This continues the theme of the last assignment – the Deuteronomistic theory of history. In Judges, the Israelites are without a main leader. They shouldn’t need one: they’ve been given the Law and should be able to govern themselves by it. But they keep not succeeding and falling away from the Law – which means (by now the story will be sounding familiar to you) falling away from the exclusive worship of Yahweh and whoring after other gods. This inevitably leads to their being attacked and battered by different groups of Canaanites under an assortment of kings. (Canaan was by no means securely in Israelite hands.) At such times, a “judge” – a temporary ruler with a big military role – would receive the spirit of YHWH and leads the Israelites against their enemies, usually winning with the help of YHWH. For a time, the Israelites are faithful of YHWH, only to fall into the worship of Baal or some other Canaanite deity. Then the cycle begins again. The last verse of the book reads as follows: “In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes” ( Judges 21.25). It will begin to look to the Israelites like they need a permanent king to keep them in line. This is what they will ask for in 1 Samuel, our assignment for next week.

_Bible reading:_ Judges 2.1-5.31; 10.1-12.7; 21.25 (last verse of the book, quoted above).
_Harris reading:_ pp. 172-177 contains good stuff. Also look at map on p. 171.

**Questions (you need to think about and have answers for all the questions; you only have to write on #5!):**

1. Note the map in Harris, p.171 (or Map 3 at the back of the Oxford Bible – “Israel in Canaan”). It shows Canaan as settled by the twelve tribes of Israel, named after Jacob’s twelve sons – Dan, Issachar, Reuben Judah, and so forth. (Joseph’s tribe gets subdivided into Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph’s two sons.) Remember, Canaan is also full of other people, too – Amorites, Moabites, and so forth. Jerusalem at this point does not belong to the Israelites; it is a Jebusite city. Two important areas to notice are Ephraim and Judah. When Israel comes apart in a couple of weeks, it will be between these two tribes (Ephraim becomes another name for Israel, so you end up with Israel and Judah. Their separate histories become important in understanding parts of the great prophets). So which of the two – Ephraim or Judah – is to the north of the other?

2. Skim over Judges ch. 1 quickly and don’t worry about following all the names. Note what the introductory footnote says: the chapter “describes the general success of Judah and the increasing failure of the other Israelite tribes in dispossessing the Canaanites from the individual tribal alloments.”

3. The footnote to 2.6-3.6 tells you that this section is about “apostasy and its consequences.” Another very important term: apostasy. (a) What does it mean? (b) Name a couple of the gods the Israelites lust after.

4. Enjoy the Biblical writers’ talent for sticking in memorable little details to help the stories live in our memories. What do you remember about Ehud in 3.12 ff. (“ff”) means
“and following”)? What do you remember about King Eglon? Can you believe the Israelites serving a king like Eglon for eighteen years! It’s a measure of how far they fall when they fall into apostasy, now that you know what it means.

5. **For writing:** The main exhibit for today is the story of Deborah in 4.1-5.31; it contains one of the oldest parts of the Bible, the song of Deborah in ch.5. In considering the battle described here, historians generally agree on this bare outline of historical events: Around 1125 B.C.E., some combination of Israelite tribes (but not all of them) rebelled against a Canaanite overlord named Jabin, who sent an army of chariots under the command of Sisera to subdue them. Battle was joined at the river Koshon, where a rainstorm turned the battlefield to mud and Sisera’s chariots bogged down helplessly. In the retreat, much of Sisera’s army was killed, and Sisera himself was assassinated by a woman with whom he took refuge. **Questions:** What does the poetic account in Judges 5 add to that sparse statement of events? What religious meaning does the poet find in the battle? What emotional effects appropriate to the occasion does the poem convey? Where do you see parallelism contributing to emotional effect? **Point out particular lines and details from the poem to support your answer.** (If you missed what Michael said on Monday about parallelism in Hebrew poetry, see Harris, , pp. 214-215, Box 6.2 for an efficient overview of the topic.) Be sure to understand and envision the scene at the very end of the poem.

6. I’m having you read the story of Jephtha in 11.1-12.7 because it is sad and beautiful. Its purpose seems to be, in part, to illustrate a common theme in all these chapters – that YHWH has to work out his divine plan through very imperfect leaders. What is Jephtha’s mistake in this story? Why does he make it? (In this culture, a vow, once made, cannot be retracted.) Speaking of imperfect leaders, we don’t have time for Samson, the most imperfect of them all, and so colorful! If you want to read about him, he’s in Judges 13.1-16.31.