Abner is sometimes called Abner, sometimes Abner b. Ner; Jeroboam appears both as Jeroboam and as Jeroboam b. Nebat; Gideon is usually Gideon or Jerubbaal, except for three places where he is called Jerubbaal b. Joash. Shimei is four times Shimei b. Gera, and fourteen times simply Shimei, but Sheba is invariably Sheba b. Bichri on the eight occasions he is mentioned by name. Similar variations occur in the names of other personages in the historical books. Judging by the lack of attention this phenomenon receives in the commentaries one must assume that the choice of the name-forms “X” or “X ben Y” is generally thought to be arbitrary.

This view may be questioned, however. While it is impossible to be certain that one has correctly identified the reason for the use of one of the name-forms in a particular passage, it will become clear from the present study that a number of factors that influence the narrator’s choice of name-form may be distinguished. That is, when both “X” and “X ben Y” are in use for an individual, it can be observed that the long form “X ben Y” is used:

a. for clarity, to distinguish e.g. X ben Y from X ben Z
b. for reasons of narrative form
   (i) to introduce a new character into a narrative
   (ii) to introduce a new scene in which the character appears
   (iii) when a speaker mentions a character for the first time (an extension of (i) and (ii))
   (iv) in initial or concluding summaries
c. for formality
   (i) in legal formulations

1) This, the most obvious reason for the full name-form, is the only one recognised even by I. LANDE in her valuable Formelhafte Wendungen der Umgangs-
(ii) in prophetic oracles
(iii) in other formal and official phrases
(iv) in stereotyped formulas, e.g. royal synchronisms
d. for contextual significance
   (i) where the relationship (of X to Y) is meaningful in the context
   (ii) where the name Y has some significance for the narrative

Each of these offers a quite natural occasion for the use of the long form, and most could be readily paralleled in modern English usage. What is noteworthy is that the use of the “X ben Y” form can be reduced to so small a set of contexts. It is of course obvious that a clear distinction between the uses mentioned above cannot always be maintained: thus it could well be argued that the “X ben Y” form in legal formulations is motivated by a need for clarity rather than for formality, but the analysis will, it is hoped, prove useful practically.

It needs to be remarked that the long form “X ben Y” is not always employed when one of the situations analysed above arises; one can only hope to show why “X ben Y” is used when it is used, and one cannot usually speculate about why it is not used.

The reasons for the use of one name-form rather than the other become clear primarily through an examination of names in their setting, so it is proposed to trace certain names throughout the narratives in which they occur. The names studied are arranged in the order of their first occurrence in the Bible.

_Ehud._ The use of the “X ben Y” (hereafter “XbY”) form in Ehud’s case is a simple example of type b i. In Judg. iii 15 “Yahweh raised up a deliverer, Ehud b. Gera, a Benjaminite”, the hero of the narrative is first introduced with the long name-form. Thereafter throughout the story he appears simply as Ehud (vv. 16, 18, 20 etc.).

_Barak_ at his first mention is “Barak b. Abinoam” (Judg. iv 6), while his town and tribal affiliation are also noted, though integrally with the narrative (“Deborah called Barak b. Abinoam from Kadesh Naphtali”) rather than, as is more usual, merely appended to the name (cf. Ehud). Throughout the narrative we have “Barak” simply, except in one place (v. 12): “And they (indefinite) told Sisera: Barak b. Abinoam has gone up to Mount Tabor”. This sudden reversal to the “XbY” form is not arbitrary but can be explained as a vivid trick of style whereby the narrator reproduces not only the direct speech of the spies of Sisera but even the name-form they would have used.