

SAMSON AND THE DANITE MIGRATION: RECONCILING JUDGES 13:25 AND 18:12

INTRODUCTION

The Danite Migration, indicated in Judges 1:34 and detailed in Judges 18, was a northward trek of the Tribe of Dan in which they abandoned their original territory. The detailed account of the migration is presented in the “first” appendix of the book of Judges, after the Samson narratives. However, this chronological position must be examined, as understanding the dynamics of the migration will shed light on the history of the period of the Judges and, particularly, its relationship to the exploits of Samson. To determine if the migration was before or after Samson is to determine a key aspect of his role in the period of the Judges; whether he was a returning hero that came back to wage a war with the Philistines, who forced his tribe to migrate, or was he a Danite warrior, in the time immediately before the migration, fighting to prevent the complete eradication of his tribe at the hands of the Amorites and, later, Philistines.

The territorial allotment given to Dan is written in Joshua 19:40. However, a list of similar territories is found in Joshua 15:33-36 and these areas are ascribed to Judah. It is generally accepted among Biblical scholars that the list in Joshua 15 is an administrative list from the time of the monarchy. We would suggest that this list originated in the Davidic reign, not later in the monarchy as many scholars conclude. We base our suggestion on the important role of Judahite territory in the Davidic kingship; simply stated, as David was attempting to secure his throne in Judah he needed to bolster the image of Judah as the dominant tribe over and against his opponents who were still advocates for Saul. Such a priority did not exist later in the monarchy. But, for our present purposes, we contend that the similarities of territorial holdings between Dan and Judah were the result of the Danite Migration and the Judahite assumption of the vacated land.

The original territorial allotment of Dan was in the south, between Philistia and Judah. And was part of the region known as the “Shephelah”. The Shephelah, literally meaning “the low” in Hebrew, is the transliterated term which refers to a

range of limestone foothills that buffer the central mountain range of Judah. They are rounded mounts, that attain an altitude of 330-1500 feet and are cut East to West by wadis, or riverbeds. They are divided from the actual mountain range of Judah by a series of valleys which cut North to South and have been recognized by geographers and battle strategists as a key defense system for Judah; as these valleys have been compared to a protective moat. The wadis also acted as major communication routes. The Shephelah has been considered a transition region between the coastal plains and the Judean mountains; thereby increasing its military and strategic value. In addition to its strategic value, the Shephelah is a fertile region; producing grains, vineyards and olive groves. Therefore, this region of Judah, although only about 10 miles wide by 50 miles long, would be desired by any people entering the region and trying to establish themselves. The original inheritance of Dan was, therefore, small, but valuable.¹

Though Dan was known for its fighting nature, as indicated by the images used to describe him in the Blessing of Jacob (Genesis 49:16) and the Blessing of Moses (Deuteronomy 33:22), the tribe was always embattled by its neighbors. The traditions surrounding Dan suggest that the tribe was “originally confined to hill country and prevented by stronger Canaanite city-states from settling in the Shephelah and coastal plain.”² Judges 1:34 suggests the embattled existence of Dan, as the Amorites seemed to have the first group to encounter Dan as the tribe tried to move westward from the mountain range of Judah.³ Some traditions suggest that the Amorites dwelt in the central mountain range, while other Canaanites dwelt in the Jordan Valley and by the sea (Numbers 13:29). By the period of the Judges, the Amorites were well distributed throughout Canaan. The name “Amorite” became a political designation, “a traditional titulary of kings” with older, northern Syrian, lineages. The Amorites became assimilated into the various cultures of the region to the point where they “ceased to exist as a distinct cultural group”. However, the memory of this people was strong as “there was no region of the Levant that had not been influenced by the Amorite language and culture in various ways and various degrees”.⁴ Therefore, based on linguistic connections of the name to the Old Akkadian and early Semitic term

¹ In Numbers 1:39, 2:26, and 26:43 we read of large populations of Dan. However, these census numbers seem to reflect the strength of Tribe in their northern location and not the original allotment.

² K. Whitelam, “Dan (person)”, *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6 vols (NY: Doubleday, 1992) 2:10.

³ The Amorites, according to ancient inscriptions, are first mentioned as a people in the records of Sargon of Akkad, in the 3rd millennium BC.

⁴ G. Mendenhall, “Amorites”, *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6 vols (NY: Doubleday, 1992) 1:202.

for “the west”, the “Amorites” that hemmed in Dan seem to refer to a group, possibly hybridized, that lived West of Mesopotamia and of the Jordan.

Judges 1:19, with a reference to iron chariots of those living on the coastal plain, seems to be a clear description of the Philistines as they were establishing their nation among the Canaanites. The Philistines were among the “Sea Peoples”, originating in the region of Asia Minor, who swept before them the nations of the eastern Mediterranean by land and sea. Pharaoh Ramesses III (1195- 1164 BC) of Egypt knew of the victories attained by the “Sea Peoples” and prepared for war. The temple of Amun in Medinet Habu contains inscriptions which describe Egypt’s readying their army and navy. The inscriptions also describe a horrific battle, in which Egypt was able to repel the invaders. The military forces of both groups, however, were badly weakened. The Philistines drew back into a vassal land of Egypt, Canaan. It is unclear if this was an agreement struck between Egypt and Philistia in which the Philistines became vassals and mercenaries or that Egypt was too weak to pursue and their hold on the region was loosening. Most scholars agree that this battle occurred in c. 1188 BC. By 1177BC the Philistines were establishing themselves on the southwest coast of Canaan. From the text of Judges 1:19, we can infer that this was early in the Philistines’ inhabiting of the region as the Israelites did not know the names of the people with the iron chariots. The Philistines had taken the secret of iron smelting from the Hittites in their conquests and, thus, introduced the Iron Age to the region of Canaan. The Philistines well organized, both militaristically and politically, so it was not long before they could start encroaching on the Israelites, particularly the Danites. Therefore, based on archaeological evidence found in the northern region to which they migrated we can date the beginnings of the Danite Migration to c.1175 BC.⁵

We propose that the Samson narratives depict the turbulent period just before the Danite Migration. According to Judges 13:2, Dan is referred to as a “clan”, a point which we revisit below, which we suggest implies that the bulk of the Danites’ territory had been lost to the neighboring groups; pressure from the Amorites and Philistines from the West and Judah from the East, this term represents the remnants of the Tribe of Dan. However, in Judges 13 the clan still retained its tribal identity. Samson, we contend, should be seen as a warrior that

⁵ Cf. J.L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (Chicago: Bruce, 1966) 673,

W. Keller, *The Bible as History* (NY: Morrow, 1981) 174-179,

Wood, B.G, “Recent Discoveries and Research on the Conquest”, *Archaeology and Biblical Research* 4:108-110.

engaged the Amorites and Philistines in their attempts to expand into tribal territories. Canonically, this assertion also entails that the presentation of material in the book of Judges is in correct chronological sequence and the account of the Danite Migration, although entitled an “appendix”, should be properly understood as an event in the aftermath of Samson’s death.

THE CLAN OF DAN

Judges 13:2 refers to Dan as a “clan”. Dan was the son of Jacob, the progenitor of one the Twelve Tribes of Israel that was mentioned in both Patriarchal blessings of Jacob and Moses. Yet, this reference elicited no explanation from the original narrator or later editors. This indicates that the circumstances surrounding this change in designation were already known and accepted in common Israelite knowledge.

The clan is the “effective social unit within the tribe; it is the clan of which the tribesmen is a member, and it is the clan which imposes tribal obligations”, according to C. Wright. Clans may merge to form tribes or a clan may get absorbed by a stronger tribe. Clans were subunits of the tribe, but were units “of recognizable kinship”. Wright argues that it is this “kinship factor which lies behind the motive for the supportive and restorative roles” of the clans. Furthermore, the clan was critical to the tribe’s “*territorial identity*”.⁶ Within each clan “each household had its patrimonial portion. . . So, when an Israelite gave his full name, including his house, clan, and tribe, it not only stated his kinship network but practically served as a geographical address as well”.⁷

As in the overall tribes, clans appoint leaders by common agreement. His will guides the tribe or clan. Ideally, “he is the bravest strongest warrior” and determines the movements of tribe or clan, “leads them into war and raids, and is the judge of disputes.”⁸ We would argue that the regularity of the charismatic endowments which seem to have been the first glimpses at his surpassing power, to which Judges 13:25 refers, would allow Samson to be the leader by such common agreement. In light of McKenzie’s and Wrights discussions, the actions of Samson can be seen in a distinct light. Wright concludes that the clan “existed primarily for the good of the constituent families. . . [it] stands out as a protective association of families which operated to preserve the minimal

⁶ Cf. Joshua 13:15, *et al* wherein recurs the phrase that tribes were allotted land “according to their clans”.

⁷ C.J.H. Wright, “Family”, *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6 vols (NY: Doubleday, 1992) 2:762.

⁸ McKenzie, *Dictionary*, 899.

conditions for the integrity of each of its member families by extending mutual help as needed to supply male heirs, to keep land, to rescue members from debt, slavery, and to avenge murder. These functions were restorative in that they were emergency means to restore the normal autonomous basis of a member family. . . unable to act on its on its own behalf”.⁹ Samson was a Judge and rose to leadership, as the other Major Judges, in an emergency or crisis situation, as the Amorites threatened the existence of the clan of Dan and the nation of Israel. It fell to Samson to restore the viability of not only individual families, but of the Danite identity of the clan. Later, his actions would take on a national context. Therefore, his actions against the Philistines should be seen in this later context. The reference to Dan as a viable clan indicates a period before the full primacy of the Tribe of Judah into which the remnants of the clan were absorbed. This reference indicates a pre-monarchial dating for the Danite Migration and the exploits of Samson; the basis of the Samson narratives. Perhaps, it is the exploits of Samson against the Philistines that secured the memory of the southern “clan of Dan”.

THE CAMP OF DAN

After the miraculous birth of Samson was foretold and the promise fulfilled, we find a reference to the “Spirit of the Lord” engaging Samson numerous times in Mahaneh-Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.¹⁰ The term “Mahaneh-Dan” means, “Camp of Dan”. While many scholars question the chronology presented in the book of Judges, placing the Samson narratives before the account of the migration, we contend that this reflects an accurate sequence of events. The “Camp” referred to in Judges 13:25 served as a staging area for the migration. The image of a “staging area” is supported by Judges 18:11, as the area of Zorah and Eshtaol is clearly mentioned.

J.D. Crossan argues in a similar manner:

“Mahaneh-Dan means ‘Camp of Dan’ and would be an unnecessary title within the actual territory of Dan. If this point were that from which the

⁹ Wright, 2: 763.

¹⁰ The receiving of the YHWH Spirit is what allows Samson to be classified as a “Charismatic Leader”. This reference, in 13:25, is difficult to translate into English, as there are no exact English constructs to match it. However, it is generally agreed that there is a repetitive aspect, indicating multiple occurrences, to this phrase describing the Spirit’s activity and that it means some form of compulsion, disturbing, or troubling. We would suggest that it manifested in some way that was witnessed by his clansmen, possibly early feats of strength, which prompted them to see his actions as products of the Spirit.

Danites departed (Judges 13:25, 18:2), we might imagine Samson's decision to remain and conduct personal guerilla war with the Philistines as the background to 13:25."¹¹

While Crossan's argument is compelling, it is oversimplified in that it is too broad and does not fit all of the aspects presented in the narratives. From a practical view, it seems unlikely that the 600 armed Danites, mentioned in 18:12, would not try to convince Samson to join them and re-establish Dan's identity elsewhere. If Samson were to refuse, it would have to be because he wanted to preserve the original allotments. However, since there are no textual or historical indications of this exchange it is highly speculative. Judges 14:3, the protest of Manoah to Samson wanting a Timnite bride, states that kinsmen (clansmen) are still in the area with no indication of any intent to move. In Judges 16:31, Samson's kinsmen bore his body up from Gaza and back to the grave of Manoah, between Zorah and Eshtaol.¹² Therefore, there does seem to have been a remnant that remained in the area of Zorah and Eshtaol. Furthermore, the "title" of "camp" is needed. This designation serves several purposes; preserves the original tribal identity, it distinguishes a new historical circumstance from the tribal allotments under Joshua, and because it is coupled with the reference to Zorah and Eshtaol it serves to distinguish this location from the "Camp of Dan" in Judges 18:12.

The references to the towns of Zorah and Eshtaol are significant. It has been stated that the environs of Zorah and Eshtaol should be understood as the "core area of the Danite settlement in the Judean foothills".¹³ Therefore, we can argue that this would be a most probable staging area for any migration as it would also be the area of consolidation of the clan's resources and the heaviest concentration of tribespeople. At this point, as the reference suggests, the migration does not seem to have commenced as Crossan contends. Rather, this location should be understood as a temporary location, a camp, from which the clan could reassert itself or vacate. We would suggest that these two options were being discussed between the clan leaders, including Manoah, and Samson, the warrior of the clan. The temporary nature of this "camp" is underscored by the Hebrew construction which reads, literally, "in a camp of Dan". The names of

¹¹ J. D. Crossan, "Judges", *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* 2 vols (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968) 1:159.

¹² This grave is still prominent today.

¹³ R. Greenberg, "Zorah", *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6 vols (NY: Doubleday, 1992) 6:1168.

Zorah and Eshtaol are used as geographic markers but do not lend their names to this camp.

It has long been noted among scholars that the events of the “Spirit of the Lord” are depicted differently than those narrating the other three events. As noted this connotes a repetitive series of events, whereas the later episodes are singular onrushes. We suggest that this difference is significant. It seems as though this series is a distinctive Danite memory that pertains to the Amorites, which would give much credibility to the reference in Judges 1:34 that attributes the initial pressure on Dan to the Amorites. G.F. Moore states;

“There is no intimation either in the story of Samson or in ch. 18 of such a pressure from the side of the Philistines as might force the Danites out of their settlements; 18:1 agrees perfectly with 1:34, and we shall do better, therefore, to explain their failure to establish themselves there by the stubborn resistance of the native population of the Lowland, the Amorites”.¹⁴

The Amorites were distributed throughout Israel and, although powerful, would be more fitting to the series of skirmishes and battles which seem to be indicated by Judges 13:25. Moore’s argument supports our conjecture of a consolidating and, potential staging area for the Danites. As the Danites concentrated their resources and people, the land of Dan would be a target for both the Philistines and the Judahites; Dan’s neighbors, leading to conflicts. The beginnings of such conflicts are seen in Judges 15, when the Philistines force the men of Judah to deliver Samson to them. Therefore, reference in Judges 13:25 reflects the struggles between the Danites and the native Amorites while the later references, depicted to be in Judahite territories, would be memories of Samson and the Philistines that were distinctive to Judah and this would account for the difference in the way the events were written.

The Importance of Judges 18:12

From the area of Zorah and Eshtaol, six hundred men of the clan of the Danites , camped in Judah, near Kiriath-jearim. This encampment became known as a “Camp of Dan”. The text is careful not to confuse the camp in Judges 13:25 with this reference. This separation must be respected and observed.

¹⁴ G.F Moore, *Judges* (NY: Scribner’s, 1903) 371.

The editors, probably Davidic scribes, introduce this camp by telling us that the Danites “camped in Judah”. The Danites have moved out of their territory, and it is now seen as vacated. Historically, this allows for the conflict between Judah, epitomized by David, and the Philistines as both would want to assimilate this land. Once David broke the Philistine power (2 Samuel 5), these lands and cities would be placed on the administrative lists found in Joshua 15. With this assimilation, and defeat of the Philistines, the Davidic power base and holdings were immediately expanded and the primacy of Judah- a major concern of the Davidic scribes- is strengthened. If any Danites remained in the South, their territorial identity was completely lost and they blended into the Tribe of Judah.¹⁵ This seems to indicate that the death of Samson, the warrior of the clan of Dan, was the deciding moment for their future movements.

The Danites’ encampment was near the city of Kiriath-jearim. This was the first stop on the Danite Migration and is only about 10 miles from Zorah. The name of translates to “forest city”. It was located on the “frontier of Judah and Benjamin”. The city seemed to have some historical and religious significance as this was city where the Ark of the Covenant was kept for twenty years after its return from the Philistines (1 Samuel 6:21-7:2).¹⁶ P. K. McCarter has argued that the original name is “City of Baal”, which was intolerable for the Israelites. However, it is referred to as “Baalath” in Joshua 15: 9-10. As well as having religious significance, it was a strategically powerful position assumed by the Danites as “in ancient times the city commanded a strategic hill at the juncture of the traditional tribal boundaries of Judah, Dan, and Benjamin”.¹⁷ The name, “Camp of Dan”, was not applied to any other location and is “otherwise unattested” in Scripture.¹⁸

However, we suggest, the Danites stopping at Kiriath-jearim was not a random pause in the migration but was a retracing of their development as a tribe. G. Knoppers points out that 1 Chronicles 2:54 contains a reference to the “cities of Qiriath-jearim”. Herein the “author lists its leading families. Growth in these families, in turn, introduces further differentiation in to the lineage (‘the Zorathites

¹⁵ In Judges 20:1, the Assembly of the Israelites, Dan was already seen as the northernmost point of Israel with the phrase “from Dan to Beersheba”. Therefore, Dan was depicted as being identified with the North in the pre-monarchic period.

¹⁶ J. Hamilton, “Kiriath-jearim”, *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6 vols (NY: Doubleday, 1992) 4:84.

¹⁷ P. K. McCarter, *1 Samuel*, (NY: Doubleday, 1980) 137.

¹⁸ McKenzie, *Dictionary*, 484.

and the Eshtaulites') and, by implication, further geographic expansion".¹⁹ In other words, the cities of Zorah and Eshtaol had strong ancestral ties to Caleb (1 Chronicles 2:50), a hero that is associated with early Judah and the Judge, Othniel (Judges 3:9). The genealogies in 1 Chronicles 2 appear to be entangled traditions or variant memories presented by the Chronicler in what, he felt, was the most coherent narration. The questions raised by this presentation have not yielded answers easily and scholars have made many attempts at resolving the textual issues. However, it is generally agreed among Biblical scholars that Caleb was remembered as a prominent hero in Judah's history.

Fretz and Panitz contend that "the key to resolving the tensions in these genealogies is the fact that Caleb is part of Judah's genealogy. . . Finally, by listing descendants of Caleb who have names associated with geographical locations, the Chronicler reveals both the antiquity of his source material and the close association of persons with places". Genealogies serve a social function, "they can be used to delineate social and political ties between two groups, and, in particular, to incorporate marginally affiliated clans into a central group. The genealogy of Caleb is related in this way to the tribe of Judah and was assimilated into the Israelite tribal system thereby. Not only the individuals and groups of people but the places became part of the tribe. Thus the genealogy provided a means for legitimizing social relations and for defining the geographical domain of the individuals or groups concerned."²⁰ Therefore, Caleb and Judah were part of the ancestral foundations of the Danites. The ancient political and geographical ties would incline the Danites to stop at Kiriath-jearim. It also provided support for Judah to assimilate any part of the tribe of Dan or any of the remaining clan. The connection between Dan and Judah would serve the purposes of David, as he was attempting to unify the nation and the various tribal identities. In turn, it also helps to explain the emphasis on the Danite Samson; his exploits spanned both the territories of Dan and Judah and this would serve to support the literary unification which accompanied David's national unification.

THE RISE OF THE PHILISTINES

Throughout the book of Judges we see a recurring theme of the rise of Philistine domination, which finds a preliminary culmination in the Samson narratives and, in the books of Samuel, the climactic defeat of the Philistines under David. We

¹⁹ G. Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1-9* (NY: Doubleday, 2003) 314. Knoppers uses a more literal transliteration than most spellings.

²⁰ M. Fretz/R. Panitz, "Caleb", *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6 vols (NY: Doubleday, 1992) 1: 809.

have noted that the text of Judges 1:19 suggests that the name of the coastal nation was not known. But, it depicts their military might with the reference to the iron chariots.

Shamgar appears in Judges 3:31. Little is known about this man, except for his slaying 600 Philistines with an ox-goad. Many scholars have suggested that Shamgar was a prince or part of the ruling class. He is referred to in the “Song of Deborah”, considered to be one of the oldest pieces of Hebrew literature (Judges 5:6). Although the reference is short, only one verse, it contains significant indications about the relations between the Philistines and the rest of the region.

Most scholars do not think that the name is Hebrew. The most common suggestion is that the name is of Hurrian origin. The Hurrians first appear in records by c. 2400 BC and seem widely distributed throughout the region of Canaan by c. 1500 BC. Written records show many contacts with the Hebrews. They might be identified with the Horites and Hivites, which many scholars see as a corruption of “Horite”. Therefore, there is no doubt about their “presence at the time of the Israelite settlement”.²¹ The Hurrian culture was quite advanced, particularly in metallurgy. However, there are few traces of the use of iron. Iron was introduced and monopolized by the Philistines. Therefore, the uses of important metals made the two cultures complimentary and would, probably, foster commercial transactions. The Hurrians were also expert in horse training, and chariotry was held in high regard in their society. The title, “charioteer”, was a title of rank and nobility and, sometimes, an honorific title that did not denote horsemanship.²² Such expertise and societal status would also foster relations with the Philistines.

The reference states that he slew 600 Philistines with an ox-goad. It is unclear if this in one battle or over a period of time. In either instance, it does not denote a decisive defeat of the Philistines as 600 would hardly be the full complement of the military even after the battle with Egypt. We would suggest that such a small number would have been easily defeated by the city-states of Canaan or any of the peoples that were spread through the region, such as the Hurrians or the Amorites. The weapon used is very significant. The goad was a “wooden stick 6-7 ft long with which the plowman could prod the ox. It could therefore be employed as a weapon. The Philistines held a monopoly on iron working and

²¹ McKenzie, *Dictionary*, 380.

²² M. Morrison, “Hurrians”, *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6 vols (NY: Doubleday, 1992) 3: 338

forced the Hebrews to buy ox goads and other tools from them.”²³ Often it had on one end “a spade for removing mud from the plow and at the other a sharp point for prodding oxen.”²⁴ We would suggest that, based on the Hurrian metallurgy and the Philistine monopoly of iron, Shamgar had to purchase the goad from the Philistines as there is little basis from which to argue that the Philistine monopoly did not extend to all the peoples of the region. From this circumstance of forced relations between the Hurrians and the Philistines, it could be argued that Shamgar’s battle with the Philistines arose, originally, from their commercial dealings and the number “600” was the local complement of soldiers occupying the area in which Shamgar lived. Significantly, Shamgar is not called a “Judge” or said to have “judged” Israel. Instead, we might understand his exploit by seeing him as a “Canaanite prince who helped to save Israel by fighting against the common enemy, the Philistines”. That he is not considered a “judge” may suggest “that he may have been otherwise and enemy of Israel”.²⁵ Overall, this short reference helps to define the relationship of the Philistines with the peoples in the region.

The Jephthah account, in Judges 10:6, introduces the Philistines, with the Ammonites, as an oppressing power. Many scholars see this note as an added gloss, or insertion. However, some scholars, as typified by J. D. Crossan, argue this note was part of an early edition of Judges and “was most likely intended as a prelude to the oppression of Israel by the Philistines and to the work of Samson and Samuel.”²⁶ While this note serves the literary purpose of introducing the Samson-Samuel- David accounts, it seems to suggest that the Philistines were building a power base by supporting or forming an alliance with the local Ammonites. They were not ready to be the dominant force in the region, but their military and religious influence was now being felt by the Israelites.

The Dominant force in the Region

In Judges 13:1, the prefatory note to the Samson narratives we see the Philistines presented as being at their full power. They are remembered as an oppressive, dominating, force. A key to understanding the verse is the reference to the number “forty” in describing the length of time of the oppression. The number 40 held special theological significance to the Hebrews, and it appears

²³ McKenzie, *Dictionary*, 315.

²⁴ M. Tenney, “goad”, *New International Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 393.

²⁵ McKenzie, *Dictionary*, 795.

²⁶ Crossan, 1:157.

throughout the Bible. Most commonly, it was seen as the length of a complete generation. We would suggest that this number invokes the image of the wandering in the desert for forty years (Numbers 32:13) until the generation that did evil in the sight of the Lord died out. The later editor or storyteller who wrote this introduction on the Samson narratives seemed to have an affinity to the “Sinai Experience” of Israel.²⁷ We see similar themes in Deuteronomy 8:1-5 and Joshua 5:6. Theologically, regarding the Samson narratives, the number takes on several important aspects. It seems to be associated with waiting or preparing for something, testing or probation, or a time of punishment as in the period of Wandering after Sinai (Dt. 8:1-5). The Philistine oppression of the region would be this time testing or punishment. In the other delivering, or “Major”, Judges’ accounts there is a recurring pattern of the people repenting from the evil they did in the eyes of Lord. This feature is conspicuously missing from the Samson introduction. This, we contend, suggests that a new and innocent group of Danites are now being oppressed by the Amorites or Philistines and there would be no need of repentance or further punishment.

Furthermore, as many scholars have pointed out, this period of struggle or punishment usually precedes a time of blessing or a new period in Salvation history. In the birth account of Samson it is written that the boy was born, grew, and was *blessed* by the Lord (Judges 13:24). To the Hebrews, to be blessed meant to be provided with the power and success. It was a gift of power to bring about change. The change, that was to be brought about by Samson’s birth, was the beginning of the liberation from the Philistines (Judges 13:5).²⁸ However, we do not have to place Samson at the end of Philistine oppression. The number “40” also had connotations of fullness or completeness. He was not to end the Philistine domination, that was a role for another; David. His actions were meant to prepare the way for David. This incomplete nature of his judgeship is reflected in Judges 15:20, wherein it states that he judged Israel **20 years** in the “days of the Philistines”. The phrase “days of the Philistines” refers to the time when the Philistines were in power. Such a construction does not indicate that their domination was finished with Samson, but that Samson began his delivering role during the period in which they were dominating the region.

²⁷ W. Rast, *Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings*. (Phil: Fortress, 1978), 20.

²⁸ For further discussion on this topic, cf. J. Roskoski, “The Theological Significance of Judges 13:1,” *American Journal of Biblical Theology* 15:08 (Sunday February 23, 2014).

An indication of Philistine encroachment and Danite consolidation into the Zorah-Eshtaol area is found in the famous protest of Samson's father to Samson's request for Timnite bride (Judges 14: 3). Manoah refers to the kinsfolk still in the region; therefore the migration does not seem to have commenced. However, the Danite town of Timnah, which eventually be absorbed by the Tribe of Judah, was under Philistine control. This control, based on recent archaeology, was in the form of overlords and a ruling upper class. Timnah was a cosmopolitan city and Samson's intended bride may not have been a Philistine.²⁹ But, their control of the city prompted Manoah's title of "uncircumcised" to be applied to the entire city. From this exchange, we can argue that much of the Danite territory had been vacated by the time of Samson's young adulthood and only the area of Zorah-Eshtaol was maintaining the tribal identity. After the wedding was disrupted and wager paid by Samson, in anger he went back to his own family in anger (Judges 14:19). This indicates that his family, the clan of Dan, was still in the Zorah-Eshtaol area. If his home were northward or moving in the migration the narrative would have been more specific. But, the home seems to have been assumed to be his family home in Zorah. Furthermore, this suggests the expanding Philistine control of, what were once, Israelite lands.

A key turning point in the Samson narratives lies in Judges 15:1-3. Herein we read of an exchange between Samson and his, presumed, father-in-law. Samson had left the wedding before its full consummation and, to avoid public humiliation, the father of the bride gave to the best man of the ceremony. Weddings were contractual arrangements between families; they were private, not public affairs. Therefore, legally, the father was justified in his action of not allowing Samson to visit the intended bride. The private nature of the wedding arrangements is what makes Samson's response so curious. He states that "this time" the Philistines cannot blame him if he harms them. His motives for wanting to attack the Philistines, for such a private affair, are not explicitly stated. However, the impact of his words points to several considerations. First, it

²⁹ Cf. J. Roskoski, "The Importance of Judges 15:3-5 in the Samson Narratives", *American Journal of Biblical Theology* 16:06 (Sunday, Feb 8, 2015)

seems apparent that some actions are missing from the narratives as there is no account of any encounter with the Philistines up to this point. Second, from a literary perspective, this is the event which turns Samson from a local warrior, battling the Amorites, to a national figure. It can be argued that the later Davidic editor stitched, somewhat awkwardly, Samson's personal exploits to his clashes with the Philistines which carried a national significance.³⁰

Third, we suggest that Samson conducted some raids on the Philistines during his battles with the Amorites. By the period of the Judges, the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, the Amorites were distributed throughout the Canaanite region. They originated in the region North and West of Mesopotamia. This region was part of the conquests of the Philistines as they moved southward toward Egypt. This interaction seemed to have caused a syncretism, or blending, of cultures. As G. Mendenhall argues, there was a "disintegration of the old Amorite culture. . . There can be little doubt that this was brought about by incursions of Anatolian populations from the North".³¹ The pressure from the North caused a dispersion of the Amorite population which carried the Anatolian, including Philistine, influence with it. Therefore, the Philistines would look very similar to the Amorites, the first enemy of Samson. It is also possible that alliances between the similar peoples, Amorites and Philistines, would be formed. These connections could cause Samson to attack, inadvertently, Philistines instead of Amorites. Since the Philistines had yet to encroach upon or attack Dan, Samson's actions could be viewed as unjust. However, since Dan was consolidated into such a small area it is doubtful that Philistines would be aware of the clan or the name, Samson.³²

The Danites vacating their tribal allotment allowed for the interaction between the Philistines and the tribesmen of Judah in Judges 15:9-13. The Philistines encamped in Judah and deployed against "lehi". Traditional scholarship has tried to identify this name with a place. However, Akkadian cognates and "Judeo-Aramaic variants" of this word are used to refer to "limits of districts or borders".³³ Therefore, instead of trying to identify a specific place or landmark we might better understand this term as referring to the border or, more appropriately, the new frontier between Judah and Philistia which was previously occupied by the

³⁰ Cf. Roskoski, "Judges 15:3-5".

³¹ G. Mendenhall, "Amorites", *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6 vols (NY: Doubleday, 1992) 1:200

³² This idea is supported in Judges 15:6, wherein Samson was identified and known as the "son-in-law of the Timnite". This Philistines did not seem to know him by name as of yet.

³³ M. Lubetski, "lehi", *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6 vols (NY: Doubleday, 1992) 4:275

Danites. Therefore, the text of Judges 15: 14 should be understood as, “when he reached the frontier [of Judah and Philistia], the Philistines came shouting. . . “. This is much more congruous with the image of encampment and deployment that were used as well the shifting tribal populations. The rise of Philistine power is depicted in Judges 15:11, wherein the Judahites ask if Samson knew that the Philistines ruled them. This is a clear reference to the Philistines now exerting their military, political, organizational superiority over the region. The Philistines are the dominant force in the region. This allows for the ironic victory of a jawbone wielding shepherd over one of the prevailing world powers.

Samson attained a final victory between the pillars of the temple of Dagon (Judges 16:30-31). The victory cost him his life, but was devastating to the Philistines as their governors, or serens, were present. Moreover, the burial notice also suggests that the Danites, perhaps in reduced numbers, still resided in the region of Zorah-Eshtaol. They brought his body from the temple ruins and buried at the gravesite of Manoah, both of which still stand today, between Zorah and Eshtaol. The term of his judgeship, 20 years, is repeated with the phrase “in the days of the Philistines” omitted. There is no textual evidence to suggest that they returned from any stage of the migration or their new settlement. Instead, we might better understand the notice as evidence of their remaining in the Zorah-Eshtaol region. The proximity of Zorah-Eshtaol to Philistia would allow news of this heroic death to reach the Danites quickly. There is immediacy in the depiction, which is consistent with most of the narratives, which suggests the Danite Migration had not yet commenced.

THE DEATH OF SAMSON

The account of Samson’s heroic death, in Judges 16:23-31, marks a turning point for the Danites and the region. The rise of Philistine power and their dominance in the region was suspended by Samson. While the battle at Ramath-Lehi was impressive, it was not decisive enough to wrest control of the region from the Philistines. The Hebrew term for “thousand” refers to a military, or political, group of an unspecified number. Therefore, this seems to refer to an elite force that confronted the bound Samson at the frontier and not the entire number of the Philistine soldiers. The suggestion that the entire military force was not present and defeated with the jawbone is supported by Samson’s famous prayer at the Spring of En-Hakkore (Judges 15:18). Samson worries that in his exhausted, and dehydrated, state he is vulnerable to the Philistines. This indicates that more Philistines were still in the immediate area and the entire

army was not defeated or put to flight. More importantly, the leaders of the Philistines do not seem to be present at Ramath-Lehi. At least three Serens were present in the temple of Dagon, as the number 3000 appears and this should be seen as depicting, at least, three political contingencies of the Philistines. The Philistines established a "Pentapolis", a network of five ruling cities; Gaza, Gath, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron. To have at least three of the Serens killed in the temple collapse would throw the Philistine organization into tumult. Their hold on the region was weakened, as suggested in the recurring theme of the appendices of Judges that "there was no king in Israel and every man did what right in his own eyes" (Judges 18:1, 19:1, and 21:25). While this recurring phrase can be understood as an argument for the Davidic Kingship, the phrase also depicts a power vacuum in the region. The Philistines were forced to regroup and the next reference to them is in 1 Samuel 4:1, during the life of Samuel.

However, although the Philistines were weakened they were still a formidable force with which to be reckoned. The Israelites, particularly the Danites, knew that retaliation would be inevitable. The Amorites were still a constant threat, preventing any expansion of the Danite clan. It was at this point, with the two looming threats, which the Danites had lost their warrior. Additionally, Judah was expanding in the South and taking a primary role among the tribes. Samson's death, seemingly, signaled the end of the Danite existence in the South and prompted them to move northward, to the northernmost part of Israel in which they retraced their southern movement from Kiriath-Jearim in Judah. They could no longer maintain their tribal identity or territory in the South. They were forced to establish a new tribal identity elsewhere. Their first stop was Kiriath-Jearim, "Forest City", wherein they made their residence for a considerable time, as their encampment was given the name "Camp of Dan". This was after the death of Samson and, therefore, long after the reference to the camp located between Zorah and Eshtaol in Judges 13:25.

The death of Samson set in motion the political and military shifts which allowed David to assume the Throne of Israel and begin the Eternal Kingship. During the period in which the Philistines were rebuilding, Samuel and Saul had time to fortify Israel and were able to maintain the nation. Samuel, the last Judge, was able to attain a minor defeat of the Philistines (1 Samuel 7: 7-17) and Saul, likewise, was able to defeat the Philistines (1 Samuel 14: 18-23). While these

were not decisive victories, they slowed the regrowth of Philistine power. McKenzie speaks well of Saul;

“The achievements of Saul were substantial. He gave Israel a focus around which its consciousness of union could take form. By clearing the hill country [former Danite territory] of Philistines he made it difficult for them to invade in force and created an Israel solid enough to survive in e Palestine even after a crushing defeat. He built up an armed force with some pride and experience of success. It was due to Saul more than to any one else that there was an Israel whose elders could invite David to be their king; the monarchy of David arose from the monarchy of Saul.”³⁴

It was the victory that Samson won in his death that allowed Saul these successes. Samson stood at the foundation of the Monarchy.

Samson’s birth signalled the beginning of the end of a period of oppression, or punishment, of 40 years. This image echoed, as we have noted, the wandering of Israel before entering the Promised Land. In his death, a final and victorious stand against his enemies in which he prayed for vengeance, he illustrated the theology that the power of YHWH extends beyond the borders of Israel. This extends the image of YHWH entering Egypt and destroying her pantheon, prompting the Exodus. Samson asked for remembrance and strength, one last time, to exact his fearsome vengeance. This moves against, and breaks, the belief of peoples in antiquity that deities were at their most powerful in areas in which they were worshipped; a theology called “territorial dominion”.³⁵

Therefore, the death of Samson marked shifts in theology, demographics, and political history in this region. The defeat of the Philistines created a power vacuum and the Danite Migration, prompted by the death of Samson, created a geographical void. The texts of Judges 13:25 and 18:12, with Judges 1:34, must be taken together to understand the dynamics which underscored the Samson narratives. The two places referred to as camps of Dan should be understood as two parts of the migration process; the unnamed camp in Judges 13:25 showing

³⁴ McKenzie, *Dictionary*, 777.

³⁵ Cf. J. Roskoski, “Samson’s Death Account and the Ancient Theology of Territorial Dominion,” *American Journal of Biblical Theology* 11:15 (Sunday, June 13, 2010)

<http://www.biblicaltheology.com/Research/RoskoskiJ01.pdf>

the, possible, preparation and the named Judahite camp in Judges 18:12 showing the commencing of the movement northward.

CONCLUSION: REVISITING THE ROLE OF SAMSON

Samson's life and death seemed to cause a critical juncture of Israelite and Philistine history. Through Samson's judgeship, the nature of the enemies of Israel had changed. The Amorites, which are the probable referents in Judges 13:25, were the last of the localized threats from the Canaanite city-states. This battles, or skirmishes, were common but did not seem to threaten the existence of Israel as a nation. The previous Judges, as many scholars have argued, face this type of localized threat.

However, the threat which the Philistines represented was of a national scope. Their military and political organization was superior that of the Israelites and their power threatened to eradicate Israel. The different nature of the Philistine threat is what, at least in part, prompted Judges 13:1. All of the theological imagery contained in the introductory reference to the Philistines, reaching back to images of the Exodus and wandering, all point to a new stage in Israelite history and new form of enemy. Samson brought about this new stage and led the way for the unification of David.

The identity of the Danites was at stake in this shifting of political power. The Amorites kept them in the mountains, the Philistines threatened to eradicate them in their expansion as the Danites were the first to face the Philistines, regrouping from the battle with Egypt, because their territory abutted Philistia. They had few options other than to consolidate their resources and manpower in the region of Zorah-Eshtaol. It was from there they would either reestablish their tribal heritage or migrate and establish a new heritage. The successes of their chosen warrior, Samson, would be the determining factor. His death was the last event needed to prompt the migration narrated in Judges 18.

The dynamics of the life of Samson help to define the role the Philistines played in the region. The arrival, establishment, and rise to a dominant power in the region served as a backdrop for many of the events narrated in the book of Judges. They, most likely, arrived shortly after their battle with Egypt, c. 1188 BC. By most scholarly reckonings, typified by Keller and Wood, they were able to assert themselves by approximately 1175 BC. Any alliances with natives Canaanite cultures were formed in this 13-year span of time. This would account

for the oblique and sporadic references to them throughout the book of Judges. By this chronology, which the current state of archeology supports, we would suggest Samson was born c. 1200 BC. During the 13-year span he grew into young manhood, he led the clan against the Amorites. Simultaneously, as he was growing in power so, too, were the Philistines. Therefore, the events of Judges 14-16 represent a man, at his full power, in his mid- late twenties. We would, based on current evidence, place his death at approximately 1175 BC. Samson began the liberation of Israel from Philistine power, as the role was defined before his birth (Judges 13:5). Samson halted the expansion of Philistine power, possibly forever changing the course of the history of the region; he did not break their power. Once they regrouped and marched against Israel they were decisively defeated by King David.

Overall, the passages of Judges 13:25 and 18:12 are in total agreement with each other. The charismatic text of 13:25 narrates the situation of the Danites, which agrees with Judges 1, in which they were forced by the Amorites to consolidate into a camp around Zorah-Eshtaol. Through the inevitable conflicts, it is likely that many of their number were lost. Therefore, through attrition from all sides, they were reduced to a clan but kept their tribal identity. This passage reflects the local threats that the Danites, as all of Israel, endured throughout the Settlement Period. The text of Judges 18:12 reflects the threat of the Philistines, while not ignoring the ever present Amorites. The Philistines were a threat to the nation of Israel and their presence caused a demographic shift, as typified by the Danite Migration, and shifts in the cultural and political structures of the region.

The Judgeship of Samson bridges these two texts. Through the events depicted in the narratives we see the scope of Samson's judgeship developing and expanding. Beginning with local and private conflicts, Samson grows into a Judge of national importance. In combining the local events with the national exploits the Davidic scribes help to prepare the way for the unifying efforts of David. To survive the impending conquering powers which would threaten Israel, the nation had to unify; the individual battles that were sufficient against Canaanite city-states would no longer sustain Israel. The Philistines represented a new type of threat; one that demanded the combined forces of Israel and a single visible representative. Samson began the theocratic shift toward a, single, visible leader. This theocratic shift, reflected in the writings of the early monarchy, is the reason for the awkward, perhaps clumsy, stitching together of the personal events with national exploits (Judges 15:1-5). The tribal traditions

were to be blended into a national history, which culminated in the Kingship of David. This shift, illustrated in the judgeship of Samson, is behind the literary markers of the camps of Dan in Judges 13:25 and 18:12.

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