

THE PERIOD OF THE JUDGES

As stated earlier, the Exodus took place c. 1446 B. C. and the conquest of the land began c. 1406 B. C. According to the Bible, the region of Sidon was conquered by the tribe of Asher, identified with 'Aziru' mentioned in the el-Amarna tablets as having conquered this region. We may conclude that according both these sources, the region of Sidon must have been an Israelite one. Yet the Bible appears to contradict our conclusion by its narratives about Hiram king of Zor (Tyre) and Ahab who marries Jezebel, the daughter of Etbaal, king of the Sidonians; about David and Solomon and others who "reigned over all Israel", excluding Sidon.

It is puzzling that after the war waged by Asher in the region of Sidon (mentioned in the book of Judges), the Bible does not mention any other war between the Tyrians or Sidonians and the Israelites, whereas many wars of the Israelite tribes against the Philistines, Amorites, Moabites, etc. are mentioned repeatedly. Moreover, when David ascends the throne, a strong friendship develop between Sidon and Israel David is depicted in the Bible as an ambitious man, a warrior and a conqueror, a man whom God does not choose to build the Temple because his hands "shed blood abundantly".¹ It is strange that such a man does not go to war against Tyre and Sidon in spite of the fact that these were two important and rich harbour cities. Furthermore, he is a personal friend of king Hiram, and Solomon his successor even enlarges upon this friendship.

On the face of it, the Biblical narrative of Saul's coronation² gives the impression that Saul was the first Israelite king, and that until his election to the throne there were only judges. The term 'Judges' was taken to mean 'saviours' 'deliverers', on the basis of certain verses in the book of Judges: "...the Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them" (Ju. 2; 16). "And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge" (Ju. 2; 18), "And after him was Shamgar, the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines...and he also delivered Israel" (Ju. 3; 31) Garstang³ in his book Joshua – Judges remarks that "the Hebrew

1 See: 1Chr. 22; 7–8.

2 See: 1Sam. chp. 8, 9.

3 Garstang, Joshua– Judges, pp. 265–266.

word for judge shofet is not in this case to be interpreted in the English sense of law giver or arbitrator. but rather as deliverer". This view which links judges with deliverers in general and the verse above" and after him was Shamgar, the son of Anath...and he also delivered..." In particular, do not accord with what is said in the song of Deborah:⁴ "in the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways". Shamgar was a judge, and if the highways were unoccupied in his time because of troubles in the country, how can he be a deliverer? The version in the Song of Deborah must be the more authentic one since it forms an integral part of some ancient song retained without emendation in the biblical narrative. It is evident that Judge is a term of authority paralleling that of a king; as shown in the book of Samuel:⁵ "make us a king to judge us like all the nations". In the book of Judges (9: 1–2) we read that after the death of Jerubaal, his son Abimelech came to Shechem, to his mother's brethren and tells them: "Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubaal, which are threescore and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you?". Further on, (7; 6) in the same chapter, we read: "And all the men of Shechem gathered together, and all the house of Milo, and went and made Abimelech king..."

We can therefore conclude from this verse that Abimelech, already before Saul, was crowned king in Israel. Despite this we read concerning him "Vayasar" = "ויסר" (ruled; commanded – *ibid.* 22) and not "Vayimloch" – ("וימלך" reigned), even though the English translation reads "reigned". In the Ugarit tablets, however, the name "sar" is synonymous with king.⁶

When Abimelech addresses the Shechemites with the words: "Whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubaal...reign over you..." it seems the Shechemites had expected that in the natural course of things authority would pass by inheritance to seventy people. We may safely assume then that Jerubaal himself was already king. In Chapter 8 of the book of Judges concerning Jerubaal's pursuit of Zebah and Zalmuna, the Midianite kings: we read⁷ "Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmuna, what manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor, And they answered, as thou art, so were they; each one resembled the children of a king. And he said, They were my brethern." If we take this verse literally, it may imply that Jerubaal was a king's son, and that Joash his father, was a king. After Jerubaal's death, his title passes by inheritance to his sons, one of whom, Abimelech, was

4 Ju. 5; 6.

5 1Sam. 8: 5, 20.

6 For example: Cazelles, *Essai Sur Le Pouvoir de La Divinité a' Ugarit et en Israel*, Ugaritica VI, Paris, 1969, p. 25.

7 verses 18–19.

eventually crowned king. These facts put together indicate that there were kings in Israel, if only to mention Abimelech, before Saul was crowned. The verses recurring: "in those days there was no king in Israel" (Ju. ch. 18: 19) which were brought as evidence that no king had reigned before Saul, may be explained as referring to those days, when a PARTICULAR event related in that SPECIFIC chapter occurred. Such acts as the villainous outrage in Gibeah (Ju. ch. 19), and the destruction of Laish by the tribe of Dan, of "a people that were at quiet and secure" (Ju. ch. 18) were possible because there was no one at the time to prevent such incidents happening, i. e. "in those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes." (Ju. 17; 6).

In 1Sam. 12: 11 the prophet reproves the Israelites: "And the Lord sent Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies", whereas in the Song of Deborah (Ju. 5; 6) we read: "in the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Yael, the highways were unoccupied...". Shamgar ben Anath, Jephthah, Jerubbaal, and Samuel are mentioned elsewhere in the Bible as Judges, while Bedan, Yael, are names only casually mentioned here. From the above, we may assume that the book of Judges, for one reason or another, does not give a full account of Israelite history at that period, and we shall return to this issue later. Let us merely note here that the Book of Chronicles does not mention the period of the Judges at all, and opens directly with the period of King David.

Occasionally we read verses such as: "he (David—N. G.) reigned...over all Israel" (2Sam. 5: 4), which leads us to assume that David ruled over all Israel and that there were no other kings ruling over Israel in his time. But in the Book of Chronicles we read that David sends ministers to all the Israelite tribes. When we number them, we find only ten listed: the two tribes to whom he does not send ministers are the tribe of Asher and the tribe of Gad. (1 Chr. 27; 16–22). This is significant in the light of what has been already demonstrated, that the tribe of Asher conquered the region of Tyre and Sidon, that Hiram, king of Tyre, reigned in David's time, that there had been kings before Saul who ruled over certain areas in Israel even though they are not called kings. From this we may assume that Hiram was an Israelite king who reigned over the tribe of Asher, or part of it. This explains the close ties of friendship between David and Solomon and the king of Tyre.

If we recall that Solomon asked for Hiram's help in the construction of the Temple, surely it would be sacrilegious to request help with such a holy building from a foreign ruler. If even David was not permitted to construct the Temple, a *minori ad majus*, a foreigner.

Yet if Hiram is a king of an Israelite tribe, why is it not written that Hiram is the king of the Asher tribe, rather than the king of Tyre. The answer to this may be found in the Bible.

In 1 Sam. 31 we read that the Philistines fastened Saul's body to the wall of Beth-Shan, and that the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead took down Saul's body and buried it. The text does not indicate, even by allusion, whether these inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead were Israelites or not. But in 1 Sam. (11; 1-3) the people of Jabesh-Gilead are mentioned: "Then Nahash the Ammonite came up and encamped against Jabesh-Gilead: and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee. And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, on this condition will I make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and LAY IT FOR A REPROACH UPON ALL ISRAEL. And the elders of Jabesh said unto him, Give us seven days despite, that we may send messengers unto ALL THE COASTS OF ISRAEL and then, if there be no man to save us, we will come out to thee." (My emphasis-N. G.).

We read about them again in Judges⁸, where we are told that the Israelites repented killing most of the Benjamite tribe and try to save it. But since the Israelites swore not to marry the Benjamites they searched for those Israelites who had not participated in this war, and were therefore free from the vow made: "And they said, what one is there OF THE TRIBES OF ISRAEL that came not up to Mizpeh to the Lord? And, Behold, there came none to the camp from Jabesh-Gilead." It is evident, therefore, that the people of Jabesh-Gilead were Israelites. Nevertheless the Bible calls them by their city and not by their tribal name. Similarly we read in the Book of Samuel⁹ that David wants to count the number of Israelites: "Then they came to Gilead, and to the land of Tahtim-hodshi; and they came to Dan-jaan, and about to Zidon. And came to the stronghold of Tyre, and to all the cities of the Hivites, and of the Canaanites: and they went out to the south of Judah, even to Beer-sheba". Here, too, we get the city names and not the tribal ones. In the Book of Judges, Ch. 18, we are told that the tribe of Dan looking for an inheritance: "...came to Laish unto a people that were at quiet and secure, and they smote them with the edge of the sword...And there was no deliverer because it was far from Zidon."¹⁰ It is obvious from the way the story is told that a villainous act was done to the people of Laish, for Dan "came unto a people that were at quiet and secure" etc.

In the Bible we read about Moses who commands the Israelites to destroy the Canaanites, and forbids them to make peace with the Canaanite population. Assimilation with them is considered an abomination. It is amazing, therefore, that instead of depicting the victory over the people of Laish, "the Sidonians", the Bible describes it as a villainous deed. Furthermore,

8 Ju. 21; 8

9 2Sam. 24; 6-7

10 Ju. 18: 7; 27-28.

the narrative commences with the phrase "In those days there was no king in Israel"

As we have seen, it was the tribe of Asher which had conquered the region of Tyre and Sidon. If so, the people of Laish must have been Israelites. Therefore the description as a villainous deed, and the explanation that such an act took place because "in those days there was no king in Israel".

From the biblical narrative we must conclude that the narrow tribal framework existed up until the Israelites began settling in the land, but once they were established there, and settled down, they began to be named after their cities. The Israelites did not give new names to conquered cities, and kept the original names existing before the conquest – Gezer fell, and Gezer was rebuilt, Sidon fell and Sidon was rebuilt, Jaffa fell and Jaffa was rebuilt. David sent out to all the Hittite and Canaanite cities to count the Israelites. Hence in the course of time, an Israelite from Sidon was called a "Sidonian" after the name of the city. However, since the Canaanites were not entirely destroyed, a Sidonian Canaanite would also be called a Sidonian. The same is true with Tyrians etc. A parallel can be drawn from our own times, with cities like Jaffa, or Ramle which were inhabited previously by Arabs, and are now also inhabited by Jews, without the name being changed. Until recently, the name 'Jaffaite' was synonymous with "an Arab from Jaffa", but nowadays it refers to either a Jew or an Arab residing in Jaffa.

In 1 Kings (7: 13–14) we read: "And king Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre. He was a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father was a man of Tyre." It is also told there that this Hiram constructs the Temple. The same story, with slight variations, is found in the Book of Chronicles,¹¹ where Hiram king of Tyre sends an experienced man to king Solomon to help him build the Temple: "And now I have sent a cunning man, endued with understanding, of Hiram my father's. The son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre". The name of this man is mentioned only in chapter 4 verse 11: "And Hiram made the pots and the shovels and the basins. And Hiram finished the work that he was to make for king Solomon for the house of God". We have here the same narrative, with slight variations, With The same name (Hiram – Hiram) in both verses, referring to the same construction, (the Temple). But on one point they seem to contradict each other: the Book of Kings speaks of Hiram as "a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali and his father was a man of Tyre", whereas the book of Chronicles speaks of him as "the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan and his father was a man of Tyre". From both these verses scholars assumed as if Hiram was an israelite only on his mother's side while his father was a Canaanite–Tyrian¹² and that in the names Dan and Naphtali

11 2Chr. 2: 13–14.

12 See for example: Slouschz, Hebreo – Phéniciens et Judeo Berbères, Archives

an error was introduced by a copyist. It was also concluded that the Israelite Temple was copied from Phoenician temple construction.

As a matter of fact, there is no contradiction between these two verses: in the Hebrew text the one verse reads "Ben isha min bnot Dan בן אשה מן בנות דן" = "son of a woman of the daughters of Dan". The name Dan refers to the word "isha" – woman, i. e. Hiram's mother is from the tribe of Dan (as so translated into English); in the second verse the Hebrew text reads "Ben isha almana hoo mimate Naphtali בן אשה אלמנה הוא משבט נפתלי" translated "he was a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali" but the name Naphtali in the Hebrew text refers to the word "Hoo" = הוא = he, i. e. Hiram himself is from the tribe of Naphtali, and not the widow. In other words, Hiram is from the tribe of Naphtali, while his mother is from the tribe of Dan. It must be remembered that tribal affiliation was by the house of the father¹³. Hence Hiram was from the tribe of Naphtali by the house of his father, whereas his mother was from the tribe of Dan. When the text adds: "And his father was a man of Tyre", this is to inform the reader that although his father was of the tribe of Naphtali, he resided in Tyre. Why was it necessary to make this remark? because it was the tribe of Asher which had conquered Tyre and settled there, and not the tribe of Naphtali.

Rashi (rabbi shlomo Itzhaki) and Redag (david kimhi) comment these verses the same.

Hiram is then an Israelite both on his father's and on his mother's side. Josephus¹⁴ writes about Hiram "who was of Naphtalite descent on his mother's side – for she was of that tribe – and whose father was Urias, an Israelite by race." This means he regards him as an Israelite on both sides, except that he substitutes the tribe of Dan with the tribe of Naphtali on the mother's side. To sum up, names such as Sidonian or Tyrian do not indicate that the intention is non – Israelites. They are by no means synonymous with Canaanites as most scholars seem to believe. The Hiram that built the Temple was an Israelite, and his name is identical with that of Hiram, king of Tyre. Why should we see this as a foreign name?¹⁵

There is reason to assume that the tribal formation existed for a certain period of time after the entry to Canaan. to be changed later to local sovereignties which existed in Israel even before Saul (like Abimelech, Jerubaal) . Since the tribe of Asher was the one to conquer the region of Tyre and Sidon, we must inevitably accept the fact that Hiram, king of Tyre, was an Israelite king who ruled over the tribe of Asher (or part of it), remaining

Marocaines, 1908, p. 65; p. 7, note 6.

Rawlinson, Phoenicia, 2nd edit. pp. 96–97.

Sayce. The early history of the Hebrews 2nd edit. p. 464.

13 Nu. 26: 2; 1: 2: 18: 24 ; 4: 2: 22: 40: 42 ; 3: 15: 20.

14 Ant. VIII: 76

15 Perhaps it is a distortion of the Biblical name Ahiram (Nu. 6: 39)

outside the general framework of the Israelite nation, and did not unite with the other tribes under one government – that of Saul and David. (There is reason to believe that also the tribe of Gad remained apart).