is difficult to determine the cultural, social, and emotional impact an author wished to create when the author is so far removed, as is the case in the Hebrew Bible. However, authorial intent is still important to consider when translating. I believe that all readers, and translators in particular, are honor-bound to read and interpret the text in a way that maintains authorial intent. If we ignore the text world of a literary work, and if we ignore the author-reader contract, we are abusing the text. In order to maintain integrity, and to honor that author-reader contract, I relied on genre and word choice. I believe that there are satirical elements to both Judges 4-5 and Judges 19-21, and I believe both narratives provide satirical

commentary on the role of violence. Judges 4-5 feature violence very graphically and might seem to celebrate it, were it not that the narrative ends with the mother of Sisera waiting for her child, who will never return home. Judges 19-21 features a scenario in which one vile and repulsive act must be exchanged for another vile and repulsive act, the reader is asked to imagine the violence that occurs to the young woman, and the violence snowballs into war and the theft of young women on a grand scale. I sought to maintain this satirical voice, which I accomplished primarily through my additions to the text. The addition in Judges 4:20 was in pursuit of this goal, in which I clarify Sisera's obliviousness to the threat Yael poses by stating that he was "far more concerned by what happened outside the tent, rather than within it." This clarifies the subversion of expectations that is clear in the Hebrew, but is difficult to accomplish with as much subtlety in English.

Additionally, I sought to choose words in the renderings that responded to a wider field of meaning of a given word, rather than choosing a literal translation. For instance, in Judges 20:13, the original text uses the term אֶחָיוֹתָם which refers to the relationship between the Benyaminites and the Israelites. Taken literally, this word could be translated as "their brothers," as I have done in the translation. However, this word encompasses a broader field of relationship, and I have therefore used "their kin" in the rendering.

In this rendering, I changed a great deal of the syntax. As noted in the section on translation, maintaining some of the oddities in the Hebrew syntax was important in order to illustrate the issue of syntax in translation. However, in the rendering I chose

to prioritize coherence and narrative structure rather than remaining faithful to the syntax of the original language. This is most clear in sections of discourse within the narrative. In Judges 4:9 the text states וַתֹּאמֶר הָלֹךְ אִלַּי עִמָּךְ which I have translated as “[s]he said, ‘I will certainly go with you...’ and rendered as “‘Very well,’ she said, ‘I will certainly go with you...’” This allowed the rendering to flow more elegantly in English.

Another goal of this rendering was to inspire the reader to participate actively in the narrative. In his book *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, Wayne C Booth stresses the importance of readers developing an ethics of reading when they experience literature. In fact, Booth goes so far as to suggest that readers develop relationships, or friendships, with the books that they read.²⁴ The texts we choose to read have an effect on us, and it is important to consider what that effect might be. Author John Darnielle states that “[i]f you start wanting to visit dark pockets of imagination, that may or may not change you as a person...it might have some effect on that way you think of things, there’s a sense in which you want to be a steward of what you let in.”²⁵ As the renderer of these texts, it is my duty to guide readers in the relationship that they will develop with these texts. In this rendering, I wanted to push back against the inclination that many might have to read this text as a canonical biblical text, which can create distance and result in a clinical treatment of the text. Instead, I wanted reader to take an active role, to perform the text as they read it, to let

²⁴ Wayne C Booth, *The Company We Keep : An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley, Calif.: University Of California Press, Dr, 1988).

²⁵ LA Review of Books, “John Darnielle, Wolf in White Van,” YouTube, October 22, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPPCXlQ2k4I>.

it have some effect on them, and to change the way they think of things, as Darnielle references.

To accomplish this, I took inspiration from Headley's translation of *Beowulf*, in which she imagined the narrator at times as the "an old-timer at the end of the bar." The voice I imagined for the narrator in this rendering was a friend inclined to gossip over coffee. There have been times when I have listened to what I assumed to be friendly and lighthearted gossip over coffee, but have slowly come to realize that there was something more nefarious and ill-intentioned in the stories being passed along, which led me to suspect the storyteller's involvement and intentions. The narrator in these renderings is a similar kind of storyteller. In the musical *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812*, which is based on a small section of the novel *War and Peace*, there are a series of upbeat and raucous songs about Anatole, a young rake, who prepares to whisk Natasha, a naïve young woman, away from her family to marry her in secret. The audience is lulled into the game, until very suddenly the cheer and merriness falls away when the plot is uncovered. Very suddenly, the audience is forced to remember the peril that Natasha was in, and the very real consequences the plot might have had should it have come to fruition. The reality sinks in like a cold stone in the pit of the stomach. I sought to evoke a similar feeling in my rendering. The familiar and gossipy tone of additions such as "[a]s you know," in Judges 4:1, and "as you might imagine" in Judges 4:16 are designed to invite this type of reading. By addressing the audience directly, I sought to pull them into the reading in a new way. This defamiliarizes the text and can allow readers to engage with it, not as part of the

biblical corpus and therefore weighed down by the baggage that accompanies it, but as narratives in their own right.

Just as in the translation, the rendering needed to address the divine name. In the translation I chose “YHVH,” but that is, of course, unpronounceable, and therefore would not suit the rendering. I wanted to take a direction that would recognize the fact that “יהוה” is a proper noun while also suiting the goals of the rendering. I took inspiration from the Reconstructionist siddur *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Eve*, that was published in 1989. In this siddur, when the tetragrammaton is used, it is translated in the form of what appears to be a fraction. The name “Yah” appears as the numerator, and an epithet appears as the denominator. Below is an example from Psalm 95:



I also took inspiration from the qualities of Mesopotamian deities. Helle discusses the changeable nature of Mesopotamian deities in his introduction to *Gilgamesh*. He writes that the goddess Ishtar was “the most complex and unpredictable deity in the Babylonian pantheon, patron goddess of sex, destruction, paradox, and transformation.”²⁶ He further expounds to note that Ishtar “is always changeable and always changing everything around her, turning mountains into valleys, men into women, and weaklings into warriors.” Gods in ancient Mesopotamia were changeable, and that conception of divinity exists within the biblical text.

²⁶ Helle, xix.

With the emphasis placed on the Shema in Jewish prayer, and therefore the unity of God, I believe that it is easy to forget that in the Bible, יהוה has many traits and personas. I sought to show this through my descriptions of the deity. In this rendering I use “Yah” and add an epithet within *em*-dashes. This both illuminates the multifaceted nature of the deity and defamiliarizes the text to readers. This choice also invites readers to question the use of the epithet, to wonder if the speaker, be it narrator or character, has chosen that epithet to suit their intentions.

The final element of the rendering that requires explanation is the use of lacunae. Similar to Helle, I believe that lacunae can further invest the reader in the narrative, to imagine what might have existed in the gap that a lacuna represents. In my rendering, I used lacunae in two ways. First, I used them to represent the composite nature of the poetry in Judges 5. It is a challenge to make any headway in translation with a good deal of Judges 5 because it is out of context and nonsensical within the narrative. For instance, I translated Judges 5:17 as “[a]cross the Jordan settled Gilad, and Dan, why did he sojourn with ships? /Asher dwelt on the seashore, he settled at his ports.” However, this is completely out of place in the larger context of the poem. Therefore, in order to preserve the coherence of the narrative, I substituted lacunae for these challenging insertions. Lacunae also feature when the text is needlessly detailed, or when we do not have the cultural context to make meaning of the text. For instance, I translated Judges 20:16 as “[o]f all this people, seven hundred were select men who were left-handed, all of these could hurl a stone at a hair without missing.” I am not aware of why the author specifically mentioned that the men were

left-handed, such a thing is not in my cultural repertoire and I believe it would only distract from the narrative, so it has been omitted from the rendering.

I also used lacunae as a way to invite readers to pause before continuing. For instance, I wanted to create additional distance between the violence described in Judges 5:27 and the consequences of the violence described in 5:28. Therefore, I included a lacuna. When reading silently, this lacuna can allow readers to take a breath and prepare for the change in scene and tone. When performing the text aloud, this can be a signal for a prolonged silence before continuing.

THE TRANSLATION AND RENDERING

The original text, translation, and rendering are presented below in a verse-by-verse format. The original text is presented in Hebrew, the translation is presented in this serif font, and the rendering is presented in the sans serif version of this font.

JUDGES 4-5

4:1

וַיִּסְפּוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲשׂוֹת הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה וְאַהוּד מָתָה:

The Israelites persisted in doing that which was displeasing to YHVH²⁷ since²⁸ Ehud had died.

As you know²⁹, Yah—the Enlightened—³⁰disapproved of how the Israelites behaved, what with Ehud then being dead.

4:2

וַיִּמְכְּרֵם יְהוָה בְּיַד יָבִין מֶלֶךְ-כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר מָלַךְ בְּחָצוֹר וְיִסְרָאֵל יוֹשֵׁב בְּחַרְשֶׁת הַגּוֹיִם:

YHVH handed them over³¹ to Yavin, king of Canaan who ruled in Chatzor.³² Sisera was the commander of his army, he was based in Charoshet Hagoyim.

Yah—the Ultimate—gave them over³³ to King Yavin of Canaan, who ruled in Chatzor. Sisera was his commander, who was based in Charoshet HaGoyim.

4:3

וַיַּצְעֲקוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-יְהוָה כִּי תִשַׁע מְאוֹת רָכֶב-בְּרִזָּל לוֹ וְהוּא לֹחֵם אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּחַזְקָה עֲשָׂרִים שָׁנָה:

²⁷ “YHVH was chosen to mark the proper name of the deity while maintaining neutrality.

²⁸ I read the vav in וְאַהוּד as circumstantial, describing the circumstances in which the Israelites persisted.

²⁹ Addressing the readers to make them active participants in the narrative.

³⁰ In the rendering, I represent the tetragrammaton as “Yah” with an assigned epithet. This is based on the 1989 *Kol HaNeshamah* Reconstructionist siddur. The epithet is meant to invite readers to wonder who is assigning the epithet and for what reason.

³¹ I chose this translation of the term וַיִּמְכְּרֵם בְּיַד because it is an idiom with similar force in English that maintains the embodied reference of the Hebrew.

³² I read the vav in וְיִסְרָאֵל as conjunctive, but I believe that the preceding *etnachta* works best as a full stop due to the shift in focus.

³³ I did not maintain “handed them over” in the rendering in order to distance the rendering from the more embodied prepositions in the Hebrew.

The Israelites cried to YHVH, for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he had oppressed the Israelites with force for twenty years.³⁴

Sisera had brutally quelled the Israelites for twenty years, the Israelites cried out to Yah—the Merciful—for Sisera had nine hundred iron chariots.³⁵

4:4

וְדְבוֹרָה אִשָּׁה נְבִיאָה אִשָּׁה לְפִידוֹת הִיא שֹׁפֵטָה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵת הַהִיא:

But Dvorah, a woman, a prophetess, wife of Lapidot,³⁶ she administered justice³⁷ over Israel at that time.

So³⁸ Dvorah—a woman, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidot—³⁹she was the leader⁴⁰ in Israel at that time.

4:5

וְהִיא יוֹשֶׁבֶת תַּחַת־תְּמָר דְּבוֹרָה בֵּין הָרָמָה וּבֵין בֵּית־אֵל בְּהַר אֶפְרַיִם וַיֵּצְאוּ אֵלֶיהָ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לִמְשָׁפֶט:

She would sit beneath Devorah's Palm, between Ramah and Beit El, in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites would go up to her for pronouncements.

The Israelites would go to her for adjudications⁴¹, in those days she would sit beneath Dvorah's Palm, between Ramah and Beit El, in the hill country of Ephraim.

4:6

וַתִּשְׁלַח וַתִּקְרָא לְבָרַק בֶּן־אֲבִינֵעַם מִקְדָּשׁ נִפְתָּלִי וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הֲלֹא צִוָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵךְ וַיִּמְשְׁכֶתָּ בְּהַר תְּבוֹר וְלִקְחֶתָ עִמָּךְ עֶשְׂרֵת אֲלָפִים אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי נִפְתָּלִי וּמִבְּנֵי זְבֻלֹן:

She sent for Barak, son of Avinoam from Kedesh in Naftali, and she said to him, “Hasn’t⁴² YHVH, the God of Israel commanded you to go and march to Mount Tavor, and to take with you 10,000 men from the Naftalites and the Zebulunites?”

³⁴ The structure of this Hebrew verse is vague and a little strange, since לֹא and הָיָה are technically unidentified, and could refer either to YHVH or to Sisera. I maintained that vagueness in the translation.

³⁵ For the sake of narrative coherence, I specified who was doing the oppressing, and reordered the sentence to read more narratively.

³⁶ Dvora is introduced with three clarifying roles: “woman,” “prophetess,” and “wife of Lapidot,” this is a noteworthy introduction for a woman in biblical literature, so I sought to capture the way she is defined in the translation.

³⁷ This carries some of the connotation of שֹׁפֵטָה while maintaining some of the quality of rulership.

³⁸ Changing the disjunctive “but” to “so” further cements Dvorah as an answer to the problems of the Israelites described in the previous verse, and might lead readers to expect that she is set up to kill Sisera, rather than Yael.

³⁹ I added the em dashes in the rendering to draw the connection between the epithets that are assigned to Dvorah and the epithets connected to God’s name.

⁴⁰ This is more specific to the rulership aspects without seeking to maintain any reference to “judge.”

⁴¹ This carries more of the aspects of law that are missing from the previous verse.

⁴² Many translations leave out the interrogative, which comes from הֲלֹא. I think it gives the verse a mocking or cynical quality.

She summoned Barak, son of Avinoam from Kedesh in Naftali. She fixed him with a steely glare.⁴³ “Why haven’t you left? Hasn’t Yah—the Commander—the God of Israel, ordered you to go and march to Mount Tavor with 10,000 men from Naftali and Zebulun?”

4:7

וּמִשְׁכָּתִּי אֵלַיָּךְ אֶל־נַחַל קִישׁוֹן אֶת־סִיסְרָא שָׂר־צָבָא יִבִּין וְאֶת־רֶכֶבּוֹ וְאֶת־הַמּוֹנֵה וְנִתְּתִיהוּ בְּיָדְךָ:

“I shall draw Sisera, the commander of Yavin’s army, to you at the Kishon River, with his chariot and his multitudes, and I shall hand him over to you.”⁴⁴

“Perhaps I should be the one to draw Sisera, Yavin’s commander to you at the *Kishon* River, with all his chariots and his forces, perhaps I shall give him over to **you!**”⁴⁵

4:8

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַיָּךְ בָּרַק אִם־תֵּלַכְתִּי עִמִּי וְהֵלַכְתִּי וְאִם־לֹא תֵלַכְתִּי עִמִּי לֹא אֵלַיָּךְ:

But Barak said to her, “If you go with me, then I will go, but⁴⁶ if you do not go with me, I cannot go.”⁴⁷

Barak waveringly⁴⁸ replied “if you go with me, I will go. But if you do not go with me, I cannot do it.”

4:9

וַתֹּאמֶר הִלֵּךְ אֵלַיָּךְ עִמָּךְ אֶפְסֵי כִּי לֹא תִהְיֶה תַּפְאֲרָתְךָ עַל־הַדָּרָךְ אֲשֶׁר אֶתָּה הוֹלֵךְ כִּי בְּיַד־אִשָּׁה יִמָּכַר יְהוֹנָה אֶת־סִיסְרָא וַתִּקַּם דְּבוֹרָה וַתֵּלֶךְ עִם־בָּרַק קַדְשָׁה:

She said, “I will certainly go with you. However,⁴⁹ there shall be no glory for you on the route you take, for it is by a woman’s⁵⁰ power⁵¹ that YHVH will hand over Sisera.” So Dvorah went with Barak to Kadesh.

⁴³ I double down on the mocking quality in the rendering by adding this, which both displays Dvorah’s disdain for Barak and highlights her military power.

⁴⁴ I wanted to maintain some of the syntax here while still aiming for coherence, so I displaced Sisera to the beginning of the verse, but kept the rest aligned with the Hebrew.

⁴⁵ The bolded words are meant to emphasize the subversion of expectations, one might expect Barak to be the military expert, but instead Dvorah fills that role.

⁴⁶ I read the *weqatal* form of וְהֵלַכְתִּי is apodictic, meaning that it is a conditional phrase expressing a logical result, according to “A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax” by Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi.

⁴⁷ Correspondingly, I read the *yiqtol* form of אֵלַיָּךְ as a contingent permission, but due to the ambiguity of “may not,” I chose “cannot.”

⁴⁸ I chose the descriptor here to encapsulate some of the grammar issues I note in the footnotes for the translation of this verse.

⁴⁹ The idiom אֶפְסֵי כִּי signals a restrictive clause (Arnold and Choi), which in contact means that Dvorah will go, **but** her going will limit the glory for Barak.

⁵⁰ The shift from “I” to “a woman” is significant, as it is a clue that though readers might expect Dvorah to kill Sisera, it will be through the actions of another woman, Yael.

⁵¹ This should read “hand over” similar to 4:2, but this is a different issue given the agent of the handing over. “A woman’s power” aligns with how I read דָּ in Hebrew.

“Very well,” she said, “I will certainly go with you. But there will be no renown for you by this road. When Yah—the Deliverer—gives over Sisera, it will be into a woman’s hands.” So, of course, Dvorah went with Barak to Kadesh.⁵²

4:10

וַיִּזְעַק בָּרָק אֶת־זְבוּלֹן וְאֶת־נַפְתָּלִי קְדֵשׁה וַיַּעַל בְּרִגְלָיו עֲשָׂרַת אֲלָפֵי אִישׁ וַתַּעַל עִמּוֹ דְּבוֹרָה:

Barak rallied Zebulun and Naftali to Kedesh, ten thousand men went up on foot, and with him went Dvorah.⁵³

Barak rallied ten thousand men from Zebulun and Naftali to go up on foot, and with him went Dvorah.

4:11

וַיִּסָּר חֲקִינִי וַיִּפְרֹד מִמִּין מִבְּנֵי חֶבֶב חֲתָן מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּט אֹהֶלוֹ עַד־אֵילָן בְּצִעְעָנִים אֲשֶׁר אֶת־קֶדֶשׁ:

Elsewhere,⁵⁴ Chever the Kenite separated from the Kenites, (from the descendants of Chovav, the father-in-law of Moses), he laid out his tent near the oak in Tza’ananim which was at Kedesh.

A short ways away, Chever the Kenite parted from the rest of the clan—they were descendants of Chovav, the father-in-law of Moses. Chever laid out his tent near the oak in Tza’ananim, which was near Kedesh.

4:12

וַיִּגְדּוּ לְסִסְרָא כִּי עָלָה בָּרָק בֶּן־אֲבִינוֹם הַר־תְּבוֹר:

Sisera was informed that Barak⁵⁵, son of Avinoam, had gone up Mount Tavor.

Meanwhile, Sisera heard tell⁵⁶ that Barak, son of Avinoam, had gone up to Mount Tavor.

4:13

וַיִּזְעַק סִיסְרָא אֶת־כָּל־רֶכְבּוֹ תִּשַׁע מֵאוֹת רֶכֶב בְּרִזָּל וְאֶת־כָּל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ מִחֲרָשֶׁת הַגּוֹיִם אֶל־נָחַל קִישׁוֹן:

⁵² In many instances in the rendering, I alter the syntax, particularly in discourse, so that it reads more conversationally or narratively and subverts readers’ expectations on what a biblical passage might sound like.

⁵³ Since this verse is fairly straightforward in terms of translation, I maintained the syntax of the Hebrew as faithfully as possible.

⁵⁴ I am signaling that the vav which begins this verse is directing the readers away from the previous narrative. This is an aside to which readers will return later.

⁵⁵ This might read as “it was told to Sisera,” which would be a more faithful translation. However, I believe that “Sisera was informed” is more coherent than “it was told to Sisera,” given the general preference for avoiding passive voice in English. Hebrew utilizes the passive much more fluidly than English, so “it was told to Sisera” reads coherently and fluidly in Hebrew, but not in English.

⁵⁶ This is more conversational and less militaristic, which is in line with my goal of active readership in the rendering.

Sisera rallied all his chariots, 900 iron chariots, and all the forces⁵⁷ that were with him from Charoshet HaGoyim to the Kishon River.

Sisera rallied all 900 of his iron chariots, and all the forces that were with him from Charoshet HaGoyim to the Kishon River.

4:14

ותאמר דבורה אל־ברק קום כי זה היום אשר נתן יהוה את־סיסרא בידך הלא יהוה יצא לפניך ויגד בך מהר תבור ועשרת אלפים איש אחריך:

Dvorah said to Barak, “Get up! For this is the day that YHVH shall hand over Sisera to you, doesn’t YHVH go out before you?!”⁵⁸ So Barak descended from Mount Tavor, 20,000 men after him.

Seeing this, Dvorah urged Barak.⁵⁹ “Get up! For this very day Yah—the Deliverer—will hand over Sisera to you. Don’t you know that Yah—the Warrior—strikes out before you?!” So Barak descended from Mount Tavor with his 20,000 men.

4:15

ויקם יהוה את־סיסרא ואת־כל־הרכב ואת־כל־המחנה לפי־חרב לפני ברק ויגד סיסרא מעל המרכבה וינס ברגליו:

YHVH threw Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his encampment into a commotion by sword before Barak. Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot.

As promised, Yah—the Warrior—threw Sisera with his chariots and his troops, into disarray by Barak’s sword. For his own part, in the midst of the commotion,⁶⁰ Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot.

4:16

ויברק רדף אחרי הרכב ואחרי המחנה עד חלשת הגוים ויפל כל־מחנה סיסרא לפי־חרב לא נשאר עד־אחד:

Barak pursued the chariot and the encampment to Charoshet HaGoyim. Sisera’s entire camp fell to the sword, not one survived.

But Barak pursued his chariot and all Sisera’s troops all the way to Charoshet HaGoyim. Sisera’s entire army fell to the sword, as you might imagine,⁶¹ there were no survivors.

4:17

וסיסרא נס ברגליו אל־אהל יצל אשת חֲבֵר הקיני כי שלום בין יבין מלך־חצור ובין בית חֲבֵר הקיני:

⁵⁷ Many might translate עם as “nation” or “people,” but in this context it has a distinct militaristic character.

⁵⁸ I chose the interrobang for this question that Dvorah asks Barak to imply disbelief that Barak has not yet done what Dvorah expects.

⁵⁹ Adding “seeing this” is an effort to have this scene read as two generals (Dvorah and Sisera) responding to each others troop movements, it pushes the action along.

⁶⁰ This is an addition that is meant to characterize Sisera’s actions as comedically unbelievable, which speaks to both the situation itself and the humor in Sisera’s name, which might be a pun on the word for horse in Hebrew.

⁶¹ A conversational addition, beginning to highlight the intensity of the violence.

Meanwhile, Sisera fled on foot to the tent of Yael, the wife of Chever the Kenite, for there was peace between Yavin, king of Chatzor, and the family of Chever the Kenite.

Sisera fled on foot until he reached the tent of Yael, the wife of Chever the Kenite. There was good will between King Yavin of Chatzor and Chever the Kenite's family.

4:18

וַתֵּצֵא יָעֵל לְקִרְאָת סִיסְרָא וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו סוּרָה אֲדֹנָי סוּרָה אֵלַי אֶל־תִּירָא וַיָּסֵר אֵלָיָהּ הָאֱהָלָה וַתִּכְסֶהוּ בַּשְּׂמִיכָה:

Yael went out to call Sisera, she said to him, "Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me, do not fear." He did turn aside to her, into her tent, and she covered him in a blanket.⁶²

Yael went out to call to Sisera. She said to him, "Turn aside, my lord. Turn aside to me, do not fear." He indeed turned aside to her, into her tent no less,⁶³ and she covered him up in a blanket.

4:19

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיָהּ הַשְׁקִינִי־נָא מְעֻט־מִים כִּי צָמָאתִי וַתִּפְתַּח אֶת־נְאוֹד הַחֶלֶב וַתִּשְׁקֶהוּ וַתִּכְסֶהוּ:

He said to her, "Please, give me just a little water, for I am parched." So she opened up a skin of milk,⁶⁴ let him drink, and covered him.

"Please, give me just a little water, for I am parched," he begged her. So, what does Yael do? She opened up a skin of milk, let him drink his fill, then covered him again.

4:20

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיָהּ עֲמֵד פֶּתַח הָאֱהָל וְהָיָה אִם־אִישׁ יָבֹא וּשְׁאַלְךָ וְאָמַר הִנֵּשׁ־פֹה אִישׁ וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵין:

He said to her, "Stand at the entrance of the tent, and if a man comes and asks you if there is a man inside, say there is not."

"Stand at the entrance of the tent," he said to her, far more concerned by what happened outside the tent, rather than within it.⁶⁵ "And if a man comes and asks you if there is a man inside...say there is not."

4:21

וַתִּקַּח יָעֵל אֶשְׁת־חֶבֶר אֶת־יָמֶד הָאֱהָל וַתִּשֶׂם אֶת־הַמַּקְבֵּת בִּינְדָה וַתְּבוֹא אֵלָיו בְּלֹאט וַתִּתְקַע אֶת־הַיָּמֶד בְּרִקְתּוֹ וַתַּצְנַח בְּאַרְצוֹ וְהוּא־נִרְדָּם וַיָּעַף וַיָּמָת:

⁶² I do not believe that there is a sexual relationship between Yael and Sisera, but I do believe that there is a sexual implication in these verses in which the author wants the reader to think the tale might end bawdily, but the narrative subverts readers expectations when it ends in violence. I chose "turn aside," which is luring, and "covered him in a blanket," neither of which are explicit, but have similar implications to the Hebrew.

⁶³ This addition serves to further emphasize the implications in the translation.

⁶⁴ I believe that נְאוֹד הַחֶלֶב evokes a breast, but I do not believe that it refers to Yael's actual breast.

⁶⁵ The Hebrew and the translation both imply a paranoia from Sisera of what is outside of the tent, which again subverts readers' expectations, the rendering makes this explicit.

Yael, the wife of Chever, took the tent peg, and put the hammer in her hand, she came to him stealthily, and she drove the tent peg through his temple and slammed him to the ground. He fell, fainted, and died.

Yael, the wife of Chever, took a tent peg in one hand and the hammer in the other. She approached Sisera, and she drove the tent peg through his skull, and **slammed** him into the ground. He fell, spent and exhausted, to death!⁶⁶

4:22

וְהָיָה בָּרַק רֹדֵף אֶת־סִיסְרָא וַתֵּצֵא יָעֵל לִקְרָאתוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ לֵךְ וְאַרְאֶנְךָ אֶת־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה מִבְקֵשׁ וַיָּבֹא אֵלֶיהָ וְהָיָה סִיסְרָא נָפֵל מֵת וְהָיָה בָּרַקְתּוֹ:

All the while, Barak pursued Sisera. Yael went out to call to him, she said to him, “Come here,⁶⁷ I will show you the man you seek.” He went to her and beheld Sisera, fallen dead, the tent peg in his temple.

Barak continued to fruitlessly pursue Sisera. Still reeling, Yael went out to call to him. “Come here,” she insisted. “I will show you the man you seek.” He went to her and beheld his quarry, Sisera, fallen dead, with the tent peg still in his skull.

4:23

וַיִּכְנַע אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת יָבִין מֶלֶךְ־כְּנָעַן לִפְנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Elohim subdued Yavin, king of Canaan on that day before the Israelites.

On that day, Elohim subdued King Yavin of Canaan before the Israelites.

4:24

וַתִּלְחַד בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל הַלּוֹד וְקָשָׁה עַל יָבִין מֶלֶךְ־כְּנָעַן עַד אֲשֶׁר הִכְרִיתוּ אֶת יָבִין מֶלֶךְ־כְּנָעַן:

The Israelites crushed Yavin, king of Canaan, harder, until they destroyed Yavin, king of Canaan.⁶⁸

Bit by bit, the Israelites crushed King Yavin of Canaan, until they destroyed him.

5:1

וַתִּשָּׂר דְּבוֹרָה וּבָרַק בְּנֵי־אֲבִינוֹם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר:

Dvorah sang with Barak son of Avinoam⁶⁹ on that day:

⁶⁶ The rendering takes the back-to-back verbs present in the Hebrew and translation and encapsulates them into the utter decimation of Sisera.

⁶⁷ Earlier “turn aside” was used to portray some beckoning quality, but “come here” denies any of the earlier ambiguity.

⁶⁸ Between the issue of “sending the hand” being translated as “crushing” and the awkward repetition, this is difficult to portray in translation. I utilized the imagery of putting pressure until something is totally broken, which I think maintains some of the discomfort of the Hebrew while maintaining the point of the verse.

⁶⁹ The verse prioritizes Dvorah and relegates Barak, but the Hebrew does this more subtly than a more direct translation would allow, so I chose “with Barak” rather than “Dvorah and Barak sang,” which also refers to the third person singular feminine verb that begins the verse.

Dvorah retold the story with Barak,⁷⁰ son of Avinoam, together they sang on that day:

5:2

בְּפֶרַע פְּרָעוֹת בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהִתְנַדֵּב עִם בָּרַכּוּ יְהוָה:

When locks are let loose in Israel

when a dedicated people

bless YHVH!

When locks are let loose in Israel

when a dedicated people

bless Yah—the Guardian!

5:3

שָׁמְעוּ מְלָכִים הֶאֱזִינוּ רְזָנִים אֲנֹכִי לַיהוָה אֲנֹכִי אֲשִׁירָה אֶזְמַר לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Listen, kings! Give ear, high officials!

I, myself,⁷¹ sing to YHVH,

I praise YHVH the God of Israel.

Listen, O kings! Give ear, O high officials!

I, myself, sing to Yah—the Glorious—

I praise Yah—the Almighty—the God of Israel.

5:4

יְהוָה בְּצֵאתָהּ מִשְׁעִיר בְּצִעְדָּהּ מִשְׁדֵּה אֶדוֹם אֶרֶץ רָעָשָׁה גַם־שָׁמַיִם נָטְפוּ גַם־עָבִים נָטְפוּ מַיִם:

YHVH, in your emergence from Seir, in your strides from the field of Edom,

The earth shook, even⁷² the skies dripped, even the very clouds dripped water.

Yah—the Surveyor—when you came out from Seir, when you strode across the field of Edom,

The earth shook, the skies dripped, even the very clouds were distilled into water.

5:5

הָרִים נָזְלוּ מִפְּנֵי יְהוָה זֶה סִינֵי מִפְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Mountains were worthless before YHVH,

Yonder Sinai,⁷³ before YHVH the God of Israel.

⁷⁰ This makes the purpose of Judges 5 explicit.

⁷¹ This refers to the repetition of אֲנֹכִי in the Hebrew.

⁷² I believe גַּם is serving an asseverative function (Arnold and Choi) in this verse. The intensification progresses throughout the verse.

⁷³ “Yonder” here is in reference to הַהוּא being used as a relative pronoun (Arnold and Choi).

Mountains, even yonder Sinai, were nothing before Yah—the All-Encompassing—
Before Yah—the Almighty—the God of Israel.

5:6

בִּימֵי שָׁמְגָר בֶּן־עֲנָת בִּימֵי יָעֵל חָדְלוּ אֲרָחוֹת וְהִלְכִי נְתִיבוֹת יִלְכוּ אֲרָחוֹת עֲקֻלָּאוֹת:

In the days of Shamgar, son of Anat, in the days of Yael,
The ways were cut off, and travelers went by crooked paths.

[]⁷⁴ pathways were cut short in the days of Yael,

Travelers went by crooked paths.

5:7

חָדְלוּ כְּרִזּוֹן בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל חָדְלוּ עַד שִׁמְמָתִי דְּבוֹרָה שִׁמְמָתִי אִם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:

Countrymen ceased in Israel, they ceased,
Until Dvorah arose, until a mother arose in Israel.

There were no leaders⁷⁵ in Israel, none at all,

Until Dvorah arose, until a mother arose for Israel.

5:8

יִבְחַר אֱלֹהִים חַדָּשִׁים אִזְ לָחֶם שְׁעָרִים מִגֵּן אִם־יִרְאֶה וְרִמָּח בְּאַרְבָּעִים אֶלֶף בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:

He chose new deities,⁷⁶ so there was war in the gates,

Could a shield be seen, could a spear, among the forty thousand in Israel?

[]

5:9

לִבִּי לַחֻקֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַמִּתְנַדְּבִים בָּעַם בָּרְכוּ יְהוָה:

My heart is with the inscribed of Israel, the dedicated ones among the people

Bless YHVH!

[]

5:10

רֹכְבֵי אֲתָנוֹת צָחָרוֹת יִשְׁבִּי עַל־מִדִּין וְהִלְכִי עַל־דֶּרֶךְ שִׁיחוֹ:

Riders of tawny she-asses, those who sit on cloth and go along the way,

⁷⁴ This is a lacuna. The brackets in the rendering serve as lacunae, the purpose of which can be found in the chapter on the rendering.

⁷⁵ I took כְּרִזּוֹן to refer to dependable leadership, which is why it is contrast to “Dvorah” and “mother.”

⁷⁶ A great deal of this poem is likely composite and therefore out of context, so the translation often reflects that difficulty while still attempting to communicate the meaning of the individual verses.

Take heed!

[]

5:11

מקול מתפצץ בין משאבים שם יתנו צדקות יהוה צדקת פרזונו בישׂראל אז ירדו לשערים עם־יהוה:

From the shattered voice between the watering places, there the righteous acts of YHVH are repeated, the righteous acts of His countrymen in Israel,

Thus the people of YHVH descended to the gates.

[]

5:12

עורי עורי דבורה עורי עורי דברי־שיר קום ברק ושבּה שְׁבִיָּה בן־אבינעם:

Awake, awake Dvorah, awake, awake, recite the poem,

Get up, Barak, imprison your captives, son of Avinoam.

Awake, awake Dvorah! Awake, awake, and sing the song!

Get up, Barak, take your captives, son of Avinoam!⁷⁷

5:13

אז ירד שריד לאדירים עם יהוה ירד־לי בגבורים:

Thus, the escapee descended upon the mighty,

The people of YHVH descended upon the warriors for me.

[]

5:14

מני אפרים שרשם בעמלק אחריה בנימין בעממיה מני מכיר ירדו מחקקים ומזבולן משכים בשבט ספר:

From Ephraim, their roots in Amalek, after you, Benyamin, with your kinsmen,

From Machir the inscribed ones descended, and from Zebulun the scribal staff is drawn out.

[]

5:15

ושרי בישׂשכר עם־דברה וישׂשכר בן ברק בעמק שלח ברגליו בפלגות ראובן גדלים חקקי־לב:

And the commanders of Issachar were with Dvorah, as with Issachar, so with Barak in the valley, sent on foot,

In the divisions of Reuven were great inscriptions of conscience.

⁷⁷ “Song” was chosen for the assonantal quality with “Avinoam.”

[]

5:16

לָמָּה יָשַׁבְתָּ בֵּין הַמִּשְׁפָּתִים לִשְׁמֹעַ שְׂרָקוֹת עֲדָרִים לִפְלִגּוֹת רְאוּבֵן גְּדוּלִים חֲקִירֵי־לֵב:

Why did you sit among the saddlebags to hear the whistling of the flock?

To the divisions of Reuven, a great searching of conscience.

[]

5:17

גִּלְעָד בְּעֶבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן שָׁכַן וְדָן לָמָּה יָגִיר אֲנִיּוֹת אֲשֶׁר יָשַׁב לְחוּף יָמִים וְעַל מִפְּרָצָיו יִשְׁכּוּן:

Across the Jordan settled Gilad, and Dan, why did he sojourn with ships?

Asher dwelt on the seashore, he settled at his ports.

[]

5:18

זִבְלוֹן עִם חֶרֶף נִפְשׁוּ לָמוּת וְנִפְתָּלִי עַל מְרוֹמֵי שָׂדֶה:

Zebulun, a people who reproach his very life to death,

And Naftali upon the elevated field.

[]

5:19

בָּאוּ מְלָכִים נִלְחָמוּ אִזְּ נִלְחָמוּ מְלָכֵי כְנָעַן בְּתַעֲנָךְ עַל־מִי מִגְדוֹ בָּצַע פֶּסֶף לֹא לָקְחוּ:

The kings came to wage war, so the kings of Canaan made war in Taanach, near the waters of Megido,

But a profit of silver they did not take.⁷⁸

[]

5:20

מִן־שָׁמַיִם נִלְחָמוּ הַכּוֹכָבִים מִמְּסֻלוֹתֵם נִלְחָמוּ עִם־סִיסְרָא:

From the heavens they waged war,

The stars in their courses waged war with Sisera.

From the heavens they waged war,

Even the stars in their courses waged war with Sisera!

5:21

נָחַל קִישׁוֹן גָּרַפָם נָחַל קְדוּמִים נָחַל קִישׁוֹן תִּדְרָכִי נִפְשֵׁי עִזִּי:

⁷⁸ The translation in this verse is showcasing the uncomfortable syntax and flow of the Hebrew.

The Kishon River washed them away, river of yore, Kishon,
Tread on, my life, in strength.

[]

5:22

אֶזְקֶלְמוּ עֲקֵבֵי־סוּס מִדִּהְרֹת דִּהְרֹת אֲבִירָיו:

Thus struck the horses' hooves,
From the galloping, galloping of his power.

[]

5:23

אֹרֹן מֵרוֹז אָמַר מִלֶּאֱלֹהִי יְהוָה אֶרֶוֹר יִשְׁבִּיעַ כִּי לֹא־בָאוּ לַעֲזֹרַת יְהוָה לַעֲזֹרַת יְהוָה בַּגְּבוּרִים:

“Curse Meroz,” said the angel of YHVH, “vehemently curse her inhabitants,
For they did not come to help YHVH, to help YHVH among the warriors.”

[]

5:24

תְּבָרַךְ מִנְּשִׁים יַעֲלֵ אִשָּׁת חֶבֶר הַקֵּינִי מִנְּשִׁים בְּאֵהָל תְּבָרַךְ:

Most⁷⁹ blessed among women is Yael, wife of Chever the Kenite,
Of the women in the tent she is most blessed.

And surely, Yael, wife of Chever the Kenite, is most remarkable.

Of the homemakers she is the most superb.⁸⁰

5:25

מִים שָׁאֵל חֶלֶב נָתַנָּה בְּסֶפֶל אֲדִירִים הַקְרִיבָה חֲמָאָה:

Water he asked for, milk she gave,⁸¹

In a majestic bowl she presented curds.

When he asked simply for water, she gave him milk,

Presented in her finest dish she provided precious curds.⁸²

5:26

יָדָה לִימָד תְּשַׁלְּחָנָה וַיִּמְיְנָה לְהַלְמוֹת עַמְלִים וְהִלָּמָה סִסְרָא מְחַקָּה רָאָשׁוּ וּמְחַצָּה וְחִלָּפָה בִּרְקָתוֹ:

⁷⁹ I believe the mem in מְנַשִּׁים refers to the “most.”

⁸⁰ “Homemaker” is substituted for “women in the tent” to both allow for the double meaning of אֵהָל and to draw the connection between Yael’s actions with the hammer and her role as a wife.

⁸¹ This translation highlights the power and simplicity of the poetry in Hebrew, which accomplishes a great deal with only four words.

⁸² This connects to the previous verse about her excellent hospitality and remarkable qualities.

She reached out her hand for the tent peg, her right hand for a laborer's hammer.

She hammered Sisera! She crushed his head, she shattered, she pierced his temple!⁸³

All the while, she reached out her hand for the tent peg, her right hand for a homemaker's hammer.

She hammered **Sisera**!⁸⁴ She crushed his head! she **shattered** him! She pierced his temple!

5:27

בין רגליה כרע נפל שכב בין רגליה כרע נפל באשר כרע נפל שדוד:

Between her feet he dropped, he fell, he lay.⁸⁵

Between her feet he dropped, he fell. Where he knelt, there he fell, decimated.

At her feet he slumped, he fell, he dropped, he died.

There, where he knelt, was where he fell, **decimated**.

5:28

בעד החלון נשקפה ותיבב אם סיסרא בעד האשנב מדוע בוש רכבו לבוא מדוע אחרו פעמי מרכבותיו:

She gazes through the window, she laments, the mother of Sisera from behind the lattice.

“Why do his chariots fail to come? Why do the hoofbeats of his chariot tarry?”

[] Miles away, in a far-off chamber, surrounded by her maids, she gazes through the window. She laments from behind the lattice.

“Why don't his chariots come? Why can't I hear the hoofbeats of his horses?”

Asks the mother of Sisera.⁸⁶

5:29

חכמות שרותיה תענינה אלהיהא תשיב אמריה לה:

The wisest of her ladies answers her, she responds, saying to her:

⁸³ In Hebrew, the verb and subject can exist in the same word, but not so in English. The repetition of “she” in the second stich is a little heavy handed, but it is designed to show the differences between the two languages.

⁸⁴ The bolded words are both for emphasis and to highlight the subversion in expectations once more.

⁸⁵ This could be understood as “between her legs,” but the time for ambiguous sexual references is long past. This is very clearly a warrior fallen at the feet of the person who vanquished him, rather than anything sexual in nature.

⁸⁶ In the translation, I maintained some of the word order so that the reveal of the shift to Sisera's mother is maintained, but in the rendering I wanted to offset it even further, hence the lacuna and the displacement of the speaker until the very end of the verse.

A hand on her shoulder, the wisest of her ladies' searches for words, and answers.⁸⁷

5:30

הלא ימצאו יסלקו שלל רחם רחמתי לראש גבר שלל צבעים לסיסרא שלל צבעים רקמה צבע רקמתי לציארי שלל:

“Are they not finding and dividing spoils? A maiden, two maidens for each man, spoil of dyed spools to Sisera, spoil of embroidered goods,

A pair of embroidered cloths as spoil around the neck.”

“Surely they’ll be finding and dividing the spoils, won’t they? There’ll be a maiden...even two maidens for each warrior! A spoil of dyed spools to your boy, a spoil of embroidered goods for your Sisera,

A pair of embroidered cloths around his neck.”

5:31

כן יאבדו כל־אויביו יהוה ואֱהָבָיו כַּצֹּאת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בַּגְּבֻרָתוֹ וַתִּשְׁלַט הָאָרֶץ אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה:

Thus may all your enemies perish, YHVH, may your beloveds be like the rising sun in might,

And the land was at rest for 40 years.

[] Thus may all your enemies perish, Yah—the Judge—may your loved ones be like the rising sun in might,

And so the land was at rest for 40 years.⁸⁸

JUDGES 19-21

19:1

וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הָהֵם וּמָלָךְ אֵין בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְהִי אִישׁ לְוִי גֵר בְּיַרְכְּתֵי הַר־אֶפְרַיִם וַיִּקַּח־לוֹ אִשָּׁה כִּילְגָשׁ מִבֵּית לָחֶם יְהוּדָה:

In those days, when there was no king in Israel, there was a Levite man who dwelt on the far side of the hill country of Ephraim, he took a wife for himself, a concubine from Beit Lechem in Yehudah.

This all happened when there was no king in Israel. It just so happened that there was a Levite man who dwelt way over on the far side of the hill country of Ephraim. He went and married a woman from Beit Lechem in Yehudah.

⁸⁷ I believe that the intent of the author is to describe the result of this kind of violence, the cut away to Sisera’s mother and her ladies is subversive, and the Hebrew almost implies that this wisest of her ladies is choking on her response.

⁸⁸ The כֵּן in this verse carries comparative force, but it is abrupt after the cutaway to Sisera’s mother, perhaps because we do not have the ending of this poem. I think it is best illustrated in the rendering by a lacuna, which gives the reader an opportunity to breathe before finishing the chapter.

Things didn't go well, they weren't happy, it got worse, and you can never say what really happened in situations like this,⁸⁹ but she eventually did what she needed to do to get out of there.⁹⁰

19:2

וַתִּזְנֶה עָלָיו פִּילְגָשׁוֹ וַתֵּלֶךְ מֵאִתּוֹ אֶל-בֵּית אָבִיהָ אֶל-בֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה וַתְּהִי-שָׁם יָמִים אַרְבָּעָה חֳדָשִׁים:

His concubine played the harlot with him, she went, away from him, to her father's house, to Beit Lechem in Yehudah, and she was there for 4 months.

She asserted her independence,⁹¹ and up and left him. She went to her father's house, to Beit Lechem in Yehudah, and she stayed there for four months.

19:3

וַיָּקָם אִישׁוֹ וַיֵּלֶךְ אַחֲרֶיהָ לְדַבֵּר עִלְיָלָהּ לְהָשִׁיבָהּ וַנַּעֲרֹ עִמּוֹ וַאֲמָד חֲמָרִים וַתְּבִיאֶהוּ בֵּית אָבִיהָ וַיֵּרְאֶהוּ אָבִי הַנַּעֲרָה וַיִּשְׂמַח לִקְרָאתוֹ:

Her husband went after her, to convince her and bring her back. A young man was with him, and a couple of donkeys. She brought him to her father's house, and when the young woman's father saw him, he was happy to greet him.

Eventually, her husband went after her, things would be different, he insisted,⁹² and he tried to bring her home. He brought a servant with him and a couple of donkeys. For her part, she brought him into her father's house, and when her father saw him, he was pleased to greet him.

19:4

וַיִּתְּקֶבֶת חֲתָנוֹ אָבִי הַנַּעֲרָה וַיֵּשֶׁב אִתּוֹ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ וַיָּלִינוּ שָׁם:

His father-in-law, the father of the young woman, prevailed upon him, and he stayed with him three days, they ate, they drank, they stayed over there.

The man's father-in-law, who was the father of the young woman, did not want to let her out of his sight just yet, and prevailed upon the man,⁹³ so he stayed with him three days. They feasted together and stayed over there.

⁸⁹ This entire narrative is, as Erich Auerbach might put it, fraught with background. I believe that readers are asked to imagine a great deal of what occurs between verses, and what the intentions of different characters in this narrative might be. In this addition, I directly ask readers to participate in this imaginative exercise.

⁹⁰ This addition serves as background for the assertion of independence and offers further characterization of the unnamed actors in this narrative.

⁹¹ Translating "played the harlot" is difficult. I believe the word in Hebrew implies that the concubine was asserting her independence in a way that differed from her husband's expectations, which functions as a betrayal on par with sexual infidelity. I maintained "played the harlot" in the translation, while opting for a phrase which I believe better communicates the intent of the term in the rendering.

⁹² Again, this addition adds further context.

⁹³ In the translation, I believe that "prevailed upon" does a lot of work to establish the relationship between the husband and father-in-law, though it is not as forceful as וַיִּתְּקֶבֶת, in the rendering I added the additional context to lend that strength.

19:5

וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הָרְבִיעִי וַיִּשְׁכְּמוּ בַּבֹּקֶר וַיָּקָם לָלֶכֶת וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי הַנְּעִרָה אֶל־חֲתָנוּ סֵעָד לִבָּךְ פֶּת־לֶחֶם וְאַחֵר תֵּלְכוּ:

On the fourth day they rose early in the morning and prepared to go, the young woman's father said to his son in law, "Sustain your heart with a morsel of food, and after you all may go."

On the fourth day, the party rose early in the morning and prepared to go. But the young woman's father said to his son and law, "Have just a bite to eat before you go."

19:6

וַיֵּשְׁבוּ וַיֹּאכְלוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו וַיִּשְׁתּוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי הַנְּעִרָה אֶל־הָאִישׁ הוֹאֵל־נָא וְלִין וַיֵּיטֵב לָבָד:

So the pair of them sat and ate together, and they drank, and the father of the young woman said to the man, "Why don't you stay over, and gladden your heart?"

So the pair of them sat and ate together, and the father of the young woman said to the man, "Why don't you just stay here and enjoy yourselves? Things might be better if you just took your time."⁹⁴

19:7

וַיָּקָם הָאִישׁ לָלֶכֶת וַיַּפְצֵר־בּו חֲתָנוּ וַיִּשָּׁב וַיֵּלֶן שָׁם:

The man prepared to go, but his father-in-law urged him, so he stayed and lodged there.

The man prepared to go, but his father-in-law urged him, so he remained and stayed over there.

19:8

וַיִּשְׁכֹּם בַּבֹּקֶר בַּיּוֹם הַחֲמִישִׁי לָלֶכֶת וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי הַנְּעִרָה סֵעָד־נָא לִבָּכָה וְהִתְמַהֲמַהּ עַד־נִטּוֹת הַיּוֹם וַיֹּאכְלוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם:

He rose early on the morning of the fifth day to go, but the father of the young woman said, "Please, strengthen your heart" and they delayed until the day declined and the pair of them ate.

On the fifth day, he rose early in the morning to go, but the father of the young woman said, "Please, strengthen your heart."⁹⁵ They tarried and the day passed, so the pair of them ate.

19:9

וַיָּקָם הָאִישׁ לָלֶכֶת הוּא וּפְלִגְשׁוֹ וַנַּעֲרוּ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ חֲתָנוּ אָבִי הַנְּעִרָה הִנֵּה נָא רִפָּה הַיּוֹם לַעְרוֹב לִינוּ־נָא הִנֵּה חֲנוּת הַיּוֹם לִין פֹּה וַיֵּיטֵב לִבָּכָה וְהִשְׁכַּמְתָּם מָחָר לְדַרְפָּכֶם וְהִלַּכְתָּ לְאֵהָלָךְ:

⁹⁴ This addition clarifies the father-in-law's intention to keep his daughter and her husband in his house for as long as possible to ensure his daughter's safety.

⁹⁵ In the rendering I have been progressing in my interpretation of "strengthen your heart." Initially I translate it as "have just a bite to eat," and then when the father-in-law's attempts to keep them here continue I move to "strengthen your heart" as a signal to the reader that this delay is less about enjoying the company and more about the marital peace of the husband and wife.

The man got up to leave, he and his concubine and his young man, but his father in law, the father of the young woman, said to him, “Look, the day has waned into evening, you all should stay over, look how the day declines, stay over here and gladden your heart, and you all may rise early tomorrow to get on the road, and you may go to your home.”

The man got up to leave, he and his wife, and his servant, but his father-in-law, the father of the young woman, protested again. “Look,” he said, “the day has already faded into evening. You should all stay here. Look how late it’s gotten already. Stay here, and enjoy yourselves, and you can all rise early tomorrow to get on the road back to your home.”

19:10

וְלֹא־אָבָה הָאִישׁ לָלוּי וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיָּבֹא עַד־נֹכַח יְבוּס הַיָּהוּדִים וַיֵּשְׁלָם וַעֲמֹו צָמַד חֲמוּרִים חֲבוּשִׁים וּפִילִגְשׁוֹ עִמּוֹ:

But the man was not willing to stay over, he left, and went on until he came near to Yebus, which was Yerushalayim, and with him were his pair of saddled donkeys, and his concubine was with him.

But the man refused to stay over. He left, and they traveled on until they drew near Yebus, which was Yerushalayim. With him were his pair of saddled donkeys, and also his wife.⁹⁶

19:11

הֵם עִם־יְבוּס וְהַיּוֹם רַד מְאֹד וַיֹּאמֶר הַנָּעַר אֶל־אֲדֹנָיו לֵכֶה־נָּא וְנִסּוּרָה אֶל־עִיר־הַיְבוּסִי הַזֹּאת וְנָלִין בָּהּ:

They were near Yebus, and the day was much declined. The young man said to his master, “Please come along and let us turn aside to this city of the Yebusites and let us stay over in it.”

They were near Yebus, and the sun was sinking beyond the horizon. The servant said to his master, “Come along, let us go to this city of the Yebusites to lodge for the night.”

19:12

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲדֹנָיו לֹא נִסּוּר אֶל־עִיר נָכְרִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִנֵּה וְעָבְרָנוּ עַד־גִּבְעָה:

But his master said to him, “We will not turn aside to the foreign city here that is not of the Israelites, we shall pass through to Givah.”

But his master replied, “We will not turn aside to some foreign city here that is not of the Israelites. No, we shall pass through it to Givah.”

19:13

וַיֹּאמֶר לַנָּעַר לֵךְ וְנִקְרְבָה בְּאַחַד הַמְּקוֹמוֹת וְלִנּוּ בַּגִּבְעָה אוֹ בְּרָמָה:

He said to his young man, “Come along, let us approach one of the places, and we will stay over in Givah or in Ramah.”

⁹⁶ The order in which the party that accompanies the man changes often, I have emphasized here specifically that his wife seems to rank lower than his donkeys.

“Come along,” he said to his servant. “Let us draw near one of these places, we will stay over in Givah or in Ramah.”

19:14

ויעברו וילכו ותבא להם השמש אצל הגבעה אשר לבנימין:

So they passed by, and the sun set when they were near Givah, which is of Benjamin.

⁹⁷

So they passed by, and the sun set fully as they approached Givah, which is of Benjamin.

19:15

ויעברו שם לבוא ללון בגבעה ויבא וישב ברחוב העיר ואין איש מאספ־אותם הביתה ללון:

They turned aside there and went to stay over in Givah. He went and sat in the square, but not one person took them home to stay over.

They turned aside there and went to lodge in Givah. The man went and sat in the square, and tellingly,⁹⁸ no one took them in.

19:16

והנה איש זקן בא מן־מעשהו מן־השדה בערב והאיש מהר אפרים והוא־גֵר בגבעה ואנשי המקום בני ימיני:

But an old man came from his work in the fields in the evening. This man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he lived in Givah, but the men of that place were Benyaminites.⁹⁹

However, an old man came from his work in the fields in the evening. Now, to be clear,¹⁰⁰ this particular man lived in Givah, where the Benyaminites dwelled, but he was from the hill country of Ephraim.

19:17

וישא עיניו וירא את־האיש הארם ברחב העיר ויאמר האיש הזקן אנה תלך ומאין תבוא:

He looked up and saw the wayfaring man in the town square. The old man said to him, “Where are you going? And where do you come from?”

He looked up and saw the wayfaring man in the town square. The old man said to him, “Where are you going? And where do you come from?”

19:18

⁹⁷ Many of the temporal phrases in this narrative are difficult to translate, so in many instances I have provided my best guess.

⁹⁸ This makes the quality of the townspeople more explicit.

⁹⁹ This is so hyper-specific that I believe it pushes this piece into an absurdist genre. It just so happens that an older man passes by who is from the same area as the man, and he is innocent in comparison to the rest of the townspeople because he is not from there.

¹⁰⁰ This further emphasizes the absurdity in the translation.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו עֲבָרִים אֲנִי מִבֵּית־לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה עַד־יִרְכָּתִי הַר־אֶפְרַיִם מִשָּׁם אָנֹכִי וְאֶלֶף עַד־בֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה וְאֶת־בֵּית יְהוָה אֲנִי הֹלֵךְ וְאֵין אִישׁ מֵאֶסֶף אוֹתִי הַבָּיְתָה:

He said to him, “We are passing through from Beit Lechem in Yehudah to the furthest reaches of the hill country of Ephraim. I am from there. I went to Beit Lechem in Yehudah, and to the House of YHVH I now go, but not one man has taken me home.”

He said to him, “We are passing through from Beit Lechem in Yehudah to the far side of the hill country of Ephraim. I am from there. I went to Beit Lechem in Yehudah, and I now travel to the house of Yah—the Restorer—but no one has taken **me** in.”¹⁰¹

19:19

וְגַם־תָּבֶן גַּם־מִסְפּוֹא יֵשׁ לְחֻמּוֹרֵינוּ וְגַם לֶחֶם וַיֵּין יִשְׁׁלִי וְלֶאֱמָתְךָ וְלַנֶּעֶר עִם־עֲבָדֶיךָ אֵין מִחְסוֹר כָּל־דָּבָר:

“We even have straw and fodder for our donkeys, as well as food and wine for me, for your maidservant, and for the young man with your servants, we do not lack anything.”

“We have everything we need, even straw and fodder for our donkeys. And of course, food and wine for me, for your maidservant here, and for the servant over with your servants.”¹⁰²

19:20

וַיֹּאמֶר הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה שְׁלוֹם לָךְ רַק כָּל־מִחְסוֹרְךָ עָלֵי רַק בְּרַחוּב אֶל־תֵּלֶן:

The old man said, “Be at peace, but let me take on all your needs, but do not stay over in the square.”

The old man said, “Let me take on all your needs so you might be at peace, but do not stay overnight in the square!”

19:21

וַיְבִיֵּאֵהוּ לְבֵיתוֹ וַיָּבֵל לְחֻמּוֹרִים וַיִּרְחֹצוּ רַגְלֵיהֶם וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ:

So he brought him to his house, and mixed feed¹⁰³ for the donkeys, and they washed their feet, ate, and drank.

So he brought him to his house, and mixed feed for the donkeys, and they washed their feet, ate, and drank.

19:22

הִמָּה מִיִּטְיָבִים אֶת־לִבָּם וְהֵנָּה אֲנָשִׁי הָעִיר אֲנָשִׁי בְנֵי־בְלִיעֵל נָסְבוּ אֶת־הַבַּיִת מִתְדַּפְּקִים עַל־הַדֶּלֶת וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־הָאִישׁ בְּעַל הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה לֵאמֹר הוֹצֵא אֶת־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־בָּא אֶל־בֵּיתְךָ וְנִדְעֵנוּ:

They gladdened their hearts, but the men of the city, worthless men, they surrounded the home, knocking on the door. They said to the man, the master of the house, the elder, “Bring out the man that you brought to your home, so we might know him.

¹⁰¹ There’s an emphasis on the personal pronoun to highlight the priorities of the man.

¹⁰² Again, the ordering of who is mentioned and when gives readers a clue to the man’s priorities.

¹⁰³ This is not something in my cultural repertoire, so I am making an assumption that feeding donkeys involves some sort of preparation.

They enjoyed themselves. But soon, the men of the city, a depraved lot, surrounded the home and pounded on the door. They said to the man, the master of the house, the old man, “Bring out that man that you brought to your home, so we might rape him.”¹⁰⁴

19:23

וַיֵּצֵא אֲלֵיהֶם הָאִישׁ בְּעַל הַבַּיִת וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם אֵלֶיָּהוּ אֶל־תִּרְעוּ נָא אֶחָדִי אֲשֶׁר־בָּא הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה אֶל־בֵּיתִי אֶל־תַּעֲשׂוּ אֶת־הַנִּבְלָה הַזֹּאת:

The man, the master of the house, went out to them, and said to them, “Do not, my brothers, do not be wicked, please. Since this man has come to my house, do not commit this disgrace.”¹⁰⁵

The man, the master of the house, went out to them. “My brothers do not do this evil deed. Do not, please!” He said to them. “Since this man has come into my house, do not commit this disgrace.”

19:24

הִנֵּה בְּתִי הַבְּתוּלָה וּפִילְגָּשָׁהּוּ אוֹצִיָּאָה־נָּא אוֹתָם וְעַנּוּ אוֹתָם וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֵיכֶם וְלֹאִישׁ הַזֶּה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ דָּבָר הַנִּבְלָה הַזֹּאת:

“Look, here is my virgin daughter and his concubine, please let me bring them out, humiliate them, and do what you see fit with them, but to this man do not commit this disgrace.”

“Look, here is my virgin daughter, and here is the man’s wife! Please, let me bring them out, use them to do what you see fit, but do not commit this disgrace to this man.” As we know, one ill turn deserves another.¹⁰⁶

19:25

וְלֹא־אָבּוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים לְשָׁמֹעַ לוֹ וַיִּחְזַק הָאִישׁ בְּפִילְגָּשׁוֹ וַיֵּצֵא אֲלֵיהֶם חָחוּץ וַיִּדְעוּ אוֹתָהּ וַיַּתְעַלְלוּ־בָּהּ כָּל־הַלַּיְלָה עַד־הַבֹּקֶר וַיִּשְׁלְחוּהָ כַּעֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר

But the men were not willing to listen to him, so the man seized his concubine and brought her to them outside. They knew her and dealt harshly with her all night until morning. They sent her away when dawn rose.

The men were not willing to listen to him, so the man seized his wife and threw her outside to the crowd. They raped her and destroyed her all night until morning. They sent her off when dawn broke.

19:26

¹⁰⁴ I deny the euphemism of “know” in the rendering that I utilize in the translation. I wanted the dark satire to be as evident as possible, the exchange that occurs is one rape, a vile and abhorrent act, for another rape, a vile and abhorrent act.

¹⁰⁵ Rather than the discourse going directly to the negative request of “do not be wicked,” which one might expect, there is first a negative cohortative address to the crowd, and the clause ends with the *etnachta* on another pleading word. This translation seeks to maintain this discomfort.

¹⁰⁶ This addition is a refrain throughout the remainder of the narrative that shows how violence can grow exponentially in a short period of time.

וַתָּבֹא הָאִשָּׁה לִפְנוֹת הַבֹּקֶר וַתִּפֹּל פְּתַח בֵּית־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־אֲדוֹנֶיהָ שָׁם עַד־הָאֹר:

The woman came and fell at the entrance of the home where the man who was her lord was until the morning turned light.

The woman fell at the entrance of the home where her lord stayed as the morning grew light.

19:27

וַיָּקָם אֲדֹנֶיהָ בַּבֹּקֶר וַיִּפְתַּח דְּלֹתוֹת הַבַּיִת וַיֵּצֵא לִלְכֹּת לְדַרְכּוֹ וְהִנֵּה הָאִשָּׁה פִּילְגָשׁוֹ נִפְלְתָה פְּתַח הַבַּיִת וַיָּדִיהָ עַל־הַסָּף:

Her lord¹⁰⁷ arose in the morning and opened the doors of the home, he went out to continue on his path, and there was the woman, his concubine, fallen at the entrance of the home, her hands were on the threshold.

Her lord arose in the morning and opened the doors of the home. He went out, intending to continue on his road home, and very nearly tripped over the woman, his wife, fallen at the entrance of the home. Her hands were barely over the threshold.

19:28

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ קוּמִי וְנִלְכֶה וְאֵין עֲנָה וַיִּקְחֶהָ עַל־הַחֲמֹר וַיָּקָם הָאִישׁ וַיֵּלֶךְ לְמָקוֹמוֹ:

He said to her, “Get up, let us go,” but there was no reply. He put her on the donkey and set out for his place.

“Get up,” he said, looking down at her. “Let’s go.” But there was no reply. He draped her over the donkey and set off back home.

19:29

וַיָּבֹא אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הַמַּאֲכָלֹת וַיַּחֲזֹק בְּפִילְגָשׁוֹ וַיַּנְתִּחֶהָ לַעֲצָמֶיהָ לְשֹׁנִים עָשׂוּר נִתְחַזְּמִים וַיִּשְׁלַחֶהָ בְּכָל גְּבוּל יִשְׂרָאֵל:

He came to his house, and he took the knife and seized his concubine, he cut her up by her limbs in twelve pieces¹⁰⁸ and sent her out to all the territories of Israel.

When he got back home, he took the knife and seized his wife. You must’ve seen it,¹⁰⁹ he cut her up limb by limb into twelve pieces and sent her out to all the territories of Israel.

19:30

וְהָיָה כָּל־הָרְאֹה וְאָמַר לֹא־נִהְיָתָה וְלֹא־נִרְאָתָה כִּזֹּאת לְמִיּוֹם עֲלוֹת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה שְׂמִימוֹלְכֶם עָלֶיהָ עָצוּ וַנְּדַבְּרוּ:

And all who saw said, “There has not been, nor has there been seen something like this from the day that the Israelites went up from the land of Egypt until today. Consider this, plan, and discuss.”

¹⁰⁷ There is a shift here from “husband” and “man” to lord that is significant. Initially they are on an equal ground, but that changes dramatically in the course of the narrative.

¹⁰⁸ The word נִתְחַזְּמִים has the connotation of dividing a carcass, but that is difficult to communicate in English in a similar way.

¹⁰⁹ This is a direct address that fits the gossip-like tone of the narrator, as if this is something everyone would have heard about.

Everyone who saw this said, “There has never been...we have never seen¹¹⁰ something like this from the very beginning, ever since the Israelites went up from the land of Egypt, until today.” So together they considered it, discussed it, and began to plan how they would respond.

20:1

וַיֵּצְאוּ כָּל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַתִּקְהַל הָעֵדָה כָּאִישׁ אֶחָד לְמִדּוֹן וְעַד־בָּאָר שָׁבַע וְאָרְץ הַגִּלְעָד אֶל־יְהוָה הַמִּצְפָּה:

All of the Israelites went out and assembled the community as one, from Dan to Be'er Sheva and the land of Gilad—to YHVH at Mitzpah.

To get to the bottom of this, the Israelites went out and assembled as one community, from Dan to Be'er Sheva and the land of Gilad. Together they went up to Yah—the Overseer—at Mitzpah.

20:2

וַיִּתְּצֻבוּ פָּנוֹת כָּל־הָעָם כָּל־שְׁבִטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּקָּהָל עִם הָאֱלֹהִים אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אָלֶף אִישׁ רַגְלֵי שְׁלֹף־חֶרֶב:

The leaders of all the people, all the tribes of Israel, stationed themselves in an assembly of Elohim's people, four hundred thousand armed men on foot.

The leaders of all of the tribes stationed themselves in an assembly of Elohim's people. All told—four hundred thousand armed men on foot.

20:3

וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ בְנֵי בִנְיָמִן כִּי־עָלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל הַמִּצְפָּה וַיֹּאמְרוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל דַּבְּרוּ אֵיכָה נִהְיָתָה הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת:

The Benyaminites heard that the Israelites had gone up to Mitzpah. The Israelites said, “Tell us how this wicked matter came to be.”

Obviously, word reached the Benyaminites that the Israelites had gone up to Mitzpah. Having gathered, the Israelites turned on the man, “Tell us,” they said, “how this wicked matter came to be.”

20:4

וַיַּעַן הָאִישׁ הַלֵּוִי אִישׁ הָאִשָּׁה הַנִּרְצָחָה וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּבְעָתָה אֲשֶׁר לְבִנְיָמִן בָּאתִי אֵנִי וּפִילִגְשִׁי לְלוּן:

The man answered, the Levite, husband of the slain woman, he said, “To Givah of Benjamin I came, I and my concubine, to stay over.

The man, the Levite, husband of the slain woman, answered. “I came to Givah, of Benjamin, myself and my wife, to lodge there.”

20:5

וַיִּקְמוּ עָלַי בַּעֲלֵי הַגִּבְעָה וַיִּסְבּוּ עָלַי אֶת־הַבֵּית לִילָה אוֹתִי דָמוֹ לְהָרֹג וְאֶת־פִּילִגְשִׁי עָנּוּ וַתָּמֹת:

¹¹⁰ לֹא־נִהְיָתָה וְלֹא־נִרְאָתָה is an awkward turn of phrase that is difficult to translate, in the rendering I opted for a sense of disgust and horror.

“The masters of Givah arose against me, they surrounded the house at night, it was me they made to kill, but they dealt harshly with my concubine, and she died.

“The men of Givah arose against me, they surrounded the house at night, and it was **me**¹¹¹ that they threatened! However, instead, they destroyed my wife, and she died.

20:6

וַאֲחִזוּ בְּפִילְגָשִׁי וַאֲנַתְחָהָ וְאַשְׁלַחְהָ בְּכָל־שָׂדֵה נַחֲלַת יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי עָשׂוּ זָמָה וּנְבִלָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:

“So I took hold of my concubine, and I cut her and sent her to every field of Israel’s territory, for they had committed an abomination and a disgrace in Israel.

“So I took hold of my wife, and I cut her up, and sent her to every field of Israel’s territory. It was **them** who committed an abomination and a disgrace in Israel, not **me**!¹¹²

20:7

הִנֵּה כָּלְכֶם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָבּוּ לָכֶם דָּבָר וְעֲצֶה הֵלֶם:

“Now, all you Israelites, come now- discuss and plan here!”

“Now look, all you Israelites, come and plan what to do about this!”

20:8

וַיָּקָם כָּל־הָעָם כָּאִישׁ אֶחָד לֹאמַר לֹא נָלֵךְ אִישׁ לְאַהֲלָו וְלֹא נָסוּר אִישׁ לְבֵיתוֹ:

All the people rose as one and said, “We shall not go back, each man to his dwelling, and we shall not turn aside, each man to his home.

Suitably outraged, all the people rose as one to say, “We shall not go back home, not one of us, and we will not turn away with thoughts of home

20:9

וְעַתָּה זֶה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה לְגִבְעָה עָלֶיךָ בְּגֹרֶל:

“But now this is what we shall do to Givah, upon it by lot!

[]

20:10

וְלָקַחְנוּ עֲשָׂרָה אָנָשִׁים לְמֵאָה לְכָל שְׁבִטַי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמֵאָה לְאַלְפִי וְאַלְפִי לְרִבְבָּה לְקַחַת צִדָּה לָעַם לַעֲשׂוֹת לְבוֹאֵם לְגִבְעָה בְּנִימָן בְּכָל־הַנְּבִלָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:

“We shall take ten men per hundred from all the tribes of Israel, and a hundred per thousand and a thousand per ten thousand, to fetch provisions for the people, to make ready for their going to Givah in Benjamin on account of the disgrace that was committed in Israel.”

¹¹¹ This emphasizes the transaction of one evil deed for another, equally evil deed.

¹¹² The emphasis gets the man out of the hot water he might otherwise have found himself in.

“We shall take ten men per hundred from all the tribes of Israel by lot,¹¹³ and likewise a hundred per thousand, and a thousand per ten thousand. Those of us chosen will fetch provisions for the people to prepare for riding to Givah in Benjamin to make them answer for this disgrace that was committed here in Israel!”

20:11

וַיֵּאסְפוּ כָּל־אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־הָעִיר כָּאִישׁ אֶחָד חֲבָרִים:

So every man of Israel was gathered to the city, united as one.

So every warrior of Israel gathered to the city, united in one force.

20:12

וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ שְׂבָטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנָשִׁים בְּכָל־שְׂבָטֵי בְנֵימִן לֵאמֹר מָה הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר נִהְיְתָה בָּכֶם:

The tribes of Israel sent men through all the clans of Benjamin, saying “what is this wickedness that has happened among you?

To investigate further, the tribes of Israel sent men through all the clans of Benjamin to ask, “What is this terrible crime that has happened among you?

20:13

וַעֲתָה תָּנוּ אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים בְּנֵי־בְלִיעֵל אֲשֶׁר בְּגִבְעָה וְנִמְיָתָם וְנִבְעָרָה רָעָה מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא אָבוּ בְנֵי בְנֵימִן לְשַׁמֵּעַ בְּקוֹל אֲחֵיהֶם בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל:

“Now give over the worthless men in Givah so we might put them to death and burn the wickedness from Israel.” But the Benjaminites were not willing to listen to the voices of their brothers, the Israelites.

“Surrender the depraved men in Givah so we can put them to death and thereby burn the wickedness from Israel.” But, as we know, one ill turn deserves another,¹¹⁴ and the Benjaminites were not willing to listen to the voices of their kin,¹¹⁵ the Israelites.

20:14

וַיֵּאסְפוּ בְנֵי־בְנֵימִן מִן־הָעָרִים הַגִּבְעָתָה לְצֵאת לִמְלָחְמָה עִם־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

The Benjaminites gathered from their cities to Givah to go out to wage war with the Israelites.

Things spiraled from there, as the Benjaminites came together from their cities to Givah in order to wage war with the Israelites.

20:15

¹¹³ The phrasing in 20:9 is awkward, the verse reads as if there is something missing. In an effort towards coherence, I displaced “by lot” from 20:9 to 20:10.

¹¹⁴ This is the next iteration of the violence, not only was the Levite man willing to exchange one vile act for another, but now the Benjaminites are defending the vile act itself, to the point of war.

¹¹⁵ In this verse, and in other instances, I have substituted “brothers” from “kin,” which I believe is more in line with the intent of the author.

וַיִּתְּפְקְדוּ בְנֵי בִנְיָמִן בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא מִהַעֲרִים עָשָׂרִים וְשִׁשָּׁה אֶלֶף אִישׁ שֶׁלֹּף חֶרֶב לְבַד מִיִּשְׁבֵּי הַגְּבֻעָה הַתְּפֻקְדוֹ שְׁבַע מֵאוֹת אִישׁ בַּחֹר:

The Benjaminites were mustered on that day from the cities: six thousand armed men, apart from the citizens of Givah—they mustered seven hundred select men.

All told, the Benjaminites numbered six thousand armed men. Not even counting the men from Givah, they numbered seven hundred, all fighting fit, mind you.¹¹⁶

20:16

מִכָּל הָעָם הַזֶּה שְׁבַע מֵאוֹת אִישׁ בַּחֹר אִטָּר יְדֵי־יְמִינוֹ כָּל־זֶה קָלַע בָּאֶבֶן אֶל־הַשָּׁעָרָה וְלֹא יִחָטָא:

Of all this people seven hundred were select men who were left-handed, all of these could hurl a stone at a hair without missing.

[¹¹⁷]

20:17

וְאִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל הַתְּפֻקְדוֹ לְבַד מִבְּנֵי־מִן אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אֶלֶף אִישׁ שֶׁלֹּף חֶרֶב כָּל־זֶה אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה:

And the Israelites mustered, apart from Benjamin, four hundred thousand armed men, all of them warriors.

The Israelites mustered, Benjamin excluded, four hundred thousand armed men, each of them warriors.

20:18

וַיִּקְמוּ וַיַּעֲלוּ בֵּית־אֵל וַיִּשְׁאַלוּ בָּאלֹהִים וַיֹּאמְרוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִי יַעֲלֶה־לָנוּ בַתְּחִלָּה לְמִלְחָמָה עִם־בְּנֵי בִנְיָמִן וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה יְהוּדָה בַתְּחִלָּה:

They marched to Beit El and asked of Elohim, the Israelites said, “Who should go up first to war with the Benjaminites?” and YHVH said, “Yehudah first.”

They marched to Beit El to seek counsel from Elohim.¹¹⁸ The Israelites asked, “Who should go up first to war with the Benjaminites?” to which Yah—the Guide—answered, “Begin with Yehudah.”

20:19

וַיָּקוּמוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּבֹּקֶר וַיִּתְּנוּ עַל־הַגְּבֻעָה:

The Israelites arose in the morning and encamped near Givah.

The Israelites arose in the morning where they were encamped near Givah.

20:20

¹¹⁶ This draws the readers back into the narrative, again evoking the conversational, gossipy tone.

¹¹⁷ I do not understand the cultural implications of left-handedness, and I believe that without that cultural knowledge this verse is a distraction from the wider narrative.

¹¹⁸ In several instances in which the Israelites ask God a question, I have chosen to render the action as “seek counsel” rather than “ask,” as that implies an oracle structure of divine discourse.

וַיֵּצֵא אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִלְחָמָה עִם־בְּנֵי־מִן וַיַּעֲרְכוּ אֹתָם אִישׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִלְחָמָה אֶל־הַגִּבְעָה:

The men of Israel went out to war with Benjamin, the men of Israel formed battle ranks at Givah.

The Israelite forces formed ranks as they went out to war with Benjamin.

20:21

וַיֵּצֵאוּ בְנֵי־בְנֵי־מִן מִן־הַגִּבְעָה וַיִּשְׁחִיתוּ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא שְׁנַיִם וְעֶשְׂרִים אֶלֶף אִישׁ אֲרָצָה:

The Benjaminites came out from Givah and struck down twenty-two thousand of the Israelites.

Twenty-two thousand Israelites fell that day to the Benjaminites who struck out from Givah. Their mothers, behind lattices, lamented.¹¹⁹

20:22

וַיִּתְחַזַּק הָעָם אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּסְפוּ לַעֲרֹךְ מִלְחָמָה בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־עָרְכוּ שָׁם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן:

The people, the men of Israel, rallied, and persisted in drawing up battle ranks in the place where they had drawn ranks on the first day.

The Israelites rallied and formed ranks again.

20:23

וַיַּעֲלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּבְכוּ לִפְנֵי־יְהוָה עַד־הָעֶרֶב וַיִּשְׁאַלּוּ בְּיְהוָה לֵאמֹר הֲאִסִּיף לְגִשָּׁת לְמִלְחָמָה עִם־בְּנֵי־בְנֵי־מִן אֲחֵי וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה עָלוּ אֵלָיו:

The Israelites ascended and wept before YHVH until the evening, and asked of YHVH, “Should we persist to join in battle with the Benjaminites, our brothers?” and YHVH answered, “Go up against them.”

Meanwhile, some of the Israelites went up to weep before Yah—the Unyielding—They sought counsel, asking, “Should we continue to wage war with the Benjaminites, our kin?” and Yah—the Warrior—replied that the war should continue.

20:24

וַיִּקְרְבוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־בְּנֵי־בְנֵי־מִן בַּיּוֹם הַשֵּׁנִי:

The Israelites advanced upon the Benjaminites on the second day.

So the Israelites advanced upon the Benjaminites again on the second day.

20:25

וַיֵּצֵא בְנֵי־מִן לִקְרֹאתָם מִן־הַגִּבְעָה בַּיּוֹם הַשֵּׁנִי וַיִּשְׁחִיתוּ בְּבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹד שְׁמֹנֶת עָשָׂר אֶלֶף אִישׁ אֲרָצָה כָּל־אִלָּה שְׁלֹפֵי חֶרֶב:

The Benjaminites went out to greet them from Givah on the second day, and they struck down an additional eighteen thousand Israelites, all of them armed men.

¹¹⁹ This addition serves to connect Judges 4-5 with Judges 20, to remind readers of the impact of war even when it is described in this manner, rather than with the emotional quality of Judges 4-5.

Eighteen thousand Israelites, each one a warrior, fell that day to the Benyaminites who struck out from Givah.

20:26

וַיַּעֲלוּ כָל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָל־הָעָם וַיָּבֹאוּ בֵּית־אֵל וַיִּכְּבוּ וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וַיִּצְוּמוּ בַּיּוֹם־הַהוּא עַד־הָעֶרֶב וַיַּעֲלוּ עֹלוֹת וַיִּשְׁלְמוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה:

All the Israelites, the entire people, went up and came to Beit El, they wept and sat there before YHVH. They fasted that day until the evening and offered burnt offerings and well-being offerings before YHVH.

Desperately, the Israelites went up again to Beit El. They wept and fasted there until evening and offered sacrifices before Yah—the Guide.¹²⁰

20:27

וַיִּשְׁאַלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּיהוָה וַשֵּׁם אֲרוֹן בְּרִית הָאֱלֹהִים בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם:

The Israelites asked of YHVH—the ark of the covenant of Elohim was there in those days,

The Israelites sought counsel from Yah—the Guide, the ark of the covenant of Elohim was there back then,

20:28

וּפִינָחָס בֶּן־אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן־אַהֲרֹן עָמַד לִפְנֵי בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם לֵאמֹר הָאִסֹּף עוֹד לְצֹאת לַמִּלְחָמָה עִם־בְּנֵי־בְנִימִן אָחִי אִם־אֶחָדָל וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה עָלוּ כִּי מָחָר אֶתְּנֶנּוּ בְיָדְךָ:

And Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon stood before Him in those days saying, “Should we persist again to go out to war with the Benyaminites, our brothers, or should we desist?” and YHVH said, “Go up, for tomorrow I will give them over to you.”

And Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon stood before Him in those days. The Israelites asked, “Must¹²¹ we continue to wage war with the Benyaminites, or can we desist?” But Yah—the Tenacious—replied, “Continue, for tomorrow I will give them over to you.”

20:29

וַיִּשֶׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל אַרְבִּים אֶל־הַגְּבֻעָה סָבִיב:

So Israel set ambushes all around Givah.

Cleverly, the Israelites laid ambushes all around Givah.

20:30

וַיַּעֲלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־בְּנֵי בְנִימִן בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וַיַּעֲרֹכוּ אֶל־הַגְּבֻעָה כָּפְעָם בְּכָפְעָם:

¹²⁰ I chose to slim down some of the detail-heavy verses in Judges 20 for the sake of a clearer narrative, which can otherwise get a little confusing. I want the narrative and the violence within it to be readable and accessible.

¹²¹ There is a desperation to cease the violence that I sense in this repeated request, but the point of the narrative is to depict the consequences of violence, so the violence continues.

The Israelites went up against the Benyaminites on the third day, drawing ranks at Givah as they had each time before.

The Israelites formed ranks at Givah once more on the third day, as they had before.

20:31

וַיֵּצְאוּ בְנֵי-בִנְיָמִן לִקְרַאת הָעָם הַנִּתְקָו מִן-הָעִיר וַיִּחַלּוּ לְהַכּוֹת מִהָעָם חֲלָלִים כָּפְעָם כָּפְעָם בַּמַּסְלוֹת אֲשֶׁר אָחַז עֲלֶיהָ בֵּית-אֵל וְאֶחָת גְּבַעְתָּהּ בַּשָּׂדֶה בְּשִׁלְשִׁים אִישׁ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:

The Benyaminites went out to greet the people, they were pulled away from the city. The people began to be slain as they had each time before,¹²² in the pathways—one of which goes up to Beit El, and another to Givah—in the field, about thirty men from Israel.

When the Benyaminites went out to battle, they began to cut down Israelites as they had the previous days, but slowly they were pulled away from the city onto the pathways that went to Beit El and to Givah.

20:32

וַיֹּאמְרוּ בְנֵי בִנְיָמִן נִגְפִים הֵם לִפְנֵינוּ כְּבָרְאֲשֻׁנָּה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אָמְרוּ נָנוּסָה וְנִתְקַנּוּהוּ מִן-הָעִיר אֶל-הַמַּסְלוֹת:

The Benyaminites thought,¹²³ “They shall be stricken before us like the first time” but the Israelites thought, “We shall flee and draw them away from the city to the pathways.”

The Benyaminites thought that surely the Israelites would be struck down before them as they had been before, but the Israelites planned to flee, drawing them from the city towards the pathways.

20:33

וְכָל אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל קָמוּ מִמְּקוֹמוֹ וַיַּעֲרְכוּ כְּבַעַל תָּמָר וְאֶרֶב יִשְׂרָאֵל מִגִּישׁ מִמְּקוֹמוֹ מִמַּעֲרָה גְּבַע:

And every man of Israel got up from his position and arranged themselves in Baal Tamar, the Israelite ambush burst forth from its position at Maareh Gavah.

The Israelites positioned themselves, and the Israelite ambush burst forth from Maareh Gavah toward Baal Tamar.

20:34

וַיָּבֹאוּ מֵאֵלֶּה לְגִבְעָה עֶשְׂרֵת אֲלָפִים אִישׁ בְּחֹר מִכָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהַמְלָחָמָה כְּבֹדָה וְהֵם לֹא יָדְעוּ כִּי-נִגְעַת עָלֵיהֶם הָרָעָה:

Ten thousand select men from all Israel came from the south to Givah, and the battle was grievous. They did not know that wickedness reached out to them.

¹²² The violence in Judges 20 is described in an almost rote way, which is so distant from how Yael's violence is depicted. This illustrates how desensitization to this kind of violence can lead to an acceptance of violence as routine.

¹²³ The root אמר can mean both “said” and “thought” in Hebrew.

Ten thousand elite men from Israel came from the south to Givah and waged a grievous battle. []

20:35

וַיִּגְדֹּף יְהוָה אֶת־בְּנֵי־מִנְיָן לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּשְׁחָתוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּבְנֵי־מִנְיָן בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא עֲשָׂרִים וְחַמְשָׁה אֶלֶף וּמֵאָה אִישׁ כָּל־אַלֶּה שְׁלָף־קֶרֶב:

YHVH smote the Benyaminites before Israel, the Israelites destroyed the Benyaminites on that day, twenty-five thousand and one hundred men, all of them armed.

Yah—the Warrior—smote the Benyaminites before Israel. Twenty-five thousand Benyaminites were destroyed that day, each one of them a warrior.

20:36

וַיֵּרְאוּ בְנֵי־בְנֵי־מִנְיָן כִּי נִגְפוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ אִישׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵל מְקוֹם לְבְנֵי־מִנְיָן כִּי בָטְחוּ אֶל־הָאֹרֶב אֲשֶׁר־שָׂמוּ אֶל־הַגְּבֻעָה:

The Benyaminites saw that they were smitten. The men of Israel had given over a position to Benjamin, for they relied on the ambush that had been placed near Givah.

The Benyaminites saw that they had been beaten, but the Israelites had given up some of their position, relying on the ambush near Givah.

20:37

וְהָאֹרֶב הַחִישׁוּ וַיִּפְשְׁטוּ אֶל־הַגְּבֻעָה וַיִּמְשְׁדוּ הָאֹרֶב וַיִּדּוּ אֶת־כָּל־הָעִיר לִפְי־קֶרֶב:

And the ambush quickly raided Givah, the ambush drew out and struck the entire city with the sword.

The ambush devastated Givah, striking the entire city by the sword.

20:38

וְהַמּוֹעֵד הָיָה לְאִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל עִם־הָאֹרֶב הָרֶב לְהַעֲלוֹתָם מִשָּׂאת הָעֶשֶׂן מִן־הָעִיר:

There was an appointed time between the men of Israel and the ambush—when a huge column of smoke was sent up from the city

At an appointed time, a huge column of smoke went up from the city.

20:39

וַיִּהְיוּ אִישׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמַלְחָמָה וּבְנֵי־מִנְיָן הִחֵל לְהַכּוֹת חֲלָלִים בְּאִישׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּשְׁלֹשִׁים אִישׁ כִּי אָמְרוּ אִם נִגְדֹּף נִגְדֹּף הוּא לִפְנֵינוּ כַּמַּלְחָמָה הָרִאשׁוֹנָה:

The men of Israel were to turn around in the battle. Benjamin had begun by killing about thirty men of Israel, and they thought, “They shall surely be stricken before us like the first battle.”

The Israelites, seeing the signal, knew it was time to turn the tides. The Benyaminites had gained some ground, killing around thirty Israelites, and began to think that the Israelites would fall before them as they had previously.

20:40

והמשאית החלה לעלות מן העיר עמוד עשן ויפן בנימין אחריו והנה עלה כליל העיר השממה:

But when the column began to rise from the city, the pillar of smoke, Benjamin turned around and beheld the entire city burning up to the sky!

But as the column, that pillar of smoke, rose from the city, the Benyaminites turned around and saw the entire city being put to the blaze!

20:41

ואיש ישראל הפך ויבהל איש בנימין כי ראה כי נגעה עליו הרעה:

The men of Israel turned around, and the men of Benjamin were disturbed, for they saw that the wickedness had reached out to them.

[]

20:42

ויפנו לפני איש ישראל אל־דרך המדבר והמלחמה הדביקהו ואשר מהערים משחיתים אותו בתוכו:

They turned from the men of Israel along the road to the wilderness, where the battle overtook them, and those that were from the cities were destroying them within it.

The Benyaminites turned to flee along the road to the wilderness, but the battle overtook them []

20:43

פתרו את בנימין הרדיפהו מנוחה הדריכהו עד נכח הגבעה ממזרח־שמש:

They surrounded Benjamin and chased them to Menuchah leading them opposite to Givah on the east.

The Israelites surrounded Benjamin, and chased them to Menuchah []

20:44

ויפלו מבנימין שמנה־עשר אלף איש את־כל־אנשי־חיל:

Eighteen thousand fell from Benjamin, all of them valorous men.

Eighteen thousand men fell from Benjamin, each one of them were men of valor.

20:45

ויפנו ויגסו המדברה אל־סלע הרמון ויעללהו במסלות חמשת אלפים איש וידביקו אחריו עד־גדעם ויכו ממנו אלפים איש:

They turned and fled to the wilderness, to the Rock of Rimon, but they dealt severely with them on the roads, five thousand men, and clung to them until Gidom, and slew two thousand of their men.

Those that remained turned and fled to the wilderness, to the Rock of Rimon, and they were destroyed on the roads.¹²⁴ The Israelites clung to them all the way to Gidom, and two thousand more of their men fell.

20:46

וַיְהִי כָּל־הַנִּפְּלִים מִבְּנֵימִן עֲשָׂרִים וְחֲמִשָּׁה אֶלֶף אִישׁ שָׁלַף חֶרֶב בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת־כָּל־אַלֶּה אֲנָשֵׁי־חֵיל:

So all the fallen from Benjamin on that day came to twenty-five thousand, all of them armed men, and all of them valorous men.

As you can imagine, it was a bloody fight. All told, twenty-five thousand Benyaminites died that day, each of them were men of valor.

20:47

וַיִּפְּנוּ וַיָּגִסּוּ הַמִּדְבָּרָה אֶל־סֶלַע הָרִמּוֹן שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ וַיָּשָׁבוּ בְּסֶלַע רִמּוֹן אַרְבָּעָה חֳדָשִׁים:

But six hundred men turned and fled to the wilderness, to the Rock of Rimon, and they stayed at the Rock of Rimon for four months.

A remnant of six hundred men fled to the wilderness, to the Rock of Rimon, and they stayed there for four months.

20:48

וְאִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל שָׁבוּ אֶל־בְּנֵי בִנְיָמִן וַיַּכּוּם לַפִּי־חֶרֶב מֵעִיר מָתָם עַד־בְּהֶמָּה עַד כָּל־הַנִּמְצָא גַם כָּל־הָעָרִים הַנִּמְצָאוֹת שָׁלְחוּ בָאֵשׁ:

The men of Israel went back to the Benyaminites and struck them all with the sword—entire cities, even cattle, everything that could be found. They set fire to all the cities they could find.

It wasn't enough, so the Israelites went back and struck down every remaining Benyaminite in the cities by the sword, even cattle, anything and anyone. Every Benyaminite city was put to the blaze.

21:1

וְאִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל נִשְׁבַּע בַּמִּצְפָּה לֵאמֹר אִישׁ מִמֶּנּוּ לֹא־יִתֵּן בָּתּוֹ לְבָנִימִן לְאִשָּׁה:

The men of Israel had sworn at Mitzpah: "No man among us shall give his daughter to Benjamin as a wife."

As a result of the unpleasantness, the men of Israel had sworn at Mitzpah: "No man among us shall allow his daughter to be the wife of a Benyaminite."

21:2

וַיָּבֹא הָעָם בֵּית־אֵל וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם עַד־הָעֶרֶב לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּשְׁאוּ קוֹלָם וַיִּבְכּוּ בְּכִי גָדוֹל:

The people came to Beit El and sat there until the evening before Elohim, they rose their voices and wept a great cry.

¹²⁴ This is the same term used to describe what the men did with the wife in Judges 19.

The people went to Beit El and sat there until the evening before Elohim, their voices rose up as they wept bitterly.

21:3

וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָמָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵיטָה זֹאת בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל לְהַפְקֵד הַיּוֹם מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל שְׁבֵט אֶחָד:

They said, “Why, YHVH, God of Israel, has this happened in Israel, that today one tribe must be missing from Israel?”

They lamented, “Why has this happened in Israel, oh Yah—the Understanding—why must we feel the loss of a tribe from Israel?”¹²⁵

21:4

וַיְהִי מִמָּחָרֶת וַיִּשְׁכְּמוּ הָעָם וַיִּבְנוּ־שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ וַיַּעֲלוּ עֹלוֹת וַשְּׁלָמִים:

The people got up early the following day, and they built an altar there, and offered burnt offerings and well-being offerings.

The community rose early the following day, built an altar there, and sacrificed burnt offerings and wellbeing offerings.

21:5

וַיֹּאמְרוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָלָה בְּקִהָל מִכָּל־שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יְהוָה כִּי הִשְׁבוּעָה הַגְּדוֹלָה הֵיטָה לְאִשָּׁר לֹא־עָלָה אֵל־יְהוָה הַמִּצְפָּה לֵאמֹר מוֹת יוּמָת:

The Israelites said, “Is there anyone who did not offer in the community, from all the tribes of Israel, to YHVH?” For a great oath had been made about any who did not offer to YHVH at Mitzpah, saying “he shall surely die.”

The Israelites schemed, “Is there anyone in the community, from all the tribes of Israel, who did not bring an offering to Yah—the Remarkable—for an oath had been made saying that any who did not offer to Yah—the Remarkable—at Mitzpah would surely die.

21:6

וַיִּנְחָמוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־בְּנֵי־מִנַּחֵם וַיֹּאמְרוּ נִגְדַע הַיּוֹם שְׁבֵט אֶחָד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל:

The Israelites pitied the Benyaminites, their brothers, and said, “Today one tribe has been cut off from Israel.

The Israelites pitied the Benyaminites, they were kin, after all, and observed, “Today one tribe has been cut off from Israel.

21:7

מִה־נַּעֲשֶׂה לָהֶם לְנוֹתָרִים לְנָשִׁים וְאִנְחָנוּ נִשְׁבַּעְנוּ בַּיהוָה לְבָלְתִּי תַת־לָהֶם מִבְּנוֹתֵינוּ לְנָשִׁים:

“What shall we do for those who are left for wives? For we swore to YHVH not to give them our daughters as wives.”

¹²⁵ This is an interpretive translation which is meant to humanize the inquiry.

“What shall we do for those who are left without wives? We swore to Yah—the Witness—not to give them our daughters as wives.”

21:8

וַיֹּאמְרוּ מִי אֶחָד מִלְּשָׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָלָה אֶל־יְהוָה הַמִּצְפָּה וְהִנֵּה לֹא בָא־אִישׁ אֶל־הַמִּתְּחֵנָה מִיְּבֵישׁ גִּלְעָד אֶל־הַקָּהָל:

They said, “Is there anyone from the tribes of Israel that did not go offer to YHVH at Mitzpah?” And look, no one from the camp of Yaveish Gilad has come to the community.

They schemed, “Is there anyone from the tribes of Israel that did not bring an offering to Yah—the Remarkable—at Mitzpah?” and it just so happened that no one from the camp of Yaveish Gilad had come with the community.

21:9

וַיִּתְּפְקֹד הָעָם וְהִנֵּה אֵין־שָׁם אִישׁ מִיְּבֵישׁ גִּלְעָד:

The people were mustered and saw that no one was there from the citizens of Yaveish Gilad.

The people formed ranks and realized that no one was there from the citizens of Yaveish Gilad.

21:10

וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ־נָשָׁם הָעֵדָה שְׁנָיִם־עָשָׂר אֶלְף אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי הַחַיִּל וַיִּצְווּ אוֹתָם לֵאמֹר לְכוּ וְהַפִּיתֶם אֶת־יְיֹשְׁבֵי יְבֵשׁ גִּלְעָד לַפִּי־חֶרֶב וְהַנָּשִׁים וְהַטָּף:

The assembly sent twelve thousand men, valorous men, there, and commanded them, “Go and strike the citizens of Yaveish Gilad by sword, and the women and the little ones.

As we know, one ill turn deserves another,¹²⁶ so the assembly sent twelve thousand men there, men of valor, and commanded them, “Go and strike down the citizens of Yaveish Gilad by sword, even the women and children!

21:11

וְזֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשׂוּ כָל־זָכָר וְכָל־אִשָּׁה יָדַעַת מִשְׁכַּב־זָכָר תִּמְרִימוּ:

“This is what you shall do: every male and every woman who has experienced sexual relations with a man, exterminate them.”

“Follow these orders: Exterminate every man, and every woman who has had sexual intercourse with a man.”¹²⁷

21:12

¹²⁶ Following the war and the oath against providing wives to the Benyaminites, the violence still persists, this time as an excuse to plunder women.

¹²⁷ Again, there is a euphemism in the Hebrew that I am denying in both the translation and the rendering to avoid any confusion.

וַיִּמְצְאוּ מִיּוֹשֵׁבֵי יָבִישׁ גִּלָּד אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת נַעֲרָה בְּתוּלָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־נִדְעָה אִישׁ לְמִשְׁכַּב זָכָר וַיָּבִיאוּ אוֹתָם אֶל־הַמִּחָנֶה שְׁלֹה אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן:

They found among the citizens of Yaveish Gilad four hundred young maiden women who had not had sexual relations with a man, and brought them to the camp of Shiloh, that was in the land of Canaan.

Among the citizens of Yaveish Gilad they found four hundred young maidens who had not had sexual intercourse with a man, and they brought them to the camp in Shiloh, which was in the land of Canaan.

21:13

וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ כָל־הָעֵדָה וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֶל־בְּנֵי בִנְיָמִן אֲשֶׁר בְּסָלַע רִמּוֹן וַיִּקְרָאוּ לָהֶם שְׁלוֹם:

The whole assembly sent word to the Benyaminites who were at the Rock of Rimón, calling to them in peace.

The entire community sent word to the Benyaminites, who were at the Rock of Rimón, calling a truce.

21:14

וַיָּשָׁב בִּנְיָמִן בָּעֵת הַהִיא וַיִּתְּנוּ לָהֶם הַנָּשִׁים אֲשֶׁר חָיו מִנָּשִׁי יָבִישׁ גִּלָּד וְלֹא־מִצְאוּ לָהֶם כֶּן:

At that time, Benjamin returned, and they gave them the women that lived from the women of Yaveish Gilad, but they were not found fitting.

So Benjamin returned, and the Israelites gave them the remaining women, the maidens from Yaveish Gilad, but there were not enough of them.

21:15

וְהָעָם נָחַם לְבִנְיָמִן כִּי־עָשָׂה יְהוָה פְּרִץ בְּשִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

The people pitied Benjamin, for YHVH had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.

The community pitied Benjamin, for Yah—the Divider—had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.

21:16

וַיֹּאמְרוּ זִקְנֵי הָעֵדָה מִה־נַּעֲשֶׂה לְנוֹתָרִים לְנָשִׁים כִּי־נִשְׁמְדָה מִבְּנֵימִן אִשָּׁה:

The elders of the assembly said, “What shall we do for those who remain for wives, for the women of Benjamin have been destroyed?”

The elders of the assembly pondered. “What wives shall we provide for those who remain?” They wondered, “for the women of Benjamin have been destroyed.”

21:17

וַיֹּאמְרוּ יְרֻשַׁת פְּלִיטָה לְבִנְיָמִן וְלֹא־יִמָּחָה שְׁבֶט מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל:

They said, “Let there be an enduring inheritance for Benjamin, so that a tribe is not wiped out from Israel.

They relented, “Let there be an enduring inheritance for Benjamin, so that a tribe is not wiped out from Israel.

21:18

וַאֲנַחְנוּ לֹא נוּכַל לְתַת־לָהֶם נָשִׁים מִבָּנוֹתֵינוּ כִּי־נִשְׁפָּעוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאִמֹּר אָרוּר נָתַן אִשָּׁה לְבִנְיָמִן:

“But we are not able to give them wives from our daughters, for the Israelites had sworn, saying ‘cursed be any who give a wife to Benjamin!’”¹²⁸

“However, we cannot give them our daughters as wives, for the Israelites had sworn that anyone who gave a wife to Benjamin would be cursed!

21:19

וַיֹּאמְרוּ הֵנָּה חֲגִי'הֶנָּה בְּשֵׁלוֹ מִיָּמִים יְמִימָהּ אֲשֶׁר מִצְפוֹנָה לְבֵית־אֵל מִזְרָחָהּ הַשָּׁמֶשׁ לְמִסְלָהּ הָעֹלָה מִבֵּית־אֵל שְׂכֶמָה וּמִנֶּגֶב לְלִבְנָה:

They said, “Look, the festival of YHVH at Shiloh is happening now.”—this was north of Beit El, east of the pathway that goes up from Beit El to Shechem, and south to Levonah.

“Hmmm,” they schemed. “The festival of Yah—the Provider—at Shiloh is happening now.”
[]

21:20

וַיִּצְווּ אֶת־בְּנֵי בִנְיָמִן לֵאמֹר לְכוּ וְאַרְבָּתֶם בְּכַרְמִים:

They commanded the Benyaminites, saying, “Go and wait in ambush in the vineyards.

“Go and wait in ambush in the vineyards,” they instructed the Benyaminites. As we know, one ill turn deserves another.¹²⁹

21:21

וּרְאִיתֶם וְהִנֵּה אִם־יֵצְאוּ בָנוֹת־שִׁילֹה לְחֹל בְּמַחְלוֹת וַיִּצְאָתֶם מִן־הַכְּרָמִים וְחִטַּפְתֶּם לָכֶם אִישׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ מִבָּנוֹת שִׁילֹה וְהִלַּכְתֶּם אֶרֶץ בִּנְיָמִן:

“And when you see the girls of Shiloh going out to whirl in dances, go out from the vineyards. Each of you seize a wife from the girls of Shiloh and go to the land of Benjamin.

¹²⁸ I believe a critical voice like Exum would interpret these repeated reminders of the oath as a method for men to enact violence against women, that the oath is simply an excuse. However, I would argue that it is less specific, and instead it is an artificial problem that is maintained in order for a specific group of people to continue to carry out their own will over anyone else’s, as well as an opportunity to carry out violence.

¹²⁹ This is another iteration of the violence that has led to the Benyaminites being without wives, this violence occurs without the pretext of war, and is instead just the blatant theft of women from their home.

“When you see the girls of Shiloh going out to whirl in their dances, emerge from the vineyards. That way, each of you may seize a wife from the girls of Shiloh and can go to the land of Benjamin.

21:22

וְהָיָה כִּי־יָבֹאוּ אֲבוֹתָם אוֹ אֶחָיָהֶם לְרִיב אֵלֵינוּ וְאֶמְרָנוּ אֲלֵיהֶם חַנּוּנוּ אוֹתָם כִּי לֹא לָקַחְנוּ אִישׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ בַּמִּלְחָמָה כִּי לֹא אָתָם נָתַתָּם לָהֶם כָּעֵת תְּאֻשְׁמוּ:

“And when their fathers or their brothers come to quarrel with us, we shall say to them ‘Have pity on them, for we could not take a wife for each man due to the war, and you could not have given them like this without being guilty.’”

“Then we will be blameless, and when their fathers and brothers come to us for recompense, we might say ‘have pity on them, for they went without wives due to the war, and you could not have knowingly given your daughters over without guilt!’”

21:23

וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־כֵן בְּנֵי בִנְיָמִן וַיִּשְׂאוּ נָשִׁים לַמִּסְפָּרָם מִן־הַמְחַלְלוֹת אֲשֶׁר גָּזְלוּ וַיָּלְכוּ וַיָּשׁוּבוּ אֶל־נַחֲלָתָם וַיִּבְנוּ אֶת־הָעָרִים וַיָּשְׁבוּ בָהֶם:

The Benyaminites did so, they took up wives from the number of the whirlers that they plundered, and they went and returned to their territory, and they built the cities and settled in them.

So the Benyaminites did just that. They took up wives from the girls who danced, whom they plundered, and with them they returned to their territory, built the cities back up, and settled in them.

21:24

וַיִּתְהַלְכוּ מִשָּׁם בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּעֵת הַהִיא אִישׁ לְשִׁבְטוֹ וּלְמִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ וַיֵּצְאוּ מִשָּׁם אִישׁ לְנַחֲלָתוֹ:

The Israelites went about from there at that time, each man to his own tribe and his own family, each man went out to his own territory.

From there, the Israelites scattered, each man to his own tribe and to his own family, each man to his own territory.

21:25

בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם אֵין מֶלֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ הָיָה עֹשֶׂה בְּעֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה:

In those days there was no king in Israel, and each man did what was right in his own eyes.

After all, in those days there was no king in Israel, and each man did what was right in his own eyes.

THE READER'S VERSION

This version of the rendering is designed to be read aloud. The lacunae have been shortened and the verses are unmarked to allow for ease of reading. The verses are also structured in a more poetic format, which can guide the performer as they read. This line breaks are based either on the disjunctives found within the Masoretic text, or are designed to suit the creative additions in the rendering.

JUDGES 4-5

As you know,
 Yah—the Enlightened—disapproved of how the Israelites behaved,
 What with Ehud then being dead.
 Yah—the Ultimate—gave them over to King Yavin of Canaan,
 He ruled in Chatzor.
 Sisera was his commander,
 Who was based in Charoshet HaGoyim
 Sisera has brutally quelled the Israelites for twenty years,
 The Israelites cried out to Yah—the Merciful,
 For Sisera had nine hundred iron chariots.
 So Dvorah—a woman, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidot,
 She was the leader in Israel at that time.
 The Israelites would go to her for adjudications,
 In those days she would sit beneath Dvorah's Palm,
 Between Ramah and Beit El, in the hill country of Ephraim.
 She summoned Barak, son of Avinoam, from Kedesh in Naftali.
 She fixed him with a steely glare. "Why haven't you left?
 Hasn't Yah—the Commander—the God of Israel, ordered you to go and march
 on Mount Tavor,
 With 10,000 men from Naftali and Zebulun?
 "Perhaps I should be the one to draw out Sisera, Yavin's commander to you at the
 Kishon River, with all his chariots and his forces,
 Perhaps I shall give him over to **you!**"
 Barak waveringly replied, "If you go with me, I will go,
 But if you do not go with me, I cannot do it."
 "Very well," she said. "I will certainly go with you, but there will be no renown for you
 by this road.
 When Yah—the Deliverer—gives over Sisera, it will be into a woman's hands."
 So, of course, Dvorah went with Barak to Kedesh.

Barak rallied ten thousand men from Zebulun and Naftali to go up on foot
And with him went Dvorah.

A short ways away, Chever the Kenite parted from the rest of the clan,
They were descendants of Chovav, the father in law of Moses.

Chever laid out his tent near the oak in Tza'ananim, which was near Kedesh.
Meanwhile, Sisera heard tell that Barak, son of Avinoam, had gone up to Mount Tavor.
Sisera rallied all 900 of his iron chariots, and all the forces that were with him,
From Charoshet HaGoyim to the Kishon River.

Seeing this, Dvorah urged Barak. "Get up! For this very day Yah—the Deliverer—will
hand over Sisera to you.

Don't you know that Yah—the Warrior—strikes out before you?"

So Barak descended from Mount Tavor with his 20,000 men.

As promised, Yah—the Warrior—threw Sisera, with his chariots and his troops, into
disarray by Barak's sword.

For his own part, in the midst of the commotion,
Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot.

But Barak pursued his chariot and all Sisera's troops all the way to Charoshet
HaGoyim.

Sisera's entire army fell to the sword,
As you might imagine,
There were no survivors.

Sisera fled on foot until he reached the tent of Yael, the wife of Chever the Kenite.

There was good will between King Yavin of Chatzor and Chever the Kenite's
family.

Yael went out to call to Sisera. She said to him, "Turn aside, my lord. Turn aside to me,
do not fear."

He indeed turned aside to her, into her tent no less, and she covered him with a
blanket.

"Please, give me just a little water, for I am parched," he begged her.

So what does Yael do?

She opened up a skin of milk, let him drink his fill, and covered him again.

"Stand at the entrance of the tent," he said to her,

Far more concerned by what happened outside the tent
Rather than within it.

"and if a man comes and asks you if there is a man inside...say there is not."

Yael, the wife of Chever, took a tent peg in one hand, and the hammer in the other. She
approached Sisera,

And she drove the tent peg through his skull, and **slammed** him into the ground.
He fell, spent and exhausted, to **death**!

Barak continued to fruitlessly pursue Sisera. Still reeling, Yael went to call to him.

"Come here," she insisted, "I will show you the man you seek."

He went to her and beheld his quarry, Sisera, fallen dead,
With the tent peg still in his skull.

On that day, Elohim subdued King Yavin of Canaan before the Israelites.

Bit by bit, the Israelites crushed King Yavin of Canaan,
Until they destroyed him.
Dvorah retold the story with Barak, son of Avinoam,
Together they sang on that day—
When locks are let loose in Israel,
When a dedicated people bless Yah—the Guardian!
Listen, O kings! Give ear, O high officials!
I, myself, sing to Yah—the Glorious,
I praise Yah—the Almighty—the God of Israel.
Yah—the Surveyor—when you came out from Seir, when you strode across the field of
Edom,
The earth shook, the skies dripped, even the very clouds were distilled into
water.
Mountains, even yonder Sinai, were nothing before Yah—the All-Encompassing,
Before Yah—the Almighty—the God of Israel.
[
Pathways were cut short in the days of Yael,
Travelers went by crooked paths.
There were no leaders in Israel, none at all,
Until Dvorah arose, until a mother arose for Israel.
[
[
Awake, awake, Dvorah! Awake, awake, and sing the song!
Get up, Barak, take your captives, son of Avinoam!
[
[
From the heavens they waged war
Even the stars in their courses waged war with Sisera!
[
[
And surely, Yael, wife of Chever the Kenite, is the most remarkable,
Of the homemakers she is the most superb.
When he asked simply for water, she gave him milk,
Presented in her finest dish she provided precious curds.
All the while, she reached out her hand for the tent peg, her right hand for a
homemaker's hammer,
She hammered **Sisera**! She crushed his head! She shattered him! She pierced
his temple!
At her feet he slumped, he fell, he dropped, he died,
There, where he knelt, was where he fell, **decimated**.
[
Miles away, in a far-off chamber, surrounded by her maids
She gazes through the window. She laments from behind the lattice.
“Why don't his chariots come? Why can't I hear the hoofbeats of his horses?”

Asks the mother of Sisera.
A hand on her shoulder, the wisest of her ladies searches for words,
And answers.
“Surely they’ll be finding and dividing the spoils, won’t they? There’ll be a maiden,
even two maidens, for each warrior! A spoil of dyed spools to your boy, a spoil of
embroidered goods for your Sisera,
A pair of embroidered cloths around his neck.
[]
Thus may all your enemies perish, Yah—the Judge—may your loved ones be like the
rising sun in might,
And so the land was at rest for 40 years.

JUDGES 19-21

This all happened when there was no king in Israel.
It just so happened that there was a Levite man who dwelt way over on the far side of
the hill country of Ephraim. He went and married a woman from Beit Lechem in
Yehudah.
Things did not go well. They weren’t happy. It got worse.
And you can never be sure what really happened in situations like this, but
eventually
she did what she needed to do to get out of there.
She asserted her independence, and up and left him. She went to her father’s house, to
Beit Lechem in Yehudah,
And she stayed there for four months.
Eventually, her husband went after her. Things would be different, he insisted. He tried
to bring her home. He brought a servant with him, and a couple of donkeys.
For her part, she brought him into her father’s house, and when her father saw
him, he
was pleased to greet him.
The man’s father in law, who was the father of the young woman did not want to let her
out of his sight just yet, and prevailed upon the man, so he stayed with him three days.
They feasted together, and stayed over there.
On the fourth day, the party rose early in the morning and prepared to go,
But the young woman’s father said to his son in law,
“Have just a bite to eat before you go.”
So the pair of them sat and ate together,
And the father of the young woman said to the man,
“Why don’t you just stay here and enjoy yourselves?
Things might be better if you just took your time.”
The man prepared to go,
But his father in law urged him, so he remained and stayed over there.
On the fifth day, he rose early in the morning to go, but the father of the young woman
said, “Please, strengthen your heart.” They tarried and the day passed,

So the pair of them ate.
The man got up to leave, he and his wife and his servant,
But his father in law, the father of the young woman, protested again.
“Look,” he said, “The day has already faded into evening. You should all stay here.
Look how late it’s gotten already. Stay here, and enjoy yourselves,
And you can all rise early tomorrow to get on the road back to your home.”
But the man refused to stay over. He left, and they traveled on until they drew near Yebus, which was Yerushalayim.
With him were his pair of saddled donkeys,
And also his wife.
They were near Yebus, and the sun was sinking beyond the horizon.
The servant said to his master,
“Come along, let us go to this city of the Yebusites to lodge for the night.”
But his master replied “we will not turn aside to some foreign city here that is not of the Israelites.
No, we shall pass through it to Givah.”
“Come along,” he said to his servant. “Let us draw near one of these places,
We will stay over in Givah or in Ramah.”
So they passed by, and the sun set fully as they approached Givah, which is of Benjamin.
They turned aside there,
And went to lodge in Givah.
The man went and sat in the square,
And, tellingly, no one took them in.
However, an old man came from his work in the fields in the evening. Now, to be clear, this particular man lived in Givah,
Where the Benyaminites dwelled,
But he was from the hill country of Ephraim.
He looked up and saw the wayfaring man in the town square.
The old man said to him,
“Where are you going? And where do you come from?”
He said to him, “We are passing through from Beit Lechem in Yehudah to the far side of the hill country of Ephraim. I am from there. I went to Beit Lechem in Yehudah,
And I now travel to the house of Yah—the Restorer,
But no one has taken me in.
“We have everything we need, even straw and fodder for our donkeys, and of course food and wine for me, for your maidservant here, and for the servant,
Over with your servants.”
The old man said, “Let me take on all your needs so you might be at peace,
But do not stay overnight in the square!”
So he brought him to his house, and mixed feed for the donkeys,
And they washed their feet, ate, and drank.

They enjoyed themselves. But soon, the men of the city, a depraved lot, surrounded the home and pounded on the door.

They said to the man, the master of the house, the old man,
“Bring out that man that you brought to your home,
So we might rape him.”

The man, the master of the house, went out to them. “My brothers, do not do this evil deed. Do not, please!” He said to them.

“Since this man has come into my house, do not commit this disgrace.
“Look, here is my virgin daughter, and here is the man’s wife! Please, let me bring them out, use them to do what you see fit,

But do not commit this disgrace to this man.”
As we know, one ill turn deserves another.

The men were not willing to listen to him, so the man seized his wife and threw her outside to the crowd.

They raped her,
And destroyed her all night until morning.
They sent her off when dawn broke.

The woman fell at the entrance of the home
Where her lord stayed
As the morning grew light.

Her lord arose in the morning and opened the doors of the home. He went out, intending to continue on his road home,
And very nearly tripped over the woman,
His wife,
Fallen at the entrance of the home.
Her hands were barely over the threshold.

“Get up,” he said, looking down at her. “Let’s go.” But there was no reply.
He draped her over the donkey and set off back home.

When he got back home he took the knife and seized his wife. You must have seen it, he cut her up limb by limb into twelve pieces,
And sent her out to all the territories of Israel.

Everyone who saw this said, “There has never been...we have never seen something like this from the very beginning, ever since the Israelites went up from the land of Egypt until today.”

So together they considered it, discussed it, and began to plan how they would respond.

To get to the bottom of this, the Israelites went out and assembled as one community, from Dan to Be’er Sheva and the land of Gilad.

Together they went up to Yah—the Overseer—at Mitzpah.
The leaders of all the tribes stationed themselves in an assembly of Elohim’s people.
All told, four hundred thousand armed men on foot.

Obviously, word reached the Benyaminites that the Israelites had gone up to Mitzpah.
Having gathered, the Israelites turned on the man.
“Tell us,” they said, “how this wicked matter came to be.”

The man—the Levite, husband of the slain woman—answered

“I came to Givah, of Benjamin, myself and my wife, to lodge there.

“The men of Givah arose against me, they surrounded the house at night,

And it was me that they threatened!

However, instead, they destroyed my wife and she died.

“So I took hold of my wife, and I cut her up, and sent her to every field of Israel’s territory.

It was them who committed an abomination and a disgrace in Israel,

Not me!

“Now look, all you Israelites,

Come and plan what to do about this!”

Suitably outraged, all the people rose as one to say,

“We shall not go back home, not one of us

We will not turn away with thoughts of home.

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“We shall take ten men per hundred from all the tribes of Israel by lot, and likewise a hundred per thousand, and a thousand per ten thousand. Those of us chosen will fetch provisions for the people to prepare

For riding to Givah in Benjamin to make them answer for this disgrace

That was committed here in Israel!”

So every warrior of Israel gathered to the city, united in one force.

To investigate further, the tribes of Israel sent men through all the clans of Benjamin to ask,

“What is this terrible crime that has happened among you?

“Surrender the depraved men in Givah so we can put them to death and thereby burn the wickedness from Israel.”

But, as we know, one ill turn deserves another,

And the Benyaminites were not willing to listen to the voices of their kin, the Israelites.

Things spiraled from there, as the Benyaminites came together from their cities to Givah

In order to wage war with the Israelites.

All told, the Benyaminites numbered six thousand armed men,

Not even counting the men from Givah,

They numbered seven hundred, all fighting fit, mind you.

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The Israelites mustered, Benjamin excluded, four hundred thousand armed men,

Each of them warriors.

They marched to Beit El to seek counsel from Elohim. The Israelites asked, “Who should go up first to war with the Benyaminites?”

To which Yah—the Guide—answered, “Begin with Yehudah.”

The Israelites arose in the morning

Where they were encamped near Givah.

The Israelite forces formed ranks

As they went out to war with Benjamin.
Twenty two thousand Israelites fell that day to the Benyaminites who struck out from Givah.
Their mothers, behind lattices, lamented.
The Israelites rallied,
And formed ranks again.
Meanwhile, some of the Israelites went up to weep before Yah—the Unyielding. They sought counsel, asking “should we continue to wage war with the Benyaminites, our kin?”
And Yah—the Warrior—replied that the war should continue.
So the Israelites advanced upon the Benyaminites again on the second day.
Eighteen thousand Israelites, each one a warrior, fell that day
To the Benyaminites who struck out from Givah.
Desperately, the Israelites went up again to Beit El. They wept and fasted there until evening
And offered sacrifices before Yah—the Guide.
The Israelites sought counsel from Yah—the Guide,
The ark of the covenant of Elohim was there back then,
And Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon, stood before Him in those days. The Israelites asked, “Must we continue to wage war with the Benyaminites, or can we desist?”
But Yah—the Tenacious—replied,
“Continue, for tomorrow I will give them over to you.”
Cleverly, the Israelites laid ambushes all around Givah.
The Israelites formed ranks at Givah once more on the third day,
As they has before.
When the Benyaminites went out to battle,
They began to cut down Israelites as they had the previous days,
But slowly they were pulled away from the city onto the pathways
That went to Beit El and to Givah.
The Benyaminites thought that surely the Israelites would be struck down before them as they had been before,
But the Israelites planned to flee,
Drawing them from the city towards the pathways.
The Israelites positioned themselves,
And the Israelite ambush burst forth from Maareh Gavah toward Baal Tamar.
Ten thousand elite men from Israel came from the south to Givah
And waged a grievous battle
[].
Yah—the Warrior—smote the Benyaminites before Israel. Twenty-five thousand Benyaminites were destroyed that day,
Each one of them a warrior.
The Benyaminites saw that they had been beaten
But the Israelites had given up some of their position,

Relying on the ambush near Givah.
The ambush devastated Givah,
Striking the entire city by the sword.
At an appointed time,
A huge column of smoke went up from the city.
The Israelites, seeing the signal, knew it was time to turn the tides.
The Benyaminites had gained some ground, killing around thirty Israelites,
And began to think that the Israelites would fall before them as they had
previously.
But as the column, that pillar of smoke,
Rose from the city, the Benyaminites turned around,
And saw the entire city being put to the blaze!
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The Benyaminites turned to flee along the road to the wilderness,
But the battle overtook them
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The Israelites surrounded Benjamin,
And chased them to Menuchah
[
Eighteen thousand men fell from Benjamin
Each of them were men of valor.
Those that remained turned and fled to the wilderness, to the Rock of Rimmon, and they
were destroyed on the roads.
The Israelites clung to them all the way to Gidom,
And two thousand more of their men fell.
As you can imagine, it was a bloody fight. All told, twenty-five thousand Benyaminites
died that day,
Each of them were men of valor.
A remnant of six hundred men fled to the wilderness,
To the Rock of Rimmon,
And they stayed there for four months.
It wasn't enough, so the Israelites went back and struck down every remaining
Benyaminite in the cities by the sword,
Even cattle, anything and everyone. Every Benyaminite city was put to the blaze.
As a result of the unpleasantness, the men of Israel had sworn at Mitzpah:
"No man among us shall allow his daughter to be the wife of a Benyaminite."
The people went to Beit El and sat there until the evening before Elohim,
Their voices rose up as they wept bitterly.
They lamented, "Why has this happened in Israel,
Oh Yah—the Understanding—why must we feel the loss of a tribe from Israel?"
The community rose early the following day, built an altar there,
And sacrificed burnt offerings and wellbeing offerings.
The Israelites schemed, "Is there anyone in the community, from all the tribes of Israel,
who did not bring an offering to Yah—the Remarkable?"

For an oath had been made saying that
Any who did not offer to Yah—the Remarkable—at Mitzpah would surely die.
The Israelites pitied the Benyaminites, they were kin, after all,
And observed, “Today one tribe has been cut off from Israel.
“What shall we do for those who are left without wives?
We swore to Yah—the Witness—not to give them our daughters as wives.”
They schemed, “Is there anyone from the tribes of Israel that did not bring an offering
to Yah—the Remarkable—at Mitzpah?”
And it just so happened that no one from the camp of Yaveish Gilah
Had come with the community.
The people formed ranks
And realized that no one was there from the citizens of Yaveish Gilad.
As we know, one ill turn deserves another, so the assembly sent twelve thousand men
there, men of valor,
And commanded them,
“Go and strike down the citizens of Yaveish Gilad by sword,
Even the women and the children!
“Follow these orders:
Exterminate every man,
And every woman who has had sexual intercourse with a man.”
Among the citizens of Yaveish Gilad they found four hundred young maidens who had
not had sexual intercourse with a man,
And they brought them to the camp in Shiloh,
Which was in the land of Canaan.
The entire community sent word to the Benyaminites, who were at the Rock of Rimmon,
Calling a truce.
So Benjamin returned, and the Israelites gave them the remaining women, the
maidens from Yaveish Gilad,
But there were not enough of them.
The community pitied Benjamin,
For Yah—the Divider—had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.
The elders of the assembly pondered. “What wives shall we provide for those who
remain?”
They wondered,
“For the women of Benjamin have been destroyed.”
They relented, “Let there be an enduring inheritance for Benjamin,
So that a tribe is not wiped out from Israel.
“However, we cannot give them our daughters as wives,
For the Israelites had sworn that anyone who gave a wife to Benjamin would be
cursed!
“Hmmm,” they schemed. “The festival of Yah—the Provider—at Shiloh,
Is happening now.”
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“Go and wait in ambush in the vineyards,”

They instructed the Benyaminites.

As we know, one ill turn deserves another.

“When you see the girls of Shiloh going out to whirl in their dances, emerge from the vineyards. That way, each of you may seize a wife from the girls of Shiloh,

And can go to the land of Benjamin.

“Then we will be blameless, and when their fathers and brothers come to us for recompense, we might say, ‘Have pity on them, for they went without wives due to the war,

And you could not have knowingly given over your daughters without guilt!’”

So the Benyaminites did just that. They took up wives from the girls who danced, whom they plundered,

And with them they returned to their territory,

Built the cities back up,

And settled in them.

From there, the Israelite scattered, each man to his own tribe and to his own family,

Each man to his own territory.

After all, in those days there was no king in Israel,

And each man did what was right in his own eyes.