From the perspective of Fernand Braudel's *longue durée* (1972), we shall look once again at the Song of Deborah (Judg. v), beginning with a brief overview of the demographic, ecological, and social conditions that characterized the highlands of Canaan and the heartland of Israel in the 12th-11th centuries B.C. (see Stager 1985c for a lengthier analysis).

We shall then correlate some basic features of this largely archaeological reconstruction with some key words and concepts from the Song of Deborah in order (1) to understand why the highland tribes responded positively to the call to arms against the Canaanites, while other Israelite tribes stayed home; and (2) to explore the relationship between ideology and behavior within that complex institution sometimes referred to as the Tribal League of Israel.

Beginning with the Iron Age, the small village became the predominant form of settlement in the highlands of ancient Israel. Clusters of dwellings comprised the nucleus of settlement. Real fortification walls were rare. Houses arranged contiguously on the village perimeter afforded limited protection. Most villages relied upon their hilltop position and the surrounding terraced slopes for defense.

Organized along kinship lines from the multiple-family household (small *bêt ḏāḇ*) through higher order segments such as patrilineages (large *bêt ḏāḇ*) and clans (*mišpāḥōt*), the Iron Age village and clan districts provided the locus for the most basic and, in many ways, the most important socio-economic units in highland society. Preference for marriage within *mišpāḥōt*, especially of paternal first cousins (cf. Num. xxxvi), helped preserve the patrimony (*nahālāh*) and produce actual consanguinity throughout many of the villages and districts. Usually the villages had fewer than two hundred inhabitants.

Each village probably had its own council of elders (*zēqēnim*, see 1 Sam. xi 3, xvi 4, xxx 26-31), chosen from among the heads of household of the more prominent lineages. From these village councils, certain members were co-opted to serve on regional councils, and so on up the segmentary ladder of representation.
Within the village community the primary productive and processing units were the households (extended or multiple family). Most subsistence needs were met by farming the land around the village and raising livestock, such as sheep and goats. Their rural economy was based largely on cereal production, with a few settlements engaged in vine and olive cultivation.

However, in contrast to the more integrated highland-lowland economy of the Iron II period, the Iron I villagers avoided heavy investments in long-term “cash-crops”, such as olive- and viticulture produced, which tend to propel the economy toward trade links with the outside world and dependence on interregional or even international exchange networks (Stager 1985a for the Early Bronze Age and 1985c for the Iron Age; Wolf, pp. 32-6; Polk, pp. 4-7). Their mountain habitat as well as continued hostilities toward the peoples of the plains, whether Canaanites, Egyptians, or Sea Peoples, fostered what Weulersse (pp. 59-62) called the “économique locale”. The investment in permanent quarters and pioneered land in the hills promoted independence and isolation from surrounding complementary regions, especially the “bread baskets” of the coastal plains and valleys.

I can imagine that the Iron I highlanders, many of whom formed the active core of the tribesmen who responded to the call to battle in the Song of Deborah, shared much in common with some of their modern counterparts in Mt Lebanon, whom Polk (p. 8) depicted in this way:

Throughout history, the natural barrier of the mountains defended the inhabitants. [Mt] Lebanon became a refuge for such religious and ethnic minorities as the Druze and Maronites. The independent mountaineers stand in stark contrast to the humbled peasants of the Biqa Valley or the Nile Delta. The mountains provided men with the opportunity for freedom, and they realized it during much of their history. The cult of the warrior, the notion of independence of the clan, the village, and the district became integral parts of the culture of the people. Villagers marched to war under their village flags. Villagers as groups drove away tax collectors during extended periods of modern history. And, perhaps most important, they were able to develop a permanence in habitation and mores which was impossible for the more exposed lowland peasant.

In much broader strokes, Braudel paints a picture of the Mediterranean plains as the home of big landowners and poor peasants in contrast to the mountains,

the country of small peasant proprietors, poor but free, devoting their lives to producing all their needs from their land (pp. 74-5).

The mountains are forced to be self-sufficient for the essentials of life, to produce everything as best they can, to cultivate vines, wheat, and olives even if the soil and the climate are unsuitable. In the mountains, society,