

# JUDGES

## I. Here comes the Judge: a description

- A. An Israelite judge was more than a judge in the modern sense. “The term might better be rendered ‘savior’ or ‘deliverer’ [cf. 3:15; also 2:16 and Neh. 9:27 where the verbs are the same]. Judges were military figures, leading the armies of Israel against her enemies.

They also had civil functions, serving as rulers of the people...” (Pfeiffer, p.55; cf. Samuel in I Sam. 8).

God was still the [nominal] King of His people. He was the real Judge behind the judges, 11:27.

11:27 'Therefore I have not sinned against you, but you wronged me by fighting against me. May the LORD, the Judge, render judgment this day between the children of Israel and the people of Ammon.' "

Significantly, the term “judge” is not applied to any individual, but is generally in the plural, indicating no central theocratic figure.

## B. Three kinds of reputations as a judge

1. Warrior judge – Gideon, Samson, Ehud, Shamgar
2. Priest judge – Eli; Samuel was a Levite (I Chron. 6:33,34,28) who lived within the territory of Ephraim
3. Prophet judge – Samuel; Deborah the prophetess (4:4,9). Deborah is the only judge depicted as judging judicial cases (4:5)

## II. Chronology and Era

### A. Difficult chronology for about 300 years of history

1. The Narrative may describe contemporaneous events, e.g., Samson and Jephthah could be contemporaries
2. The general use of round numbers (frequently multiples of 40, e.g., 3:11,30) makes it difficult to determine the book’s exact chronology
3. Chapters 17-21 are an appendix of earlier events. These events are outside the cycles of apostasy and deliverance
4. Summary: the period covers about 300 years, ca. 1360-1050 (11:26; I Kings 6:1; cf. Acts 13:19,20). If all events were consecutive, they would total about 390 years.

### B. Fortunately, Egypt was weak at this time which kept it from meddling in Palestine, although

there were incursions up the Medt. coast. Pharaoh Merneptah (1224-1214) left a record of his Palestinian invasion upon the famous **Israel Stela** (ca. 1220) found in Egypt, the earliest extant secular record of Israel (*ANE*, picture 96).

“Plundered is Canaan with every evil;  
Carried off is Ascalon.  
Seized upon is Gezer;  
Yenoam is made a thing of naught;  
Israel is desolated, her seed is not.  
Palestine has become a defenseless widow for Egypt;  
Everyone that is turbulent is bound by king Meneptah....”

C. The Philistines, after being repulsed by the Egyptians in the Delta, begin colonization of coastal Palestine (= Latin for “Philistine”) in a second wave ca. 1200. Ctr. Gen. 26:1,14 for evidence of scattered presence in patriarchal times.

D. Ca. 1360-1050. Cf. Jephthah’s perspective in 11:26

11:26 ‘While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and its villages, in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities along the banks of the Arnon, for three hundred years,...

E. Critical Theory: “Israelite Amphictyony”

An “amphictyony” can be defined as a religious league dedicated to a central shrine; from a Greek compound word meaning “both” + “inhabitants” = mutual neighbors sharing an identity.

This higher critical belief purports that the tribes of Israel did not invade Canaan. Rather, the tribes grew up independently in Canaan or else infiltrated that region as Apiru. As independent tribes or city states, the original 12 tribes joined in league for religious purposes with a central shrine. (See Kaiser, p. 175f.)

Mendenhall (1962) and later Gottwald theorized that Israel started as disconnected rabble peasants in the coastlands of Palestine that revolted against city state overlords or against invading Philistines. The unsuccessful peasants’ revolt forced them to move to the unsettled hill country around 1200. However, Anson Rainy (“Where Did the Early Israelites Come From?” in *BAR*, 36:6:46ff) argues especially from linguistics that the Israelites migrated into Palestine from the trans-Jordan region.

III. Theme: “*Every man did that which was right in his own eyes*” (21:25)

This theme is expressed throughout the main body of the book in the phrase, “...the children of Israel did evil in the eyes of the Lord” (2.11; 3.7; 6.1; cf. 3.12;4.1; 10.6; 13.1).

In the closing appendices, this theme of chaos is expressed as, “in those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6 and 21:25; cf. 18.1 and 19.1).

More than needing a king to enforce social order, Israel needed a Messiah to save them from themselves.

A. Sectionalism; no centralization: different judges deliver different tribes

B. Elements that impacted the unity of the tribes and/or affected their ability to possess the land

SOCIOLOGICAL 1. Pockets of strong Canaanite resistance, particularly in the Valleys of Jezreel and Aijalon; these two wedges effectively broke the nation into northern, central, and southern regions.

a. Canaanite and Philistines' superior arms

- (1) Chariots
- (2) Laminated bows
- (3) Monopoly on iron manufacture

b. Alliances with Canaanites, 2:1-5

GEOGRAPHICAL 2. Geographical isolation of distinct regions: Trans-Jordan, Galilee, central mountains, arid Negev, coastal plain

THEOLOGICAL 3. Sin and necessary punishment, 2:19,20

2:19 And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way. 20 Then the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and He said, "Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice...

THEOLOGICAL 4. God's testing the faithfulness of this generation of Israel, 2:22,23; 3:4 (cf. Dt. 8:2)

2:21 "I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, 22 "so that through them I may test Israel,

PRACTICAL 5. Instruction in the art of war, 3:1-3

C. Motif of 7 recorded cycles of apostasy recorded in the book:

- > prosperity
  - > corruption and debauchery
    - > judgment via foreign oppression
    - > repentance and deliverance

Homiletical/thematic outline of the book's message from ch. 2

- Sin, v. 11
- Servitude, v. 14
- Supplication, v.16
- Salvation, v. 18

D. Turmoil of civil wars: "God gives them up" to their sin, but this record also shows the need for a faithful king on God's throne.

1. Abimelech, son of Gideon, versus Shechem — 9

2. Annihilation of the Benjamites — 19-21

Judge Ehud (3c) is probably one of the survivors (2nd generation?) who delivers his people from the Moabites

3. Jephthah and Gilead versus Ephraim — 12

E. Theology (from Cundall in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*)

1. God is the righteous Judge, punishing national and personal apostasy
2. God is sovereign, e.g., Gideon's force (6:16)
3. God is gracious, intervening in time of trouble
4. The importance of faith, Heb. 11:32,33
5. Not mentioned by Cundall is Judges' extensive portrayal of total depravity

IV. Date

- A. Probably written in the days of Saul and/or David, the book of Judges provides an apology for the establishment of the monarchy (17:6; 18:1).

17:6 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

- B. Transmission of the story and text

Cundall in his *TOTC on Judges* (pp. 26,27) suggests that the book began as oral tribal traditions that were reduced to writing in the early monarchy when a renewed national identity was beginning to grow (see refrain of appendices of Judges: C.3 below). He believes the main text might have come around 980. The introduction that sounds like the book of Joshua may have been added last of all by the historian from an ancient account of the conquest.

Naturally, this date excludes the Talmudic tradition of Samuel's authorship. This date later than Samuel is based on Samuel's general opposition to establishing the monarchy (I Sam. 8).

But in opposition to a 980 date are the facts that

- a. Jerusalem is still held by the Jebusites in the days of the original composition (1:21)

1:21 But the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem; so the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

- b. The city of Gezer is still held by the Canaanites (1:29); this city was in the control of Egypt by 970 when it was given to Solomon for a wedding present.

## V. Structure and theme

- A. The **focus**, in contrast to the united action of the nation in the book of Joshua, is on the personal actions of a particular tribe's deliverer. Note Davis & Whitcomb's contrast of the two books: "Victory through Faith" vs. "Failure through Compromise."

Some scholars like archaeologist, Cyrus Gordon, have compared this treatment of the nation's history to other ancient epic literature like Homer's *Illiad* or *Odyssey* (Wolf in *EBC*, p. 379).

### B. Thematic Structure

1. Though it looks like a patchwork, several readings will discern the thematic progression of Israel's growing inability to occupy the land, setting the stage for the chronicles of the theocratic monarchy.

The opening section selectively shows the nation's failure and culminates with the charge of breaking the covenant (2:1,2,20).

The second section illustrates the cycle of apostasy; increased degeneration is evident from the time of Abimelech (ch. 9) onward, Jephthah fails in avoiding civil war where Gideon had succeeded, and the anti-role model Samson never really succeeds in delivering his generation.

The appendices, of course, are sufficiently indicative of the moral/spiritual debauchery of the age.

2. Finally, note the internal structure that supports the above theme and focus: the expression "the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord" is used six times to introduce six major oppressions in this period.

### C. General Outline

1. Incomplete conquest of the land — 1:1-2:5

This is the literary bridge to the book of Joshua. Note the repeat of Othniel's tie to Joshua, as well as the mention of Joshua's death.

2. Israel's Judges — 2:6-16:31

3. Appendices — 17:1-21:25

Here the **refrain is**, "there was no king in Israel," an observation that explains in

retrospect the chaos of the period; 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25.

The events of these five chapters occurred before or during the rule of Othniel.

## VI. Introduction — 1:1-3:6

### A. Incomplete Conquest — 1 - 2:5

1. Not one tribe succeeds in full occupation of their territory
2. Recapitulation of Southern conquest, 1:1-21
  - a. Adonibezek, vv. 5-7, (not Adonizedek of Josh. 10); *lex talionis*, plus, such treatment rendered one unfit for military duty
  - b. Jebusites re-occupy gutted Jerusalem, it being in tribal “no man’s land” on Benjamin’s boundary with Judah, vv. 8,21. This location will later be an advantage in David’s choosing a neutral capital.
  - c. Kenites, related to Moses’ brother-in-law, Hobab, (cf. Num. 10:29-32)
  - d. Beginning of iron age, 1:19; cf. I Sam. 13.19ff.
3. Northern attempts at tribal conquest result at best with forced conscription, vv.22-36
4. Angel of the Lord appears early — 2:1-5 (cf. early appearance in Joshua 5)
  - a. Perhaps at Bethel, code-named “Weeping;” (cf. Gen. 35:8)
    - (1) Removed from Gilgal, last time of appearance to Joshua and during covenant ceremony
    - (2) Sacrifice offered here, v. 5; Bethel is the sanctuary in Judges, 20:18ff.; 21:1-4
  - b. Purpose: to execute covt curses brought on by the people’s breach of covenant

### EXCURSIS on the Othniel Chiasm

From George Schwab, *Right in Their Own Eyes: the Gospel according to Judges*, p. 46

- A Othniel and clan success, 1:11-20
- B Tribes’ Failure, 1:21-36
- C Angel’s verdict/prophecy, 2:1-5
- D Passing of Joshua, 2:6-10
- E Evil of God’s people, 2:11-15
- \***FGod gives judges**, 2:16
- E<sup>1</sup> Evil of God’s people, 2:17
- D<sup>1</sup> Passing of the Joshua and the judges, 2:18,19, (21)
- C<sup>1</sup> God’s verdict, 2:20–3:4
- B<sup>1</sup> Tribes’ failure, 3:5-8
- A<sup>1</sup> Othniel’s success, 3:7-11

## B. General description of the period — 2:6-3:6

1. Recapitulation of death of Joshua and elders from Josh. 24:28-31 as a reason for apostasy
2. New generation's spirit of anarchy (2:10,17,20; cf. Moses' statement about the generation that "knew not Joseph) and God's testing them (2:22; 3:4)

10 When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel.

## VII. Appendix: 2 illustrative stories of chaos

### A. Scheme

1. Chronologically, these events come very early in the period of the Judges, and are thus dealt with at this point in the outline.
  - a. The Danite migration is also recorded in Joshua (19:47), a fact that appears to have been still during the life-time of one such as Rahab (Josh. 6:25).
  - b. Phinehas was still alive during the Benjamite purge (20:28) but was already an adult in the time of Moses (Num. 25:7).
  - c. Judges 18:30 mentions Jonathan, the grandson of Moses!

The MT cites Jonathan as the heir of "Manasseh" in this verse, while the LXX probably accurately has Jonathan as the descendent of "Moses." The omission of "N" in the Hebrew name of Manasseh easily yields "Moseh."

### 2. Literary Design

- a. These early events are included at the end of the book as a climax to show the depth of rebellion and depravity of a covt people. These events could not be included in the main section describing the faithful heroes of the faith and God's deliverance. Rather, they depict judgment of being given up to their own ways; remember the refrain of 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25.
- b. Though the book of Ruth falls into the time period of the Judges, it thematically does not fit into the design of the Book of Judges and stands alone as a blossom of hope and mercy in the midst of a spiritual desert. Still, as we shall see, there also is a thematic connection between Ruth and these appendices that calls for their being placed at the end of Judges.
- c. \*Finally, there is literary symmetry in the incidents of the two appendices: both involve a Levite, a man from Ephraim, Bethlehem of Judah, and 600 warriors. The two appendixes of Judges combined with Ruth is called the "**Bethlehem Trilogy**."

## B. Danite migration — 17-18

1. A mercenary Levite (ctr. Mal. 2:7,8) leaves Bethlehem to become an Ephraimite's chaplain. Kaiser believes this individual is Jonathan ben Gershom ben Moses (p. 198).

17:7 Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah; he was a Levite, and was staying there. 8 The man departed from the city of Bethlehem in Judah to stay wherever he could find a place. Then he came to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, as he journeyed. 9 And Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?" So he said to him, "I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am on my way to find a place to stay."

2. The Danites, squeezed out of their allotted territory by invading Philistines, move into south Lebanon. Perhaps during peaceful rule of Othniel (Jdg. 3:11).

18:30 Then the children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image; and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land

- a. 18:30, "Day of captivity" is suggestive but uncertain. Perhaps refers to:
  - (1) Capture of ark by Philistines; note language of I Sam. 4:21 where the same root word for "departed" is used here for "captivity;" or
  - (2) Unrecorded invasion and seizure of Dan
  - (3) Some, like Schwab, believe this reference shows a post-Assyrian-exile edit
- b. Vs. 31, Tabernacle at Shiloh now, till moved away from the Philistines to Nob, I Sam. 21:1

## C. Benjamite war — 19-21

19:1,2 ...there was a certain Levite staying in the remote mountains of Ephraim. He took for himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. 2 But his concubine played the harlot against him, and went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah...

1. Outrage at Gibeah - 19
  - a. By-passed the Jebusites to stay among Israelites (vv. 11,12)
    - 1) Ironically, they were no safer among their Benjamite brethren
    - 2) An Ephraimite shows hospitality, while Benjamites did not, v. 16
  - b. Reflections of Sodom, v. 22
  - c. Grotesque object lesson awakens Israel from lethargy while serving as a threatened execration upon the indifferent
  - d. Gibeah = Saul's home (1Sam 10:26) where he establishes his throne; ctr. Deut13:16
2. Civil war - 20

- a. Mandated in Deut 13.12-16
- b. Theological Implications of “left-handed” Benjamites, 20:16

20:16 Among all this people were seven hundred select men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair's breadth and not miss.

- 1) Left-handed: contrary to the normal order of nature, especially in view of the name, “son of [my] right hand”
  - 2) “...sling ...and not miss” = אֶפְסַד *chata*,” the Hebrew word also used for sin or “missing the mark” (e.g., Ps. 51:4)
- c. 600 Benjamite survivors given wives, 400 women from punished Jabesh-Gilead (Saul is later sympathetic to this city, phps resettled by Benjamites, his own tribe); 200 others were kidnapped from Shiloh’s Valley of the Dance

### VIII. Israel’s Judges — 3:7 – ch. 16

The Book of Judges cites 12 judges; there may have been more. George Schwab notes that four of the six major judges had divine charisma, and Deborah is recognized also as a prophetess. Only Ehud was not anointed by the Spirit of God.

OT judges as God’s guides and deliverers of His people were “...militaristic leaders empowered by the Spirit of the Lord.” (Schwab)

#### A. Judean Othniel and the Mesopotamians — 3:7-11

- 1. Fertility gods of Canaanites, v. 7; see Merrill’s development of Baal and Asherah, pp. 159-161, or Howard, p. 107.

In the agriculturally based fertility religion of the Canaanites, Asherah was the mother of Baal and the wife of Baal’s father, El. Baal’s consort was his sister, Anat. The Canaanite religion had no central shrine, and cultic prostitution was prominent in many dedicated groves or high places.

3:7 So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God, and served the Baals and Asherah

- 2. Identity of Mesopotamians, אַרְמֵי נְהַרַיִם *‘aram naharaim*

- a. From Mesopotamia proper: King Cushan-Rishathaim was literally, “Cushan, the doubly wicked”

- (1) Cush (Gen. 10:8) was the father of Nimrod of Babylon
- (2) Kassites (Cushites) overran Babylon and controlled it 1500-1100

- b. An emendation of *‘aram* yields *‘edom* of the two rivers ( אֶדְוִם vs. אַרְמֵי ), making the source of the invaders Edom, a region more proximate to Othniel in the south

3. Victory followed by 40 years of peace

B. Ehud the left handed Benjamite vs. the Moabites, ca. 1335 b.c., 3:12-30

1. Oppression for 18 years by Moab, and by Amalakites and Ammon

2. Eglon, the Corpulent King of Moab

a. Assassinated by left-handed **Ehud** (3:15), Judge from Benjamin. Note 20:16 where the Hebrew uniquely describes the Benjamites as “right hand restricted” מִשְׁמֵיֶיךָ  
*Bible Review* for Dec. 1988 suggests that Ehud was from an elite group of ambidextrous warriors whose right arms were bound in days of youth to train for war.

b. Ceremonial sacrifice of idolatrous Eglon

George Schwab (*Gospel According to the OT Commentary, Right in Their Own Eyes*, pp 50ff.) believes that this portrayal is “humorous political satire mocking the Edomites” (p. 55). The king’s name, “Eglon,” is a feminine word for “little calf”; this little calf was slaughtered with a dagger that exposed his offal while the Moabite idols and the king’s servants stood dumb and helpless.

CHIASM

A Ehud passes through the dumb idols (3.19a)

B Servants of Eglon leave his presence (3.19b)

C Eglon arises in his chamber, phps royal latrine (3.20)

**\*D Eglon assassinated with sacrificial overtones (3.21-23)**

C<sup>1</sup> Eglon is supposed to be busy in his chamber

B<sup>1</sup> Servants of Eglon enter his presence (3.25)

A<sup>1</sup> Ehud escapes past the dumb idols (3.26)

c. Jericho oasis retaken as an outpost; 80 years of peace ensued

C. Shamgar and the Philistines — 3:31

1. Western oppression probably contemporary with Ehud’s eastern era of peace, ca. 1230 during the early penetration of the Sea Peoples

2. Shamgar’s physical prowess was close to that of Samson’s, taking out with his trusty ox goad 600 Philistines armed with iron

3. Egyptian incursions into Palestine

a. Probably left Israelite life undisturbed, sticking close to the coast on the Via Maris.

- b. Seti I, 1303 b.c., left a monument of his campaign over the “Apiru” tribes in Beth-shan in the territory of Issachar.
- c. Rameses II, 1286 b.c., marched through Canaan to war against Syria.
  - (1) The cities of his excursion are recorded in the Papyrus Anastasi I, a satirical account of a similar tour by an Egyptian scribe.
  - (2) This foray is just a matter of years after the proposed late date of 1290
- d. Merneptah, 1230 b.c.; set up famous **Israel Stela** in southern Egypt, making this the oldest extant reference to Israel
- e. Rameses III, 1170, moves against the Philistines attempting to settle in the Nile delta



Fig 4. The Merneptah Stele

#### D. Deborah, Judge from Ephraim and Barak of Naphtali vs. the Canaanites — 4,5

- 1. Hazor rebuilt by now, 170 years since its devastation by Joshua, and a new Jabin, phps. a descendant of the deceased Jabin of Joshua’s time, becomes the willing oppressor
- 2. Israelite victory
  - a. God causes R. Kishon to rise and disable chariots (Ps. 83:9)
 

Ps. 83:9 Deal with them as *with* Midian, As *with* Sisera, As *with* Jabin at the Brook Kishon,
  - b. Fleeing General Sisera, feeling secure among Kenites who had intermingled with Canaanites, falls prey to Jael’s tent peg. Merrill (164,5) suggests that the root meaning of “Kenite” is “smith,” implying that, since they lived in tents, the Kenites moved from job to job, and may have been servicing the Canaanite weaponry. Schwab (*Right in Their Own Eyes*, 83), suggests that Jael had straddled the exhausted Sisera to drive the peg into his gaping mouth. She is described then as “dismounting to the ground,” raising the only other picture of “dismounting” in Judges (1:14): Sisera is tacitly compared to Achsah’s brute donkey.
- 3. Deborah’s song of victory — 5
- 4. 40 years of peace (ca. 1200-1150) interrupted by invasion of Rameses III. Yigal Yadin moves the era of peace up by 30 years, based on his dating of the destruction of Hazor.

#### E. Gideon and the Midianites — 6-8

- 1. His preparation, 6

- a. Seven years of oppression and economic dearth
- b. Prophetic reiteration of Mosaic covt, vv. 8-10; cf. Ex. 20

6:8 ... the LORD sent a prophet to the children of Israel, who said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'I brought you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage; 9 'and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. 10 'Also I said to you, "I am the LORD your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell." But you have not obeyed My voice.' "

The Judges functioned prophetically (4:4) as well as judicially. As the centralized monarchy emerges with the king and his officers taking to themselves the civil role, prophets will become more and more prominent as covt spokesmen who remind the king that God is the real King behind the throne, and that God is in relation to the nation through explicit terms of the covt.

- c. Immanuel Promise, v. 12

Howard says one third of angelic appearances are in the book of Judges.

6:12 And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, "The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!"

- d. Gideon inherits the name, “Jerubbaal,” “let Baal contend” v. 32; cf. Gamaliel’s advice in Acts 5
- e. “Clothed” (לָבַשׁ *labash*) by Holy Spirit, v. 34. Cf. Bezalel and Oholiab (Ex. 35:31)

6:34 But the Spirit of the LORD came upon (literally, “clothed”) Gideon;

## 2. Midianite War, 7

- a. 135,000 enemy (odds of 450:1); descendants of Abraham by Keturah, Gen. 25:1-6
- b. Winnowing of Gideon’s force down to three companies of 100 each

- (1) Fearful dismissed, as well as the careless
- (2) Josephus says that the 300 retained were not the careful ones, but the weak ones that the glory might be of God; but see 7:6

7:6 And the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water.

- c. Three signs to Gideon to confirm “Immanuel”

- (1) Fire from the rock of sacrifice, 6:21
- (2) Wet/dry fleece, 6:37-40
- (3) Midianite dream and interpretation, 7:13,14

- d. Trumpets used again, as at Jericho

- e. Leaders Oreb and Zeeb slain by Ephraim, 8:3; Gideon takes Kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, 8:21

### 3. Post-war affairs

- a. Internecine war with Ephraim averted by flattery, 8:1-3; contrast Jephthah's impatience with proud Ephraim, 12:1-3
- b. Reparations exacted against unsympathetic cities of Israel which, putting pragmatism over principle, feared reprisals from the roving Midianites, 8:4-17

REGIONALISM. The men of Succoth and Penuel were Gadites. "Their resistance to Gideon illustrates the very concerns expressed by both Moses and Joshua in regard to the tribes that settled east of the Jordan (Num. 32:6-15, 20-27; Josh. 22:13-20). The river not only was a physical boundary, but had created a psychological and philosophical barrier. The seeds of Israelite disintegration were already beginning to germinate, and it would not be long before the Transjordan tribes would be lost to the confederation for all practical purposes." Merrill, p. 168

- c. Gideon refuses the throne, 8:23 (n.b.); 11:27
  - (1) He makes a priestly ephod which becomes a snare in Israel, 8:27  
Could this shining apron possibly be a symbol of Gideon's having been "clothed" by the Spirit of God (6:34)? If such symbolism became public, it is understandable that the apron became an object of veneration in its representation of God's powerful presence. (CKL)
  - (2) The pivotal center of the book's twelve judges: Abimelech; Gideon's son of his concubine from Shechem, (note worship of "Baal-Berith" [8:33], phps from tradition of Abraham being established in the covt there?) takes the throne for himself for three years, ch. 9
  - (3) Forty years of peace, 8:28, ca. 1160-1120. This may have been the era of the story of Ruth, its events having begun in the days of the seven year oppression and famine: "no sustenance for Israel" (6:1,4)
  - (4) Gideon's 70 sons parallel Abdon's 70 sons/grandsons, placing bookends around Jephthah who had no sons. Jephthah at his own death would forfeit his land and leadership to the family that had despised him.

### F. Tola and Jair, ca. 1120-1100 — 10:1-5

These two were probably contemporaneous, Tola serving in Ephraim for 23 years, and Jair in Gilead for 22 years. Tola was of Issachar, and Jair was phps of Manasseh since Jair was the name of one of Manasseh's sons (Num. 32:41).

## G. Jephthah and the Ammonites — 10:6-12:7

1. Dual oppression by Philistines in West and Ammonites in East around 1100. Judges 10:7 is the only clear reference to simultaneous events in the book.

2. Jephthah's failed diplomacy with Ammon, 11:12-28

a. He tries four arguments

- (1) The Amorites, not Ammonites, had been dispossessed 300 years earlier
- (2) The land was the divine grant of Israel's God; cf. 11:24 and the Moabite Stone (ca. 850) which credited Chemosh with granting victories
- (3) Why didn't the earlier kings of the land press their claims against Israel?
- (4) 300 years of squatters' rights

b. He dates Israel's occupation of the land, 11:26

c. God is the Judge behind the judges, 11:27.  
Cf. Gideon's remark about God's kingship in 8:23.

11: 27: "May the LORD, the Judge, render judgment this day between the children of Israel and the people of Ammon."

3. Jephthah's vow, 11:30-40

a. Two basic views; for a survey of arguments from both sides, see Davis and Whitcomb, *A History of Israel*, pp. 124-28. See Archer, *Survey of OT Intro* for conclusion opposite of Davis & Whitcomb

(1) She was dedicated for Nazirite service

(a) The Spirit of God was upon him, 11:29

29 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, and passed through Mizpah of Gilead; and from Mizpah of Gilead he advanced toward the people of Ammon. 30 And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD

(b) The language of vs. 31 implies that Jephthah anticipated that a human could "meet" him. It is possible that he planned to dedicate a household slave for perpetual temple service following the guidelines of Lev 27.1-8.

(c) Human sacrifice was expressly forbidden under the Law, Lev 18:21, 20:2-5, Dt. 12:31, 18:10

Deut. 12:31 "You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.

i) God did not delight in the sacrifice of Isaac, but rather in the offered substitute

- ii) Saul not permitted to keep his rash vow of killing any soldier who had eaten in battle
- (d) The daughter mourns for two months, not to mourn an impending death, but her virginity.
  - i) The point of the matter is not just that she would never have children, but that her father would never have posterity by his only child
  - ii) Might she not spend time with her father before her departure instead of with the maidens who empathized with her perpetual childlessness?
- (e) There were women Nazirites and others who served in the tabernacle, Ex. 38:8; also Anna in Luke 2  
Note that Lev. 27:28,29 says that beings devoted to God's service are not redeemable.

Lev. 27:28 'Nevertheless no devoted offering that a man may devote to the LORD of all that he has, both man and beast, or the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed; every devoted offering is most holy to the LORD.

(f) Grammatical possibilities

- i) The *waw* conjunction (“and”) in 11:31 may be translated disjunctively to show contrast: “... it shall be the Lord's **OR** I will offer it up as a burnt offering.” Note the translation difference between the 1973 (“or”) and 1977 (“and”) editions of the NASB

1973 NASB: “...it shall be the LORD'S, OR I will offer it up as a burnt offering.”  
1977 NASB: “...it shall be the LORD'S, AND I will offer it up as a burnt offering.”

- ii) Another translation from the Jewish Bible reads, “I will dedicate it and I will offer **Him** a burnt offering.”  
Here the pronoun is used as an indirect object instead of the direct object.

(g) Jephthah had respect for God, Heb. 11:32

(h) Where could Jephthah offer her without public protest (cf. resistance of Saul's men)

(2) Second possible interpretation: She became a human sacrifice

Favored by Howard, Hamilton, Kaiser, Whitcomb

(3) Either interpretation yields the tragic picture of Jephthah who has a sketchy beginning and who is left without posterity. This picture is accented by the judges before and after him who had large families (70 for Gideon and Abdon, and 30 for Jair and Ibzan). The greater tragedy for Jephthah is that his estate would be inherited “by the very family who had disowned him” (Schwab, 146).

- b. Although Jephthah was the son of a harlot mother who possibly was a pagan, he seems to have been a true worshipper of Jehovah (Heb. 11:32).  
 “It is not probable that Jephthah would have made such a senseless, rash vow; ... it is even more impossible that God would grant victory with such a horrible resulting crime because of it.”  
 –Alfred Edersheim

4. “Shibboleth” 12:5

- a. Meaning is “flowing stream” in Heb., but from this occasion, it has come to mean in modern usage any use of language as a password regarded as distinctive of a particular group
- b. Again the men of Ephraim behave petulantly about missing a fight (or more likely, war spoils). Jephthah had invited them (12:2), but he is not so diplomatic as Gideon.
- c. This incident shows the growing disintegration of the nation’s unity and even its language
- d. 42,000 Ephraimites cut off at the fords of Jordan. Hamilton (*Handbook on OT Historical Narratives*, p. 147) notes that this number is greater than the combined enemy losses (14,935) inflicted by earlier judges.

5. Jephthah judged his people for six years of peace, 12:7

This is the first judge where the narrative does not say, “then the land had rest for X years”

H. Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon — 12:8-15

- 1. Overlapping dates, ca. 1090-75
- 2. Obscurity of these [probably] northern judges. Avi-Yonah and Aharoni in *Macmillan Bible Atlas* suggest that some of these more obscure judges are named in order to list a representative from one of each of the tribes, p. 57.  
 It seems that Tola and Jair (10:1-5) are the opening bookend to the Jephthah narrative, while Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon are the closing bookend (12:8-15; see Hamilton, p. 140).
- 3. Polygamy
  - a. Ibzan of Bethlehem (south of Jerusalem or north of Nazareth), capitalized on his polygamy to unify the tribes by marrying off his children to other tribes
  - b. Abdon’s large family displayed its prosperity through its 70 car garage

I. Samson — 13-16

1. Era: Merrill believes the 40 year oppression by the Philistines (13:1) ran from 1124-1084, thus requiring Samson's 20 year tenure (15:20; 16:31) to have begun by 1104. This places his birth around 1123 b.c.
  
2. Critics deny the historicity of Samson and have tried to portray Samson as an example of Hebrew mythology: note his "herculean" Rambo exploits against the enemy, his capricious personal life, and his name, "Sun." Note that he was born near Beth-Shemesh.
 

However, his birth and death are carefully documented, and, without pulling any punches, he is portrayed as a "man of like passions" who showed less personal discipline than what would be expected as an object of the Spirit's power
  
3. His birth, 13
  - a. From among the Danites remaining in the south on the boundary of Judah
  
  - b. Foretold by the Angel of the Lord to a barren mother. Like certain other OT heroes (Isaac, Moses, Immanuel), he was a child of promise who came at a crucial time.
  
  - c. Angel's Name was "Wonderful" (13:18), same Hebrew word as in Is. 9:6; cf. v. 22
 

13:18 But the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?"  
 22 So Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God."

Is. 9:6b And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God
  
4. His career can be outlined by his three trysts. These escapades and his final demise illustrate a failure to live by I Cor. 9:27, "keeping [his massive] body under subjection." In literary context, Samson's serial pursuit of foreign women is analogous to Israel's flirting with foreign idols. Too late does Samson overcome the idol Dagon.
  - a. Woman of Timnah — 14,15
    - (1) Stepping outside the covenantal people, 14:3 ("she is right in my eyes"). Cf. I Cor. 7:39c, marrying only "in the Lord.
  
    - (2) A dead lion (14:5-9) and the jawbone of a donkey (15:15-17)
 

"swarm" of bees = "congregation" אָוֶן

"binding" of Samson (15:10-13) is same word as binding with an oath as in Nazirite binding
  
  - b. Harlot of Gaza, 16:1-3: from Gaza to Hebron is 30 miles
 

What Samson "sees" gets him in trouble; God will overcome his "seeing/lusting"

14:2 – "saw" a Philistine woman  
 16:1 – "saw" a prostitute of Gaza

c. Delilah of Sorek, 16:4-31

A lady of the night (דְּלִילָה) seduces a child of the day (בְּמִשְׁוֹן)

5. His demise

a. In the Temple of Dagon, 16:23,24. Heb. etymology of Dagon may be traced to

- (1) *dag* = “fish;” coins have been found in Ashkalon that are half man and half fish
- (2) *dagan* = “grain,” which is the preferred view for this fertility god, father of Baal

b. Biblical appeals to “Remember me...”

- (1) Samson, 16:28
- (2) Hannah, I Sam. 1:11
- (3) Thief, Lk. 23:43
- (4) Nehemiah, Neh. 13:14
- (5) (Jer. 15:15)

} all prayers in the face of antagonists with an appeal to God the Judge

6. His failure as a Nazirite

- a. Touched dead body of lion to partake of honey; jawbone of dead donkey
- b. Went to drinking banquet (wine)
- c. Set up self for shaven head