

# The Chronology of Judges: Another Look

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The question of chronological sequence in the Book of Judges is related to the date of the Exodus. If the late date of the Exodus is accepted, the length of time required for all 12 recorded judges to follow one another becomes impossible.

Even if the early date is preferred, though, a strict order of succession still yields some 100 years more between the Exodus and David than is allowed by 1 Kings 6:1, which states that 480 years elapsed between the Exodus and the fourth year of Solomon's reign.<sup>1</sup> Jephthah's remark in Judges 11:26 complicates matters further, for he seems to have claimed that 300 years had passed since Moses' defeat of the Ammonites.<sup>2</sup>

Most evangelical commentaries treat the Judges question only as it relates to the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1.<sup>3</sup> On the basis of this verse, one must either accept the possibility that some of the judges overlapped or regard 1 Kings 6:1 as an interpolation (as Garstang did<sup>4</sup>).

<sup>1</sup> A. E. Clundall, *Judges: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968), p. 31. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch suggested a total of 573 years (*Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols. [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982], 2:277-78). See also John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981); John J. Davis and John C. Whitcomb, *A History of Israel from Conquest to Exile* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980).

<sup>2</sup> Samuel J. Schultz, *The Old Testament Speaks*, 2d ed. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970), p. 104.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. William S. LaSor et al., *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), p. 220; R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), p. 330.

<sup>4</sup> John Garstang, *Joshua Judges* (London: Constable & Co., 1931), pp. 51-66.



## Suggested Solutions

Many have noted that several judges seem confined to a particular region,<sup>5</sup> and have suggested schemes for arranging them.<sup>6</sup> Geden claimed that "the geography of the judgments [*sic*] reveals the fact that there were three districts, a north, an east, and a southwest district; the historian goes round these districts in regular order four times."<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to see how he arrived at this design. If the judges are taken in their written sequence, Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar all came from the south (not necessarily from the southwest); Deborah, Gideon, and Tola were in the north; Jair and Jephthah served in Gilead; Ibzan was a southerner; Elon a northerner; Abdon lived in the central hills (which fit none of Geden's districts); and Samson worked in the southwest. There seems to be no geographical pattern here, much less a fourfold cycle such as Geden proposed.

Keil and Delitzsch's approach is equally imaginative, especially at the end of the cycle of the judges. They sought to reconcile the 20 years of Samson, the 40 years of Eli and the unknown term of Samuel with the 40 years of Philistine oppression mentioned in Judges 13:1. To accomplish this, they moved Eli back to the time of Jair and said the Philistine captivity began in the last 20 years of Eli's life. Thus Eli and Samson were contemporaries, as were Samson and Samuel. Samson's crushing blow to the Philistines (Judg. 16:30) opened the door for Samuel to rally the Israelites and throw off the Philistine yoke at Mizpah (1 Sam. 7:2-13).<sup>8</sup>

Keil and Delitzsch, among others,<sup>9</sup> assumed that Samson, Eli, and Samuel all had to fit into the 40 years of Philistine oppression, but this is not necessary. The pattern in Judges seems to be as follows: (1) Israel did evil, (2) the Lord gave them over to oppression for many years, (3) they cried to the Lord for deliverance, and (4) God raised up a deliverer. This cycle holds true for Othniel (3:7-11), Ehud (3:12-30), Deborah (4:1-7), Gideon (6:1-12), and Jephthah (10:6-11:3), all the other major judges. The Samson cycle begins by indicating that Israel again did evil and that the Lord delivered

<sup>5</sup> LaSor, *Old Testament Survey*, p. 220; Schultz, *The Old Testament Speaks*, p. 104.

<sup>6</sup> Cundall, *Judges: An Introduction and Commentary*, pp. 30-31. Harrison said that three principal groups seem to have operated at the same time, though he did not say which three they were (*Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 692). Schultz speaks of 40 to 50 proposed solutions to the problem (*The Old Testament Speaks*, p. 103).

<sup>7</sup> *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1939 ed.), s.v. "Judges, Book of," by A. S. Geden, 3:1774.

<sup>8</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 2:279-83.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Cundall, *Judges: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 30.



them to the Philistines for 40 years. Here the pattern breaks off; the Israelites did not cry to the Lord (unless this cry is recorded elsewhere, as discussed later). Still the Lord raised up Samson and began Israel's move toward the Davidic monarchy. Nothing in this pattern forces us to place Samson's 20 years within the 40-year oppression.<sup>10</sup> The pattern of events is similar enough to place him after it, as is commonly done with the other major judges.<sup>11</sup>

All these proposals overlook factors that must be considered when attempting to reconstruct the period of the judges. First, though the text states time spans for all the oppressions and judges except Shamgar, it does not tell how long it took for the Israelites to slide into idolatry again. Are the apostasies to be included in the periods of rest that are sometimes noted, or did they occur after those times?<sup>12</sup> The land had peace for 40 years until Othniel's death, then the Israelites sinned again and Eglon of Moab conquered them (Judg. 3:11-12). It seems unlikely that Israel's descent into sin and Eglon's attack happened during Othniel's later years, or that these events happened as soon as Othniel died. So a period of at least several years must be allowed for these events. If Othniel's 40 years and Eglon's 18 years are placed one after the other, the lapsed time may be shortened by as many as 20 years or as few as one year. Similar unspecified gaps between all the judges and Israel's subsequent departures from the Lord must be taken into account. These unspoken gaps are bound to throw off attempts to construct a precise time line.

Furthermore, it is not known how many generations passed before Israel first sinned. Elders governed for a time after Joshua's death (2:7). The generation that departed from the Lord came after the death of the entire generation that had seen the Lord's mighty deeds (v. 10). Does this include children old enough to remember the Conquest? It is impossible to say, but time must be allowed for the intermarriage with the Canaanites described in 3:5-6 before the first oppression under Cushan-Rishathaim (vv. 7-8). While the first

<sup>10</sup> Judges 15:20 does say that Samson judged "in the days of the Philistines." It is clear, however, that the days of the Philistines extended well beyond both him and Samuel into David's time. So this does not require placing him within the initial 40 years of enslavement.

<sup>11</sup> Keil and Delitzsch and Cundall allow for successive oppression and judgeship in all other instances. Geden seems to place Samson's 20 years after the 40-year oppression (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* [1939 ed.], s.v. "Judges, Book of," by Geden, 3:1774).

<sup>12</sup> Even if the apostasies are included in the "rest" periods a problem exists because not all the judges were followed by periods of rest. Judges 3:31 states that Shamgar came after Ehud, while Judges 4:1 indicates that Israel sinned after Ehud died. Thus the unspecified time of Shamgar may or may not overlap the time of sin in 4:1, while the time of sin may or may not overlap the 80 years of peace after Ehud's victory, since the text does not say whether Ehud lived through the entire 80 years of peace.



spiritual decline must have taken at least one generation, it could easily have taken more.

The exact length of the period of the Judges is not known, since no one can say exactly when it began. So any attempt to juggle the dates of the judges based on the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1 or the 300 years of Judges 11:26 is doomed to artificiality. There are too many blank spaces in the record.

If, for the sake of argument, one accepts the proposal of Keil and Delitzsch,<sup>13</sup> yet another difficulty is encountered. If Eli and Samuel judged concurrently with Samson but are not mentioned in Judges, how many other judges ruled in this period without being mentioned? It is generally assumed that Judges gives all the names from the period, but this may not be a valid assumption. Judges mentions 12 judges, divided into six major and six minor ones. Was this number selected to reinforce the unity of the 12 tribes under David? If so, were there other judges about whom nothing is known? And if that is the case, knowledge of the chronology of the period is further reduced.<sup>14</sup>

This overview paints a bleak picture. A time line for the period of the Judges cannot be reconstructed with any certainty. Accepting the accuracy of 1 Kings 6:1 and Judges 11:26, the best one can say is that information to fit it all together in a year-by-year sequence is lacking, but somehow it must fit the time spans of these verses.

On the other hand it is possible to construct a relative chronology, one that pictures which judges followed each other and which ones ruled concurrently. Such an arrangement helps in interpreting the book, allows for the gaps mentioned, and still enables the Judges period to be placed within the overall scope of Solomon's 480 years.

## A Proposal

Three expressions introduce several new judges. The statement that Israel "again did evil" (lit. "added to do evil") introduces Ehud (3:12), Deborah (4:1), Jephthah (10:6), and Samson (13:1). This expression always begins with the consecutive verb *וַיַּעַשׂ*, but despite its form the verb does not generally designate consecutive events. Rather, it is an episode-initial clause that begins a new story, and thus gives little or no indication of how it relates to the material preceding it.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See note 8.

<sup>14</sup> See also 1 Samuel 12:11. If the Masoretic Text reading "Bedan" (instead of "Barak," which is found in the Septuagint) is correct, this is a judge about whom nothing is known. This possibility of unknown judges is mentioned merely as a hypothesis; the present writer does not necessarily endorse it.

<sup>15</sup> Francis I. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew* (The Hague: Mouton, 1974),



"After him" (אַחֲרָיו) introduces Shamgar (3:31), Tola (10:1, אַחֲרֵי אַבִּימֶלֶךְ, "after Abimelech"), Jair (10:3), Ibzan (12:8), Elon (12:11), and Abdon (12:13), all the "minor" judges.

"And the sons of Israel did what was evil" (וַיַּעַשׂוּ אֶת־הָרָע) occurs in 3:7, the beginning of the Judges cycle, and in 6:1 introducing Gideon.

#### OTHNIEL

As noted above, the beginning of the Mesopotamian oppression is difficult to pinpoint historically. Othniel was the son of Caleb's younger brother Kenaz,<sup>16</sup> so he was at least a generation removed. The nearest thing to a time marker for Othniel is the statement in Judges 3:11 that the land had rest for 40 years, "and Othniel the son of Kenaz died." Yet even this does not limit the time span to a single generation, since it is not known how much younger Kenaz was than Caleb,<sup>17</sup> nor is Othniel's age at death known. Many of the great leaders then, such as Joshua, lived to be well over 100. If this was true of Othniel, he could have been nearly 80 before the Lord raised him up against Cushan-rishathaim (3:10). Again at least one generation must be allowed for the intermarriage mentioned in 3:6.

Geographically this series of events probably included all Israel (with the possible exception of the Transjordanian tribes), since the invader Cushan-rishathaim would have followed the Fertile Crescent and entered Israel either by going around Mount Hermon and down through the northern tribes, or by going through the eastern tribes and across the Jordan River into Ephraim or Benjamin. In either case, Othniel must have led virtually the whole nation unless he was far from home when he rose up as a deliverer.

#### EHUD

Based on the 40-year reference in 3:11, it is safe to say that Ehud followed Othniel chronologically. How long Israel sinned before Eglon of Moab invaded is a matter of speculation.

Judges 3:19 indicates that Ehud was at Gilgal, just west of the Jordan River, when he spoke to Eglon. Verse 28 reinforces this location, for seizing the fords of the Jordan would not have accomplished much by way of stopping the escaping Moabites if they were already

pp. 77, 88; cf. Gesenius' *Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch, 2d rev. ed., A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), p. 327.

<sup>16</sup> He was not Caleb's brother, as Keil and Delitzsch claimed (*Commentary on the Old Testament*, 2:291). According to 1 Chronicles 4:13, Othniel was the son of Kenaz, who was Caleb's younger brother. Kenaz had two sons, Othniel and Seraiah. Caleb's father was Jephunneh (Num. 13:6; 1 Chron. 4:15).

<sup>17</sup> The fact that Kenaz is specifically called Caleb's "younger" brother is an argument for the idea that he was quite a bit younger than Caleb, but this cannot be pressed too far.



on the east side. This suggests that Eglon had such control of central Israel that he had a summer palace in Gilgal. Ehud escaped to Seirah, a place of unknown location (v. 26), though verse 27 apparently places it in Ephraim. In that case the oppression and battle probably involved only central Israel.

In Eglon's invasion he went through Reuben in the east, across the Jordan, and into Benjamin and Ephraim. Ehud, a Benjamite, raised his main army from Ephraim (v. 27). The northern tribes were not involved in this oppression or the fighting. The "sons of Israel" followed Ehud (v. 27), but this need not mean every man in Israel.<sup>18</sup>

#### SHAMGAR

Shamgar's name is not Hebrew,<sup>19</sup> and he is said to be the son of Anath, a Canaanite name.<sup>20</sup> Though he came "after him," that is after Ehud (v. 31), it is not known how long after nor is the length of his term given.<sup>21</sup> His enemies were the Philistines, but there is no mention of oppression by them. Little is known about the beginnings of Philistine harassment. They were in the land when Joshua arrived (Josh. 13:2-3) and remained there along with other Canaanites when the period of the Judges began (Judg. 3:3). Beyond this, no one knows why Shamgar rose up and killed 600 of them.

The verbs in verse 31 may offer a clue as to his place in the sequence. The Ehud story closes with a series of events: the Israelites smote Moab (v. 29), Moab was subdued (v. 30), and the land had rest (v. 30). The chain of consecutive verbs is broken at verse 31 with the statement, "Now after him was Shamgar" (וְאַחֲרָיו הָיָה שָׁמְגָר). This could be considered a circumstantial pluperfect ("had been"),<sup>22</sup> flashing back to a time before the 80 years of peace that followed Ehud's victory. The difficulty with this is that in 5:6 Deborah lived in the time of Shamgar, whereas 4:1 puts her battle with Jabin and Sisera after Ehud's death. It is better to consider this phrase an episode-initial circumstantial clause introducing a new person.<sup>23</sup> Given the "rest" formula at the end of the Ehud story and the reference to

<sup>18</sup> This is contrary to the statement of Geden (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* [1939 ed.], s.v. "Judges, Book of," 3:1774).

<sup>19</sup> James Hastings, ed., *Dictionary of the Bible* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), p. 841. Jeremiah 39:3 mentions a Babylonian name Samgar, which may or may not be a related name.

<sup>20</sup> In Ugaritic literature, Anath was a sister of Baal.

<sup>21</sup> John Walton lists Shamgar's term as 10 years, but gives no explanation of how he derived this figure (*Chronological Charts of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978]).

<sup>22</sup> Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, p. 85.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.



Shamgar in 5:6, it is best to consider the brief reference to Shamgar circumstantial to the Deborah story, rather than to the Ehud story.

Judges 3:31 closes with the summary, "He also (וְגַם) saved Israel." While it is possible that וְגַם makes the smiting and the saving appositional (i.e., "He smote 600 Philistines . . . and thus saved Israel,") the addition of וְגַם puts the emphasis on the person and strengthens the force of וְגַם as an inclusive conjunction: "He also [like Deborah, or possibly Ehud] saved Israel."<sup>24</sup> Deborah and Shamgar were contemporaries, but the author of Judges chose to relegate Shamgar's deed to the ancient equivalent of a footnote.

Another problem is how Shamgar relates chronologically to other conflicts with the Philistines. The Philistines attacked Israel again and again, even after Samuel defeated them. It is possible that they were still harassing the southern tribes during the 40 years of rest that followed Deborah's victory.

#### DEBORAH<sup>25</sup>

Israel did evil again ("added to do evil") "after Ehud died" (Judg. 4:1). The expression וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן עָשָׂה יִשְׂרָאֵל רָע could mean "Then Ehud died," "Now Ehud had died," "Now Ehud was dying" (participle), or (with the NASB) "After Ehud died."<sup>26</sup> In any case the people returned to their evil ways as soon as Ehud was unable to hold them back. The statement eliminates the possibility that Jabin oppressed the north during the 80 years of peace that Ehud secured for the central tribes.

On the other hand, as already seen, Deborah and Shamgar were contemporaries. Shamgar was probably from Judah or Benjamin (possibly southern Dan, like Samson), and judged in the south when the Philistines raided, while Deborah the Ephraimitess judged in the north and fought the armies of Jabin. Deborah's term may even have been partly contemporary with that of Ehud, because she was judging at the time Jabin oppressed Israel (4:4). The participial clause "she was judging" places this action alongside the main threads of the story, which means that Deborah was already considered a judge when the oppression began.<sup>27</sup> Jabin's oppression lasted 20 years. The

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>25</sup> It is amusing to note that most treatments of Deborah include Barak. Besides being unnecessary, this may betray a touch of chauvinism. Barak was not a judge; he was Deborah's general. He also refused to go into battle without the woman judge at his side (Judg. 4:8).

<sup>26</sup> Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, p. 85.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 82. If Deborah had arisen as a judge after the oppression and just before the battle, sequential verbs would have been used. Cf. Bruce K. Waltke, *Hebrew Syntax Notes: A Revision of Jouon's Grammaire de l'Hebreu Biblique* (Portland, OR: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1974), p. 18.

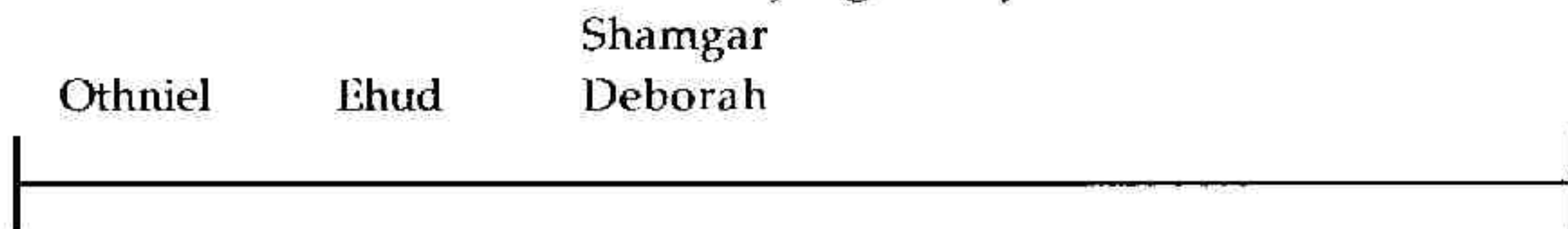


text does not say how old Deborah was when she broke his power, but perhaps she began judging the north immediately after or toward the end of Ehud's term, before Israel slid into evil again. The Israelites customarily brought their disputes to her for settlement (v. 5).

Jabin's invasion and the battle with Barak took place in the central and northern tribes. Deborah herself was from the hill country of Ephraim (v. 5), probably toward the border of Manasseh, but Barak was from Naphtali, not far from Jabin's city of Hazor. Barak drew most of his army from Zebulun and Naphtali (v. 10). The catalog of tribes that followed and tribes that did not (5:13-18) strengthens the conclusion that everything was centered in the north and the southern tribes were not affected.

Thus it is probable that Deborah (via Barak) repulsed Jabin's oppression about the time Shamgar was battling the Philistines in the south. Judges 5:31 ends with the chronological reference that "the land was undisturbed for forty years."

A time line for the first four judges may look like this:



### GIDEON

Despite the omission of וַיִּשְׁפֹּט in 6:1, the expression "Again the Israelites did evil" (NIV) may be another episode-initial clause that begins a new story without reference to previous material. Gideon probably followed Deborah, since his activities, like hers, were centered in the north and in Ephraim.

Gideon was of the tribe of Manasseh, probably the western half. This is suggested by the fact that the Midianites camped in the Valley of Jezreel (v. 33) and by the report that Gideon drew his army from the northern tribes (v. 35). Though the Midianites conducted raids as far south as Gaza (v. 4), most of their oppression seems to have been in the north, in much the same area Jabin conquered.

Midian apparently was a nomadic tribe from the Arabian desert. To invade the north central portion of Israel, they would need to pass through the tribe of Gad. It is fascinating that, until Jair (10:3-4), no mention is made of the eastern tribes, and then they are simply called "Gilead." Apparently their influence had dwindled. Judah and Benjamin also do not seem to have been involved in this war.

The land had peace 40 years during Gideon's lifetime (8:28). Abimelech's civil war followed, and lasted three years (9:22), centered only in Ephraim.

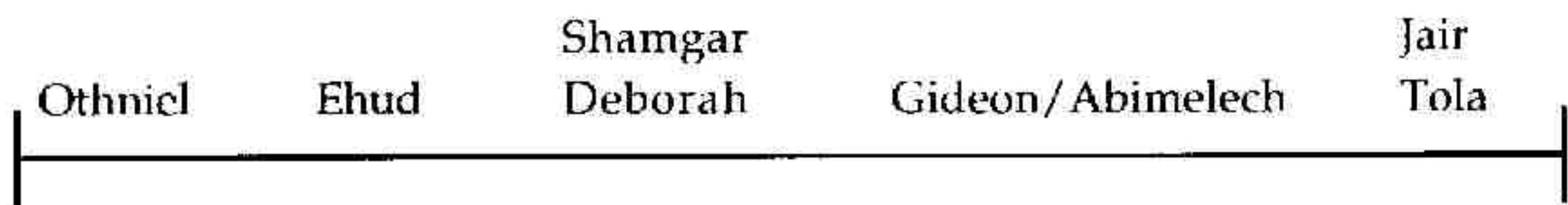


TOLA AND JAIR

Tola's judgeship followed Abimelech's death<sup>28</sup> (10:1), though by how long is not stated. Nor is the enemy in Tola's time mentioned.<sup>29</sup> Jair came "after him" (v. 3), and again no oppressor is stated.

Tola was from Issachar, and Jair was from Gilead. Given this geographic spread and the localization that appears to have set in among the various tribes, these two may have been contemporaries in spite of the sequential verbs that introduce each of them. It may be that "after him" in 10:3 refers to Abimelech. This will be treated in more detail later under Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon.

The time line may be shown in this way:



JEPHTHAH

Again the phrase "Israel added to do evil" is used (10:6). Israel served Canaanite deities, but repented after the Lord brought Ammonites and Philistines against them. There is no way to tell how many years were involved in the repentance recorded in verses 11-16.

All events involving Jephthah occurred in Gilead, except his confrontation with the Ephraimites. Though the Ammonites conducted some raids across the Jordan River into Benjamin and parts of Ephraim (v. 9), their domination was limited to Transjordan.

Since the introductory formula is not strictly a sequence indicator, it is possible that Ammon took advantage of the terror brought on by the Midianite raids of Gideon's day to do some raiding of their own. This idea is reinforced by the fact that no "rest" period is said to have preceded Jephthah's judgeship.

The Ephraimites were disappointed that Gideon did not invite them to join him in his defeat of Midian (8:1). The Ammonites invaded the Ephraimites' territory on occasion, as well as that of Judah and Benjamin (10:9), so the Ephraimites may have used that as

<sup>28</sup> Geden suggests that the author of Judges did not include Abimelech in his overall chronology (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* [1939 ed.], s.v. "Judges, Book of," 3:1774). This reference to Abimelech in connection with Tola seems to dispute that idea.

<sup>29</sup> Keil and Delitzsch insisted that Tola's deliverance amounted to providing a stable government; he "rescued" Israel from the anarchy that might have followed Abimelech's sedition (*Commentary on the Old Testament*, 2:242, 372). But this does not accord with the use of *וַיִּשְׁׁלֵט* in Judges. Since the verb in all other instances refers to physical deliverance from an oppressing neighbor, there is no good reason to give it a different meaning in this verse.



an excuse to jump into Jephthah's battle as well. Perhaps, after playing a minor role in Gideon's victory, they heard about the events in Gilead and decided to try to save face there, arriving just after Jephthah's defeat of Ammon. This places Jephthah's battle just after Gideon's, making the two judges more or less contemporary.<sup>30</sup>

The time line now looks like this:

		Shamgar	Jephthah	Jair
Othniel	Ehud	Deborah	Gideon/Abimelech	Tola
<hr/>				

IBZAN, ELON, ABDON

Ibzan followed Jephthah (12:8), and Elon and Abdon came next, introduced by the same formula (vv. 11, 13) with which Tola and Jair were introduced. Ibzan was from Bethlehem of Judah to the south, Elon was a Zebulunite to the north, and Abdon was from Ephraim in the central region.

It is possible, again despite the sequential verbs of 12:11 and 13, that these three judges were contemporaries. The sequential nature of nearly all the verbs used in this section appears to be suspended. For example if the verbs in the Ibzan episode are viewed as sequential (according to their forms), Ibzan judged Israel, took time off to have a number of children, then judged again, and then died and was buried (12:8-10). This seems rather unlikely. It makes more sense to understand that he fathered his children while he was judging, and to understand the verbs as pseudosequential circumstantial clauses.<sup>31</sup> The Abdon material uses the same verb pattern, while Elon's record (if the verbs are sequential) says he judged, then he judged. Sequential action then is suspended in all three stories.

It is entirely possible, therefore, that the אַחֲרָיו ("after him") in each judge's identification clause actually refers to Jephthah, the preceding major judge. Hence the וַיִּשְׁפֹּט ("and he judged") in each instance is not sequential to the preceding judge, but episode-initial without a time reference. This accounts for the wide geographical spread of the three judges. On the other hand if all three judges were rulers over all Israel, this was an unusual period in the Judges era not seen since Othniel, nor would be seen again until the end of Samuel's term. There is no strong reason to consider this period so

<sup>30</sup> If they were contemporary, this could also explain why the variant introductory formula is used for Gideon, since he was sequential to the period of peace following Deborah, while the Jephthah episode begins with the more common opening formula. Again such possibilities cannot be pressed too far.

<sup>31</sup> Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, p. 88. Andersen states that such pseudosequential circumstantial clauses are rare, but the majority of his research is confined to the Pentateuch. They seem to have been used much more loosely in Judges.



unusual. If Samson was contemporary with Gideon and Jephthah, as suggested in the next section, the short terms of Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon bring the Judges era up to the time when the whole nation gradually united under Samuel and the developing monarchy.

The relative time line would then look like this:

				Ibzan
				Elon
				Abdon
		Shamgar	Jephthah	Jair
Othniel	Ehud	Deborah	Gideon/Abimelech	Tola

Again it should be kept in mind that this time line only illustrates the judges in their general relation to each other and is not a precise chronological record. There is no way to tell, for example, how Tola and Elon chronologically related to each other in the north.

SAMSON

The clause "Israel added to do evil" occurs in 13:1, again without a "rest" period before it. The oppressors were the Philistines, who were Shamgar's enemies (3:31), and who were also mentioned briefly in 10:7 at the beginning of the Jephthah episode. According to 10:7, the Philistines and the Ammonites oppressed Israel at the same time. The Philistines are mentioned first, while the oppression of the Ammonites is developed first. The resulting chiasmus of episodes ties the two together in a tight fashion<sup>32</sup> and reinforces the probability that Jephthah and Samson were contemporaries.<sup>33</sup> Ammon oppressed Israel for 18 years; the Philistines, for 40. If they invaded about the same time, the Philistines could have raided to the north into Dan, Samson's country, without particularly affecting Ibzan's judging of Judah to the east of Dan.

The relative time line now may be shown as follows:

				Ibzan
				Elon
			Samson	Abdon
		Shamgar	Jephthah	Jair
Othniel	Ehud	Deborah	Gideon/Abimelech	Tola

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 67-68, 136-39.

<sup>33</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 2:280.



## The Remainder of the Period of the Judges

It is futile to try to place the events of Judges 17–21 within this scheme with precision. "In those days" (18:1; 19:1; cf. 21:25) is not specific. The words "all the sons of Israel from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilcad" (20:1) could mean the events took place before the periods of localized oppression or after them. But placing them after the listed judges presents another problem.

Samson did not end the Philistine oppression; he weakened the Philistine threat, but whenever a judge delivered Israel from oppression and brought peace to the land, the text says so. In 1 Samuel 4, the Philistines were still waging war with Israel.

If the Philistines were enslaving southern Dan, it would be difficult for all Israel from the city of Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south to assemble for a civil war. This would amount to handing the nation over to the Philistines. These events must have taken place early, probably before Othniel or during the rest that followed him. This likelihood is strengthened by the reference to Phinehas in Judges 20:28, the same Phinehas mentioned in Joshua 22:13; 24:33.<sup>34</sup> Also Saul, the first king, was a Benjamite. The tribe of Benjamin was nearly obliterated in the civil war, so a fair amount of time would have been necessary for the tribe to rebuild itself to the point where it could produce a king such as Saul.

On the other hand if these events occurred so early in the Judges period, why were they placed at the end of the book? The recurring statement, "There was no king in Israel," may provide the answer; they served to illustrate the failure of the Judges system and the need for a nation united under a single monarchy.<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusion

The relative time line suggested in this article is admittedly imperfect, but while it does not give a precise count of years between Joshua and Samuel, it gives a clearer picture of the state of the nation of Israel during the Judges period, and it condenses the overall time span of Judges into a framework that allows for the accuracy of 1 Kings 6:1 and Judges 11:26.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 238. Cundall failed to take this reference into account when he related the Danite migration to the Philistine oppression of Samson's day (*Judges: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 182).

<sup>35</sup> Artur Weiser, *The Old Testament: Its Formation and Development*, trans. Dorothea M. Barton (New York: Association Press, 1961), p. 154.