Judges Podcast quotes and Notes

Judges 2-4; 6-8; 13-16

שְׁפְטִים *shofetim* = judges, chieftains

שָׁפַט *shafat* = judge, vindicate, punish

מָשַׁל mashal = to make decisions, to have power, to rule[1]

From *The Jewish Study Bible*:

The book of Judges is the second of Former Prophets. Its place was determined chronologically- it covers the period after Joshua's death at the end of the book of Joshua and before the anointing of Saul as king in 1 Samuel. The book is named after its central characters, *shofetim* - שְׁפְטִים "judges" (typically translated in "chieftains"). Although the book ends before the birth of Samuel the prophet, 1 Samuel 8.1, "When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons judges over Israel," suggests that Samuel and his sons should be considered judges as well.

The book of Judges does not in its entirety deal with judges. The first one and a half chapters of the book concern the transition from the period of Joshua to the period of the judges, and the final five chapters, often considered an appendix to the book, contain two stories in which judges play no role.[2]

The judges are **mostly shown as tribal leaders** who delivered their people from oppression. Some were military leaders (Othniel, Ehud, Barak, Gideon, and Jephthah), some were **lone warriors** (**Shamgar[3] and Samson[4]**), and one was both leader and commander

[1] Israel said to Gideon, "rule over us" מְשֹׁל־בָּנוּ – Judges 8.22.
[2] Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Book of Judges (Old Testament Readings),* Routledge, 2001, p. x.
[3] And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel. (Judges 3.31)
[4] Judges 13-16.

(Jephthah[5]). Some judges were prophets (Deborah[6] and Samuel), one was a Nazirite (Samson), some were also priests (Eli and Samuel), or sat in judgment (Deborah and Samuel), while the acts of others are not specified (Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon). The term "judge," Hebrew *shofet* (see esp. 2 Sam. 7.11; 2 Kings 23.22; Ruth 1.1; 1 Chron. q.6, 10), thus covers the range of diverse leaders who flourished in the period prior to the monarchy. It should not be understood in a narrow juridical sense.

The book of Judges does not describe the entire period of the judges, nor is it organized chronologically. It opens in the time of the elders who survived Joshua and concludes with Samson, so the last judges, Eli (1 Sam. 4.18) and Samuel (1 Sam. 7.15-17), now appear in the book of Samuel. The ending of the book of Judges, however, deals with events that took place at the start of the period: the conquest of Dan and the war against Gibeah, both of which are placed in the third generation after the exodus from Egypt (18.30; 20.28). Its nonchronological order shows that the editors' purpose was not only to describe and record the period, but to draw lessons from it. **The book's main theme is the inefficacy of the judges, who could only save and affect their people for a limited time**; then the people would relapse, would be punished, and would cry to the Lord to save them again. This recurrent theme of sin, punishment, and rescue gives the book a cyclical structure.

The book offers two principal lessons. The first concerns the role of God in history: It describes the course of history as an interaction between God and His people, with God heeding His people's cries, and saving them through various judges. The second concerns the

[5] Judges 11-12.
[6] Judges 4-5.

type of preferred leader: **The judges are not depicted as ideal leaders**, and their depiction thus paves the way for the establishment of a more successful political institution, namely the monarchy. **The ideal king** could confront the people's enemies and prevent anarchy, though the book warns that the king may also be a villain, as in the case of Abimelech, symbolized by the bramble (ch 9).

The book can be divided into three parts. The first is an exposition that describes the background to the rise of the judges (1. 1-3.6). The second, main part of the book is devoted largely to the acts of the judges (3.7-16.31). The third, final part describes two episodes: that of Micah's graven image and the shrine built at Dan, and the story of the rape in Gibeah and the subsequent civil war (chs 17-21). **These final episodes create the impression that monarchy alone could end the chaotic period of the judges**, when "there was no king in Israel; every man did as he pleased" (17.6; 21.25).

The Sages (b. B. Bat. 14b) assumed that the book of Judges was written by the prophet Samuel, who lived not long after the events described. Biblical scholars, however, maintain that this book, like the other historiographic books in the Bible, was written later, and should not be viewed as a unified work of a single author. Scholars suggest that it could only have been written in an established social culture possessing self-consciousness, appropriate institutions, and a receptive public. Scholars distinguish between the judges' stories, which are based on local-tribal traditions of deliverance and which do not interpret events with theological causality, and their frameworks, which depict the deliverer in a broad national context, characterized by a cycle that begins with sin and ends with peace. There is widespread agreement that these frameworks reflect a Deuteronomistic redaction which took the tribal

stories, gave them a national-religious character, and fitted the whole into the great Deuteronomistic work that describes the history from the years in the wilderness (the book of Deuteronomy) to the Babylonian exile (the end of the book of Kings). At a later stage, they suggest, post-Deuteronomistic redactors added certain passages, such as the ones about the Canaanite nations that were or were not driven out, in the exposition (1-2.5) and the concluding chapters (17-21).

But **the assumption that the book of Judges reflects the ideological world of Deuteronomy may not be correct**. Deuteronomy's ideology and style are **only partly evident** in the book of Judges. Deuteronomistic literature criticizes monarchy (Deut. 17.14-20), places prophets above it (Deut. 18. 15-19; 1 Kings 12.22-24, etc.), demands centralization of cult (Deut. 12.5-28; 1 Kings 8.16ff, etc.), and depicts the deity as a remote being whose name alone dwells in the Temple (Deut. 12.5; 1 Kings 8.27, etc.). By contrast, the book of Judges has positive expectations from the monarchy, makes scarcely any reference to prophecy and its function of predicting historical events, does not call for the centralization of the cult, and shows God intervening in the events, directly or by means of angels. Moreover, the phrases that are typical of Deuteronomistic literature are concentrated only in the exposition of the book (2.6-3.4). **It would seem, therefore, that the main redaction of the book of Judges was completed in the pre-Deuteronomistic stage-namely**, in the late 8th or in the 7th century BCE-[7]and that it reflected the shocked mood in Judah after the downfall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 (see the allusion to exile in 18.30). This would explain the negative portrayal of the

[7] Robin Baker puts the textualization of Judges at the time of King Manasseh (697-643 BCE) and being written by the southern kingdom. Baker, *Hollow Men*, p. 145, 244.

northern tribes throughout the book, from the exposition which accuses them of the sin of failing to drive out the local inhabitants, to the final chapters that speak of Mount Ephraim and the shrine at Dan as sinful places. By contrast, the tribe of Judah[8] is depicted in the opening as a tribe which succeeded completely in driving out the local inhabitants and was faithful to the covenant with God. **The redaction sought to justify the punishment that befell the Northern Kingdom by showing it as a group of sinful tribes**; this theme is evident in each of the sections of the book. The book later was slightly adapted when it became part of the great Deuteronomistic work of Deuteronomy-Kings. Additions from this period or later may include: Deuteronomistic phrases noticeable in the exposition (2.11-19), the text criticizing Gideon for making the ephod (8.27b), and the episode of the concubine in Gibeah (chs 19-21), which is mainly a veiled polemical attack on the house of Saul.

The book of Judges presents itself as covering a period of more than 400 years- 111 years of subjugation, and 299 of judgeship and peace (or possibly 319 years, given the uncertainty about the length of Samson's period). These data do not agree either with the chronology of 1 Kings 6.1, according to which 480 years passed from the exodus to the building of the Jerusalem Temple, or with the historical and archeological findings, which suggest that less than 200 years passed from the end of the 13th century, when the hill country was settled, to the latter half of the 11th century BCE and the beginning of the established monarchy. Modern research has abandoned the conservative view, which accepted the bulk of the book of

[8] This is complicated, since Caleb is a Kenezite ("Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite"כָּלֵב בֶּן־יְפֻנֶּה הַקְּנִזִּי Numbers 32.12), probably a descendant of Kenaz, the grandson of Esau (Genesis 36.11, 15). This puts Caleb as an Edomite. According to Baker, this is deliberate, and shows the overall theology of Judges, meaning that the Book of Judges makes the point that it really is about your loyalty to Yahweh, rather than your tribal affiliation or being a "pure-blood" Israelite. See Baker, *Hollow Men*, p. 148.

Judges as historically authentic, and has emphasized certain ideological (anti-Northern Kingdom, anti-Saul, pro-Davidic) and literary elements of the book. At the same time, it acknowledges the fact that ancient traditions sometimes preserve some echo of the historical reality. Thus, while some scholars chose not to speak of a "period of the judges" at all, other scholars regard this period-namely, the time of settlement leading up to the monarchy-as a decisive one in the history of the people of Israel, in the course of which groups of settling nomads grew into an established society, developed a sense of national identity with a cultural-religious heritage, and came to form the people of Israel.[9]

Presenting Judges as History

When reading Judges from a Western perspective, it is worth mentioning that not everyone agrees as to the historicity of the text. Baruch Halpern sees this as the writing of the first historians.[10] Others disagree. For example, Ahlström argues that the texts of the Hebrew Bible dealing with the period preceding the emergence of the kingdom of Israel were not intended to present the history of the population of Palestine, rather these texts were driven by an “ideological-theological advocacy.”[11] Ahlström, a Biblical scholar dedicated to pursuing the only course possible, that of tracing the archaeological evidence, points out some of the possible flaws in the text of Judges when it comes to reading it as a completely historical text. For example, the account of Ehud defeating Moab, for him, presents problems. He sees no evidence for Moab being occupied before the time of King David, “thus, the narrator may have

[9] Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 508-510.
[10] Halper considers these passages “history,” and uses it to illustrate the workings of the Israelite historians, to illustrate how some Israelite historians worked with source material. See: Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History*, Penn State University Press, 1996, p. 39-75.
[11] Gösta W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine*, Fortress Press, 1993, p. 335.

exaggerated some incident of hostilities between some Israelites and Moabites in the pre-Saulidic era, the purpose being to place the subjugation of Moab as far back in time as possible."[12]

The Structure of the Text

The identification of seven periods of apostasy (see below), to me, demonstrates that this historical construction is purposeful, and that the Book of Judges was "arranged with a careful eye to its contribution to the effect of the whole."[13] All agree that the compilers of the text used sources, but the question remains as to how the major components of the text came together. Most see this text as coming from the scribal pen of a multitude of redactors, but not all agree.[14] Noth[15] views Judges as one stage of a larger whole, while Fohrer[16] argues that it never was. Smend and Boling[17] argue for the evidence of two editions of the Deuteronomistic History. Gooding[18] sees the following as the chiastic presentation of the Book of Judges:

A. Introduction part 1 (1.1-2.5)
B. Introduction part 2 (2.6-3.6)
C. Othniel (3.7-11)
D. Ehud, Shamgar (3.12-31)
E. Deborah, Barak (4.1-5.31)
F. Gideon (6.1-8.32)
E'. Abimelech, Tola, Jair (8.33-10.5)
D'. Jephtha, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon (10.6-12.15)
C'. Samson (13.1-16.31)
B'. Epilogue I (17.1-18.31)

[12] Ahlström, p. 377-378.
[13] Gooding, 1982, p. 77.
[14] For the minority position, see J.P.U. Lilley, 'A Literary Appreciation of the Book of Judges,' *Tyndale Bulletin*, 1967, 94-102.
[15] Gooding, p. 70.
[16] Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, S.P.C.K., 1978, 194.
[17] 'Judges,' *The Anchor Bible*, 1975, p. 29-38.
[18] D. W. Gooding, The Composition of the Book of Judges, *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical, and Geographical Studies*, 1982, 16:77-78.

A’. Epilogue II (19.1-25)

Because of this symmetry, Gooding writes:

> There is every evidence to suggest that each piece of source material has been selected and arranged with a careful eye to its contribution to the effect of the whole. The most natural and economical theory to account for this would be that this was the work of one mind which saw the significance of the history recorded in the sources, perceived the trends it exhibited and carefully selected and positioned each piece of source material so that the symmetrical structure of the whole would make those trends apparent to the reader. It is highly unlikely that such a carefully maintained symmetry was the work of a multiplicity of compilers each with his own different purpose.[19]

Outline of Judges

Introductory Material

1. Judges 1 - Victories and failures in the early part of Israel’s conquest of the land following Joshua’s death.
    a. **Judges 1.21-36** The tribes of the north, who here number seven, are mentioned in order from south to north, from Benjamin to Dan, who was forced to leave his inheritance and later settled in the north. This order is similar to that of the whole book, which begins with Ehud the Benjaminite and concludes with the northward wandering of Dan. The northern tribes are represented as responsible for the majority of the failures to take possession of the land.
2. Joshua dies – Judges 2.7-8. A Deuteronomistic editing: evidence of a later editor that reworked the text seems to exist here in Judges 2.11-19.
    a. Bochim בֹּכִים (Judges 2.1, 5) may be the city of Bethel.[20] Bochim = “weeping,” a place near Gilgal, (or Bethel), where the sons of Israel wept.
    b. Judges 2.1 in the LXX reads as follows: καὶ ἀνέβη ἄγγελος κυρίου ἀπὸ Γαλγαλ ἐπὶ τὸν Κλαυθμῶνα καὶ ἐπὶ Βαιθηλ καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον Ισραηλ καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς κύριος κύριος ἀνεβίβασεν ὑμᾶς ἐξ Αἰγύπτου καὶ εἰσήγαγεν ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν γῆν ἣν ὤμοσεν τοῖς πατράσιν ὑμῶν τοῦ δοῦναι ὑμῖν καὶ εἶπεν ὑμῖν οὐ διασκεδάσω τὴν διαθήκην μου τὴν μεθ᾽ ὑμῶν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. “And the angel of the Lord went up away from Gilgal upon the place of weeping,[21] even upon Bethel, and upon the house of Israel and said to them, the

[19] Gooding, p. 77.

[20] *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 513. The authors offer up the following: “The assembly in Bochim and the punishment for non-dispossessing. This episode is somewhat obscure. 1 : The angel is evidently a prophet sent by the Lord to the city of Bochim, i.e., Bethel. This identification is based upon the Septuagint, and upon the connection of Bethel to weeping (v. 5; see 20.26, 17-23; 21.2). It was only natural that Bethel, which is identified with the golden calf (1 Kings 12.25-30), was chosen to serve as the place of rebuke to the northern tribes, who violated the covenant and sinned in non-dispossessing.”

[21] Κλαυθμῶνα = “Place of weeping,” from κλαῦμα, “weeping.”

> Lord caused you to ascend out of Egypt and he led you into the land which was sworn to your fathers to give to you all, and he said to you all, I will not eradicate[22] my covenant with you into the eternities." (My translation)

The era of the Judges – chapters 3-16

1. Israel is apostate (First Apostasy), Judg. 3.5-7, Othniel[23] raised up (3.10-11), the land has rest 40 years (Judg. 3.11).
2. Second Apostasy (Judg. 3.12), Ehud אֵהוּד a deliverer (מוֹשִׁיעַ) – Judg. 3.15. Ehud delivers Israel (Judg. 3.15-31).[24]
    a. The story of Ehud slaying Eglon is layered, with one of the purposes being to mock the Moabites. This story is to promote laughter.[25]
    b. Ehud slays Eglon, who was "a very fat man" (Judges 3.17).[26]
    c. This is a sordid tale of Eglon performing a bodily function.[27]
    d. Eglon's name suggests the idea of calf *egel*.[28]

---

[22] οὐ διασκεδάσω can also be translated as "I am not in the mood," or "I do not have a disposition to…" In other words, God is not of the disposition to eliminate his διαθήκην, his everlasting covenant with his people.

[23] Othniel is an Edomite, as he is Caleb's brother. See Numbers 32.12; Genesis 36.11, 15.

[24] There are problems with the historicity of this story. For example, Ahlström finds the story where Ehud confronts Eglon the Moabite king problematic, since there is no evidence for Moabites in this period. Brettler, p. 5-6.

[25] The historical sketch suggests that the story in Judges 3.12-30 should be understood as humorous satire mocking the Moabites. Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, p. 33. It is noteworthy that Ehud is left-handed, but is a Benjaminite, the word "Benjamin" meaning "son of the right hand." The pun is purposeful. Another pun in the narrative relates to the excrement that came out of Eglon when he was assassinated. The rhyme between the proximate obscure words *happaršedona*, "the excrement" (v. 22b) and *hammisderona*, "the portico" (v. 23a) are worthy of note in the text. It is very difficult to "read like an ancient Judahite" (Edelman 1991: 13 and *passim*) in the sense of judging the aesthetic pleasure that the text might have offered to its ancient audience. Brettler, *Judges*, p. 38. Brettler argues in another paper that "the simple contention that the story is humorous is actually quite difficult to prove… for it is difficult to determine what ancient Israelites found funny or amusing, since the text rarely contains clues to the reactions of the audience." Brettler, Never the Twain Shall Meet? The Ehud Story as History and Literature, *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 1991, Vol. 62, p. 297-298. Brettler then goes on to state that he sees good reason to view this story as humorous.

[26] Eglon's fat is both the token of his physical ponderousness, his vulnerability to Ehud's sudden blade, and the emblem of his regal stupidity. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Basic Books, 2011, 58/257 electronic version. Robin Baker connects the gut of Eglon to the story of Humbaba in the Gilgamesh epic. She writes, "The most striking feature of Eglon in a book exceedingly sparing of physical descriptions is his gut. An important motif in the Humbaba tale concerns his gut. In his speech against Gilgamesh and Enkidu he asserts 'You are so very small. . . [even if I] were to kill (?) you, would I satisfy my stomach?'. A broken fragment of Tablet V describes Gilgamesh and Enkidu 'pulling out [Humbaba's] entrails'. Humbaba's visage was widely discussed in Mesopotamian texts, not least in ominous material. The depiction in an Old Babylonian clay mask from Sippar of his face as a gut seems to support the connection between these two victims of grisly assassinations. Just as Eglon's fat began to envelop Ehud's blade and, one imagines, its bearer, Gilgamesh suffers the nightmare that Humbaba's body will engulf him. When they slay the ogre, 'plenty fell on the mountain. One of the puzzles regarding the Humbaba tale is how Gilgamesh was able to breach his defences which appear to have possessed a magical force. In an Old Babylonian Sumerian text,315 Gilgamesh enters the ogre's presence using a ruse. The hero brings him gifts and, as a result, Humbaba withdraws his protective aura which then provides the opportunity for his murder by stabbing." Baker, *Hollow Men*, p. 213-215.

[27] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 58/257 electronic version.

[28] Alter, 58/257. Eglon, *eglôn* – עֶגְלוֹן Calf, *ʿēgel* – עֶגֶל – Alter's identification here to me is spot on. Brettler observes, "This exceptional and inappropriate use of animal sacrifice terminology would likely have led the ancient

e. Eglon is a fatted calf, readied for slaughter, and perhaps the epithet *bari*, “fat,” is a play on *meri*, “fatling,” a sacrificial animal occasionally bracketed with calf.
f. Ehud thrusts (*tqy*) the sword into Eglon’s belly (verse 21), and as soon as he makes good his escape (verse 27), he blasts the ram’s horn—the same verb, *tqy*—to rally his troops.[29]
g. Israel kills “ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valour” (Judg. 3.29).[30]
h. Shamgar, son of Anat[31] שַׁמְגַּר בֶּן־עֲנָת kills 600 Philistines (Judg. 3.31).
i. How to read this story- as “fictionalized history.”[32]

3. Third Apostasy (Judg. 4.1), this time Israel is conquered by Jabin, king of Canaan. Israel is delivered by Deborah and Barak (Judg. 4.1-5.31).
   a. Deborah דְּבוֹרָה = “bee,” related to דָּבַר dabar, "to speak, promise, declare,” from the idea of orderly motion. Seeing her name relate to dabar brings to mind the idea of the “oracle,” or דְּבִיר *debir*.
   b. Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah, is buried under a terebinth “oak,”(Gen. 35.8), and it is called “Allon-bakut,” the oak of weeping. In Judges 4.5 this is called “The Palm tree of Deborah.”[33]
   c. Deborah is the spouse of Lapidoth (Judges 4.4). His name means “torches.”[34]

Israelite reader or listener to conclude that sacrifice is an underlying theme of the passage. This is why I translated v. 17 as, “He ‘sacrificed’ the tribute-offering.” The author’s choice of this idiom suggests that the name Eglon is symbolic, and highlights its sacrificial overtones. The story as a whole plays on the notion of sacrifice: while pretending “to bring tribute”/“offering” to Eglon, it is actually Eglon, “the calf,” who becomes the offering. Indeed, the sacrificial knife and the partial disembowelment of the “animal” are depicted in graphic detail. The likelihood of this sacrificial interpretation is enhanced by seeing how it fits the rest of the story. Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, p. 31.

[29] תָּקַע *tāqaʿ* - to blow, clap, strike, sound, thrust, give a blow, blast.

[30] The word for “lusty,” שָׁמֵן *shamen*, also means “fat,” and thus the Moabites are “laid low, or brought into subjugation under the hand of Israel” (Judges 3.30) in a neat parallel to the fate of their fat master under the hand of Ehud.

[31] Anat עֲנָת is a goddess of the ancient Near East (Greek- Avαθ) which probably influenced the character of the Greek goddess Athena, virgin goddess of wisdom and war. Anat's name is remembered in Hebrew tradition in relation to the judge Shamgar "son of Anath," the towns of Beth Anath and Anathoth, (home of the Prophet Jeremiah) and patriarch Joseph's Egyptian wife Asenath. A Jewish inscription from the post-Babylonian period in Elephantine, Egypt, honors a goddess called Anat-Yahu (Anat-Yahweh). She is also associated with several deities of Greek and Roman mythology, especially the warrior-maiden Athena. Anat may also be seen as an example of the Warrior Maiden archetype, which has inspired numerous figures in mythology, literature and history. See: Anat, The New World Encyclopedia.

[32] “It is perhaps less historicized fiction than fictionalized history – history in which the feeling and the meaning of events are concretely realized through the technical resources of prose fiction.” Alter, 61/257.

[33] Some scholars see this setting as portraying Deborah in the place of a nurse to Israel. See: The Jewish Encyclopedia, Deborah. Accessed 5.5.2020.

[34] לַפִּידוֹת a plural of *lapîḏ* לַפִּיד, a word that means "to shine."

   d. Strong parallels between Deborah & Ishtar (Akkadian)[35], a goddess of war and love, exist throughout the text.[36]
4. Fourth Apostasy (Judg. 6.1), this time conquered by Midian. Israel is delivered by Gideon[37] (Judg. 6.1-8.32).
   a. Gideon sees an angel "under an oak in Oprah" – Judges 6.11.[38]
   b. Gideon's responses show his passionate nature, struggling to not be disappointed again – Judges 6.13, 15, 17.
      i. "I am least in my father's house" (Judges 6.15). C.S. Lewis, warning us not to think it is us who do these great things, wrote, "The book or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust in them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory or our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited" (C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 29).
   c. Gideon versus Baal and Asherah – Judges 6.25-31.[39]
   d. Gideon's name Jerubbaal is connected to Baal – Judges 6.32.
   e. Gideon's "signs" – Judges 6.17-23, 36-40.

---

[35] Some connect Ishtar (Akkadian) to Inanna. Inanna was also a fertility figure, and, as goddess of the storehouse and the bride of the god Dumuzi-Amaushumgalana, who represented the growth and fecundity of the date palm, she was characterized as young, beautiful, and impulsive—never as helpmate or mother. She is sometimes referred to as the Lady of the Date Clusters. See: Ishtar, Britannica.com Accessed 5.5.2022.

[36] Robin Baker presents quite a list of parallels between the two in *Hollow Men, Strange Women: Riddles, Codes, and Otherness in the Book of Judges*, Brill, 2016, p. 185-8. Deborah and Ishtar both sing in battle, Deborah is introduced by 7 feminine descriptors, and Ishtar lays claim to 7 names. Both women are found under a sacred palm tree. In fact, Deborah's association with the palm may have been more symbolic than real, since 'a palm tree at that altitude may be growing metaphorically.' Like Deborah metaphorically, Ishtar is accompanied by mountain goats/a *jael* that faces in two directions. Deborah is directing military operations, Ishtar is attired for battle, equipped with bow, arrows, and sword. The portrayal of Ishtar having mastery over the lion, an animal which, in one text, is termed 'the dog of Ishtar,' (CAD N/2, 1980, p. 194) recalls the other occurrence of Deborah in Judges: as the bee swarm that dominates the lion. Ishtar, 'the goddess of destiny and omens' was particularly associated with prophetic utterance, while Deborah is the sole named prophet in the entire book of Judges. Deborah directs the battle from the height of Mount Tabor (4.6-14) and Ishtar dwells on the peaks of the bright mountains (Pirjo Lapinkivi, *The Neo-Assyrian Myth of Ištar's Descent and Resurrection*, p. 40). Baker notes that "the parallels are so close, it is as if the writer of Judges modelled major elements of the Deborah story on Ishtar's contemporary iconography." Baker, p. 186.

[37] giḏʿôn גִּדְעוֹן, "hewer." From *gāḏaʿ* גָּדַע, "to cut, hew, chop, hew down, cut off, cut in two."

[38] "This tree, like Deborah's palm with its leaves and shade, may be a symbol of life and fertility and the only sign of growth that remains in a landscape picked clean by harvest looters." Roger Ryan, *Judges (Readings, a New Bible Commentary)*, Sheffiled Phoenix Press, p. 48.

[39] This motif is reminiscent of Elijah's test at Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18.20-40).

   f. Narrowing Gideon's forces to 300 – Judges 7.1-7.[40]
   g. Gooding notes that "from Gideon onward the judges actually engage in strife against sections of Israel: Gideon in revenge against the men of Succoth and Penuel (Judg. 8.4-9, 14-17), Abimelech, in his ambition to be king (9.5, 34-54), and Jephthah against the Ephraimites (12.1-6). In Samson's case, the people bind him and hand him over to the Philistines (15.9-13).[41]
5. Fifth Apostasy (Judge 8.33-35), this time Israel is entrenched in civil war, as Abimelech, son of Gideon, kills his brothers in seeking to rule Israel.[42] Jotham, remaining son of Gideon, tells the parable of the bramble (Judg. 9.7-21). Israel is delivered through the acts of a "certain woman" who cast a millstone upon Abimelech (Judg. 9.53), Tola (Judg. 10.1), and Jair (Judg. 10.3).
6. Sixth Apostasy (Judg. 10.6), this time Israel is conquered by the Philistines and Ammonites (Judg. 10.7). Israel is delivered by Jephthah, a mighty man of valour and "son of a harlot" (Judg 11.1). After Jephthah, Ibzan (Judg. 12.8), Elon (Judg. 12.11), and Abdon (Judg. 12.13) each rule over the tribes until the next cycle of apostasy is recorded.
   a. Jephthah makes a rash vow (Judg. 11.31) that may be difficult for modern readers (Judg. 11.31-40).
   b. Ways to read this story:
      i. This is human sacrifice, plain and simple, a *peshat* or literal reading of the text.[43]
      ii. Jephthah's daughter was dedicated to the Lord, much like a lifelong, proselyting missionary. In this manner, Jephthah's daughter is portrayed much like Samuel, as one dedicated to the Lord.[44]

---

[40] Gideon's army was reduced from a force of 32,000 warriors to a band of 300 lappers of water, in order to convince the people that the deliverance comes from God. According to rabbinic tradition the lappers were chosen because, unlike those who bent on their knees, they did not bow down to an idol (*Tanhuma*, ed. Buber, *Toledot* 19; *Yalqut Shimoni*, Judges 62; 1 Kings 29). According to Josephus the lappers were the cowards. Following this view, which is more likely, Gideon highlights the miracle of the victory by choosing cowards (*Josephus, Ant*., V.vi.3 [216-17]). *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 525.

[41] Gooding, "The Composition of the Book of Judges," p. 75.

[42] This killing of innocent Israelites is an example of Israel "defiling the land," something Jehovah commanded the Israelites not to do. See: Numbers 35.33-34.

[43] Marc Brettler reads the text this way, "Jephthah is not much better (than Samson). From the beginning he is introduced as "the son of a prostitute" (11:1). In his diplomatic negotiations in chapter 11, he cannot get his history right. He sacrifices his daughter. The last act recorded of him is killing forty-two thousand Ephraimites (12:6). Brettler, *The Book of Judges: Old Testament Readings*, p. 112.

[44] Mike Day, Jephthah's Daughter and Her Sacrifice: Judges 11, 02.01.2021. Joseph Smith apparently did not question the Lord about this dilemma, because he made no changes in the text of his inspired translation. The story as contained in the original Hebrew is, however, ambiguous as to how the vow was to be fulfilled. The phrase "and I will offer it up for a burnt offering" (11:31) could be translated a number of ways: "and/also/but/therefore/then/or I will offer/give/rise/lift/carry it as an offering/gift/ascent/lifting/sacrifice." It is perhaps significant that the fulfillment of this vow as recorded in verse 39 concludes with the phrase "and she knew no man." This phrase could be another way of saying "she died childless (as she was sacrificed as a burnt offering)." But it seems to mean that "she did not marry and raise a family (as she served the Lord the rest of her natural life)."

iii. This story is told in this manner to remind Israel of Manasseh's reign, as he made his son "pass through the fire" (2 Kgs. 21.6) as did Jephthah to his daughter.[45]

7. Seventh apostasy (Judg. 13.1), as Israel is conquered by the Philistines (Judg. 13.1). Israel is partially delivered by Samson שִׁמְשׁוֹן (Judg. 13-16). Samson, a name that means "splendid sun," or "like the sun."[46]
    a. Parents are old and cannot conceive (Abraham/Sarah/ Zachariah/Elizabeth)
    b. Samson has seven locks of hair (Judges 16.13).
    c. He is a giant whose shoulders span 60 cubits (compare Gilgamesh, Heracles).[47]
    d. Samson has lame feet (Sotah 10a).[48]
    e. Samson slays a lion with his hands (Judg. 14.5-6), similar to Heracles.[49]

---

[45] Contextually, the Jephthah section has clear echoes of the situation in Judah under Manasseh. Manasseh made his son 'pass through the fire' as Jephthah did his daughter. Like Jephthah, Manasseh 'shed innocent blood copiously' (2 Kgs 21:6, 16). Like Jephthah, Manasseh surrounded himself with hollow men, devoid of principle, sanctity and compassion. There is no other point in Judah's history as relayed in the Hebrew Bible when the sins catalogued in Judges were committed with the alacrity and on the scale that they were during Manasseh's reign. There is likewise no other extended period when the attraction of Mesopotamian divinities, cultic practices and myths enjoyed the currency and patronage that they received from Manasseh and his court. *Ergo*, the author's systematic insertion of a layer through his book that reworks a range of the most prominent Mesopotamian motifs to produce a trenchant commentary on the culture that produced them. Robin Baker, *Hollow Men*, p. 243.

[46] John Knight Lundwall, Oedipus and the Underworld: Mystery Cosmography in Ancient Myth and Ritual, 2011 dissertation, Pacifica Graduate Institute, p. 297. See: ProQuest Dissertations. Accessed 4.20.2022. Baker connects Sampson to Shamash, the Mesopotamian god of the Sun. He writes, "The Semitic root *šmš* 'sun' of his name Samson links him to the **Mesopotamian solar deity, Shamash, who also is god of judgment.** The association of the sun with justice derives from its constancy, the order it brings to life, and its ability to expose and banish darkness. Another connection with Shamash, whose sacred number is twenty, is that the judgeship of Samson, alone among the judges, lasted twenty years. Twenty is also a number associated with the Assyrian kings, as confirmed by the logographic spelling of the word 'king' with the sign (MAN, 20), whose appointment Shamash oversaw. The title *šamši* is associated with the sun disk icon and used to denote both human and divine kingship. Moreover, Samson is the representative judge of Dan, a tribal name which means 'judge', and perversely may represent the fulfilment of Jacob's prophecy 'Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel' (Gen. 49:16). As a caricature of judgeship, which in Israel, as in Mesopotamia, was customarily conducted at the city gate, Samson dislodges the gates of Gaza and carries them 'to the top of the hill that faces Hebron'. This was a west-east journey conducted by night that recalls the sun's own through the netherworld (16:3). The sunlike judge of Dan is the antithesis of law and order, juridical integrity and kingly virtue. He, who often operates in the dark, is himself confined to the darkness of blindness, a punishment, incidentally, conventionally inflicted by Shamash, and his story marks the darkest point in the narrative of the judge-heroes. Baker, *Hollow Men*, p. 46-47.

[47] Babylonian Talmud, see Lundwall, p. 297. In addition to his great strength, the text here implies, though it does not state definitively, that Samson is a giant: his arms spanned at least as wide as a large city gate, allowing him to tear the entire structure off its gateposts and carry it on his shoulders. Interpreting the verse, a baraita in the Babylonian Talmud makes this point explicitly (b. Sotah 10a): It was taught: R. Simon the Pious said: "The span of **Samson's shoulders was sixty cubits**, as it says [quotes Judges 16:3]… and we have a tradition that Gaza's city gates were never less than sixty [about 100 feet] cubits wide." See: Naphtali Meshel, Samson the Demigod? The Torah.com, accessed 4.20.2022.

[48] The Jewish Encyclopedia, accessed 4.20.2022. Compare Samson to Oedipus, (the lame footed one), to Jacob, to Balaam (whose foot was crushed).

[49] Hercules' first labor: slaying the Nemean lion. See: Nemean lion, Wikipedia. Accessed 5.5.2022. Note that the sphinx that Oedipus beats when he solves the riddle to save Thebes from destruction is also a lion. This is connected to the hero's journey: the slaying of beast that cannot be slain with weapons. Oedipus, Hercules, and

f. Samson eats honey (land of milk and honey?) – Judges 14.8-9.
g. Men threaten the life of Samson's wife if she does not solve their riddle (Judg. 14.15).[50]
h. Samson's wife is given to another, and he is offered the younger daughter (Compare to Jacob. See Judg. 15.2)
i. Angry, Samson takes 300 foxes, ties their tails together and sets them on fire into the crops of his enemies (Judg. 15.4-6).
j. The Philistines then burn Samson's would-be bride and her father (Judg. 15.6), after which Samson takes revenge, slaughtering them "hip and thigh" (Judg. 15.8).
k. The Philistines form an army and Samson defeats them using a jawbone of an ass (Judg. 15.15-16).
l. Samson goes to Gaza, meets a harlot, and takes out the gate of the city, two posts, bar and all (Judg. 16.1-3). This is near identical to elements in the Gilgamesh epic.[51]
m. A series of riddles in a 3+1 patten are portrayed (Judges 16.4-20).
n. On the answer to the fourth riddle, Samson is blinded for revealing the mystery behind his strength (Judges 16.21).[52]

Samson are cast into this mold as heroes. Interestingly enough, there are also depictions of Gilgamesh holding a lion or lion skins. Lundwall, p. 206. One depiction is contained in the Louvre.

[50] There seems to be a message here encoded in the text: if you give away the sacred mysteries, you do so at your own peril! Robin Baker puts it this way: "The text pointedly informs us that Samson discloses neither the killing of the young lion (14:6), nor the source of the honey (14:9), nor the meaning of his riddle to his parents (14:16); 'and 'his strength was not known' (16:9). But the destruction both of the Philistines and of Samson proceeds from his inability through 'knowing' Philistine women to keep secret knowledge secret: first the meaning of his riddle, then the source of his power. We are left in no doubt of the spiritual consequences that the release of esoteric knowledge to the wrong people has. As in Mesopotamian belief when the patron god of a city was offended by its citizens he departed his temple and left his city to its fate, so Yahweh abandoned Samson. Moreover, Samson's abuse of sacred knowledge meant that whatever spiritual understanding he had was forfeited: he 'did not know that Yahweh had left him' (16:20). It follows from the conclusion that the author of Judges subverted historiography for theological ends and was far more concerned with the transmission of esoteric knowledge than he has generally been credited for." Robin Baker, *Hollow Men*, p. 38-39.

[51] Lundwall (p. 299) asserts, "This general structure is interrupted by unusual motifs, such as the introduction of the Harlot and the removal of the city gate with its pins. This is an exact copy of the Gilgamesh text, where that Babylonian hero also removes a gate and its frame where the heavenly harlot (Ishtar with her numerous mates) is found. Such clues as this inform us that either the story is a mix of mythemes from different traditions or that the mythemes belong to a central, ritualistic structure for which we have lost their proper context." Note the parallel in lines 390-399 here.

[52] **G. Devereux cites an impressive number of stories from antiquity in which a person guilty of a sexual misdemeanor is punished with blinding**… **The question to ask is not, 'Why did Oedipus blind himself?' but, 'Why did Sophokles represent Oedipus as blinding himself?'** And a large part of the answer to that question is that it forms the culmination of the image-pattern of sight and blindness, with the implications of that patten for the opposition insight/lack of insight. See: G. Devereux, 'The Self-Blinding of Oidipous in Sophokles: Oidipous Tyrannos,' *The Journal of Hellenistic Studies* xciii, 1973, 36-49. On page 41, Devereux lists 19 stories from antiquity where blinding was the result of a sexual crime. This argument, that Sophocles portrayed Oedipus as a blind man as punishment for this specific crime, in my opinion, is solid.

o. Baker sees the Samson story directly related to the Erra Myth, stating, “the correspondences between Samson and Nergal-Erra are so close and numerous to preclude the possibility of coincidence.”[53]

---

[53] Robin Baker, *Hollow Men, Strange Women, Riddles, Codes and Otherness in the Book of Judges*, p. 193. He later (p. 198) makes the following argument, “Delilah is located only in a room, a room that is situated in the western marches of Israelite territory. This place induces sleep in her victim, and contains concealed enemies. The fact that the Philistine(s) can hide in this chamber without detection implies its darkness (16:9, 12, 19). The account of Samson’s blinding indicates that it took place in Delilah’s room (16:21). Ereshkigal’s habitation is known widely as ‘the dark house, [. . .] where those who enter are deprived of light, [. . .] they see no light, they dwell in darkness’. The negative association of indoors found in Judges is an aspect of the author’s broader philosophy in which cities are perceived as places of evil. The similarities between Samson and Delilah/the Timnite and Nergal and Ereshkigal argue that the writer of Judges appropriated and reworked this Mesopotamian composition as part of his overall treatment of Samson as an expression of Nergal.” At another point (p. 190-1), Baker explains, “Nergal (the Mesopotamian god of scorched earth and war) is called ‘king of the entrance to the Underworld’… In Samson’s joyous victory song, based on a pun that exploits the homophony in Hebrew between the term for ‘ass’ and ‘heap’ (*ḥamôr*) for its effect, he exults with the words ‘a heap, two heaps, with an ass’s jawbone I slew a thousand men’ (15:16)… Nergal’s customary harvest-heap resembles Samson’s for he is ‘the god of inflicted death’. Moreover, unexpectedly, Nergal also possessed a joyful aspect. Finally, Nergal’s month ushers in the darkest period in the year, and the fires lit at the Brazier Festival celebrate this… Nergal as the destructive aspect of the solar deity is seen in the sun’s power to burn up crops and lay landscapes waste, causing famine and pestilence. Nergal is, in fact, **a good example of a composite god** as he absorbed the deity, Erra, ‘originally seemingly an Akkadian god of “scorched earth,” raids and riots’, into his existing role as god of war and sudden death and ruler of the realm of the dead. Nergal/Erra is synonymous with sexual potency, was perceived as the divine trickster, possessing the epithets ‘King of Tricks’ (*Lugal-galamma*), ‘cunning in tricks’ (*uzun nikilti*), and is linked with the fox – ‘ the fox that comes out howling is Nergal’ – not least astronomically. He is ‘the lord who prowls by night’. In the Erra myth, Erra claims ‘I shall cut off the garment from a man’s body [. . .]. I shall make the young man go down into the earth unshrouded. [. . .] When I am enraged, I devastate people’. Of the god it is said, ‘Warrior Erra [. . .] you have put to death the man who sinned against you, you have put to death the man who did not sin against you’. When these details of Nergal/Erra are compared with the Samson tale, the correspondence between the two characters is plain. Samson’s libido requires no comment.” Baker, p. 198. Robin Baker’s connection between **Nergal’s descent** to the underworld and Samson’s descent to the bed of Delilah is provocative. **Both individuals make a descent**, both are **disguised** in their respective myths, “to conceal identity to keep power and save their life” (Baker, 200), both stories involve **illicit intimate relations**. **Nergal is warned** not to have relations with Ereshkigal, and **Samson is warned repeatedly** in the Torah, not to have relations with the enemy, “those that remain shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in yours sides” (Numbers 33.55); “If ye in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations… and make marriages with them, and go in unto them… they shall be snares and traps for you, and scourges in your eyes…” (Joshua 23.12-13). **Both succumb to temptation**, **both are made bald** (Baker, p. 198. Interestingly, Nergal is called “the bald, the cross-eyed, the lame one” several times in the text, see Gurney, p. 121, 125.), **both have an affliction of the eyes** and are handicapped (Baker, 198), **both have an overcoming, or an overwhelming sensation of love**, in Samson’s story, he is overcome, and in Nergal’s descent, Ereshkigal, the female, is overcome by Nergal. Later, Baker makes the connection between Nergal in **the seasons**, stating, “Thus, the account of Samson’s journey to Hebron, to a readership conversant in the **Nergal cult**, would conceivably be seen as the symbolic consignment of the period spanned by the six major judges, beginning in the vicinity of Hebron with Othniel, to darkness, and that Samson provides an overarching commentary on the series analogous to the function played by Nergal for the six months beginning from the summer solstice. This overarching role is likewise indicated by the convergence in his section of the four sets of seven. Samson, at the end of his journey through darkness, ‘was lifted and taken up’ whither his existence began (16:31); Nergal, immediately following the winter solstice returned from the Underworld to his father’s abode. The association of Deborah and Samson with the characters of Ishtar and Nergal is corroborated by their respective positions in the menology of the

p. John Lundwall offers the following way to read this story:

Such strange imagery belongs to the **realm of myth**, and from beginning to end we are obviously dealing with another logic besides literal history. **Although all these motifs can be said to originate in the realm of folklore, they are by now very recognizable, though at times indecipherable.** Samson is a semi-divine being with special hair whose first labor, very much like Herakles, is to slay a lion with his bare hands. He is both lame and blinded, like dear old Oedipus. He overthrows his enemies by using an ass, like Dionysus, and he is delivered to the land of the pillar where he descends to the other world, taking his enemies with him.

This general structure is interrupted by unusual motifs, such as the introduction of the Harlot and the removal of the city gate with its pins. **This is an exact copy of the Gilgamesh text**, where that Babylonian hero also removes a gate and its frame where the heavenly harlot (Ishtar with her numerous mates) is found. Such clues as this inform us that either the story is a mix of mythemes from different traditions or that the mythemes belong to a central, ritualistic structure for which we have lost their proper context.

On this last point, **the mytheme of the burning foxes provides a curious detail**. Like Balaam's talking ass, we are invited to examine this motif from a cultic, cosmographic point of view. Moreover, this mythologem proves not only strange but also a historical fact. Our greatest clue for its interpretation resides in Ovid,[54] who writing in *Fasti 4*, describes one of the Roman rites of Ceres: "When the third morn shall have risen after the disappearance of the Hyades, the horse will be in the Circus, each team in its separate stall. I must therefore explain the reason why foxes are let loose with torches tied to their burning backs" (679). During the festival of Ceres (that is, the days of harvest, and, coincidentally, during the same period that Samson bums the Philistine fields) **fire brands were tied to foxes and they were let loose in the Circus for spectators to watch**. Ovid describes how he traveled to the land of Carseoli[55] where he met a man who explained the origin of this rite.

> "In yonder plain," said he, and he pointed it out, "a thrifty countrywoman had a small croft, she and her sturdy spouse. [.. .] had a son, in childhood frolicsome, who now had seen twice five years and two more. He in a valley at the end of a willow copse caught a vixen fox which had carried off many farmyard fowls. The captive brute he wrapped in straw and hay, and set a light to her; she escaped the hands that would have burned her. Where she fled, she set fire to the crops that clothed the fields, and a breeze fanned the devouring flames. The incident is forgotten, but a memorial of it survives; for to this day a certain law of Carseoli forbids to name a fox; and to punish the species a fox is burned at the festival of Ceres, thus perishing itself in the way it destroyed the crops." (679)

SMC (Standard Mesopotamian Calendar), and specifically the autumn equinox and winter solstice." Baker, *Hollow Men*, p. 208. See also: O.R. Gurney, The Sultantepe Tablets (Continued): VII. The Myth of Nergal and Ereshkigal, *Anatolian Studies*, 1960, Vol. 10, p. 121, 125.

[54] Ovid, Roman poet (43 BCE – 17 or 18 CE).

[55] Carsoli, in Italy. See: Carsoli, Wikipedia.

The origin story tells of a precocious child who burns the fields with foxes; much like the precocious Samson who does the same within a series of labors. This story, however, like Samson's narrative, makes no sense at all, and it shows how difficult myth interpretation can be when separated from its cultic roots. Indeed, **the chief key given us by Ovid is not the interpretation of the story, but its context: the fox and the fire-tail belongs to rites**.

There is one further clue in Ovid's tale, however: **the rite itself was performed after the setting of the Hyades on the horizon**. The Hyades were the daughters of Atlas and the sisters to the Pleiades. They are mentioned as being the nurse maids to Dionysus. More importantly, their name means "the rainy ones" and like the Pleiades, they are a star cluster in the sky; specifically, they are the jawbone of Taurus the bull. The biblical text speaks of the jawbone of an ass which slays the thousand Philistines, but the connection to the Hyades is also present in the text, where, after Samson slaughters his enemies, a hollow in the jawbone opens up and water pours out of it to quench Samson's thirst (15.19). This "rainy" jawbone is the Hyades and is connected to foxes in both Ovid's narrative and the biblical story.

It is also tempting to read this story as pure solar myth. Indeed, during the days of the festival of Ceres, not to mention the writing of the story of Samson, the Hyades set with the sun on the horizon during the rainy months, while, in fact, by the next morning, Ursa Major would be seen rising with the sun parallel to the horizon, and would do so throughout the summer months. This is curious as there is a star known as "the fox," Alcor, who is the bride of the seven stars of Ursa Major; she sparkles right above Mizar in the handle of the Big Dipper. Thus, at sunrise, the fox would be seen running across the fields during the hot summer months after the setting of the Hyades.

The problem with this interpretation as the interpretation is all the other mythemes in the narrative. Many writers have tried to prove that the labors of Herakles resolve to the journey of the sun through the zodiac. However, this attempt does not work with all the labors as described in the myth and a great amount of stretching and tearing has to be done to get the entire cycle of labors to parallel the sun's movement through the zodiac. In other words, something else is going on with the Herakles myth than pure solar allegory.

The same is true of Samson. I have identified the rending asunder of the lion ward with bare hands as a motif found in cosmological cultus **relating to a netherworld journey**. **Samson's defeat of this lion is his entrance to the Underworld**. Like Balaam, themes of life and death reside behind the allegory and are tied to a cultic cosmography, as in Balaam's oracles. In the Samson narrative, lameness, blindness, wounds, and pillars are prominent motifs which also share in this cultic context. The seven locks of hair which are cut from Samson's head are not unlike the seven garments cut from Huwawa[56]; after which both heroes are killed at the axis

[56] Humbaba (or Humwawa) wears seven coats of armor. Gilgamesh and Enkidu fight Humbaba over the cedars of Lebanon, and in the course of the battle, Gilgamesh cuts off the head of Humbaba, but not before Humbaba lets out a curse, telling them that Enkidu will die. Soon after the curse, Enkidu gets sick and dies. See: Epic of Gilgamesh and the Cedars of Lebanon. Accessed 5.5.2022. Lundwall's connection to Humbaba's seven coats of armor can be seen as connected to Robin Baker's connection to Ishtar's seven garments. When she takes off the seventh garment, the garment of dignity, it leaves her naked. In the Sumerian version of the myth, at each of the seven stages Inanna-Ishtar is deprived of her 'divine powers'… In the Judges schema, the final door is reached at the

(the mountain of cedars or the twin pillars). From beginning to end, the Samson story is filled with netherworld motifs.[57]

Epilogues

Results of the period of the שפטים *shofetim* (Judges)

1. Religious confusion – Judges 17-18.
    a. Micah creates a statue made from **stolen silver**, which became the center of the cult, and the priest was Micah's son, whom he himself appointed. During this period Levites sought a livelihood; hence Micah hired a Levite and appointed him as priest rather than his son. Some scholars think that Micah's temple in the hill country of Ephraim is an allusion to Bethel, which was connected with Dan, and that the criticism here is of the central temples of the Northern Kingdom.
    b. The Levite priest that Micah hires is revealed: "Jonathan, son of Gershom, son of 'Manasseh.'" – Judges 18.30.[58]
    c. Problems with Judges 18.30-31.[59]
    d. This story works to portray the time period as one of anarchy, "In those days, there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17.6, 18.1, 19.1, 21.25). In terms of chronology, the story of Micah is set at the beginning of the age of the judges, but is placed at the end of the book to emphasize that the end of the period was similar to its beginning. This

---

beginning of the Samson cycle and results in Israel being oppressed by an alien overlord for forty years, a period as long as Israel spent in the wilderness. For the first time, the oppression does not engender a plea to Yahweh for deliverance. Much of Samson's nocturnal activity was performed naked, and we can infer that Samson was taken unclothed from Delilah's bed to be blinded and enslaved, and was kept naked as was customary. His degradation is reprised in the fate of the Levite's concubine and the maidens of Jabesh-gilead and Shiloh with which the work ends. Ishtar's condition in the Underworld as a piece of rotting meat hanging on a hook for three days is an apt metaphor for Samson's state in Gaza, and is paralleled literally in the concubine whose body is hung on the donkey and then chopped up. As each gate shuts behind the goddess, the darkness increases; so too with Israel's spiritual descent into apostasy and idolatry, as given dramatic expression through Samson. He, who for much of the time operates in the night, is blinded, and ends his life under a pile of monumental rubble and maimed corpses, twice deprived of light. As we have seen, it is in the Samson section that all four of the sevens under discussion converge. Immediately before the second articulation of Israel doing evil in Yahweh's sight, the writer states that the sons of Israel were intermarrying with the surrounding nations and serving their gods (3:5–6). The ultimate fruit of this behaviour is seen in Samson's experience with Delilah, and Israel's metaphorically with Ereshkigal. Baker, p. 202.

[57] Lundwall, p. 299-302.

[58] Here the Levite's identity is revealed, being a grandson of Moses, the third generation from the exodus. The name Moses is obscured and turned into Manasseh (an evil Judean king) by means of a hanging letter "nun" to clear Moses from his grandson's misdeeds. (According to Exod. 2.22, Gershom is Moses' son.)

[59] "The Danites set up the sculpted image for themselves; and Jonathan son of Gershom son of Manasseh, and his descendants, served as priests to the Danite tribe until the land went into exile. They maintained the sculpted image that Micah had made throughout the time that the House of God stood at Shiloh" (Judges 18.30-31). These verses have a couple of problems. Shiloh was destroyed in the days of Samuel (1 Sam. 4-5), more than 300 years before the northern tribes of Israel were taken into captivity by the Assyrians. It seems as if verse 31 is an editorial insertion, introduced into the text to connect this story with the story of Samuel, which begins with his life at the temple at Shiloh (1 Samuel 1).

demonstrates that the judges were unable to correct the situation facing Israel, hence, the solution is monarchy.[60]

2. Moral depravity – Levite concubine and her demise – Judges 19.
    a. A concubine from the hill country of Ephraim left her husband and returned to her father's home in Bethlehem. Her husband came to take her back and spent some time at her father's house. On the way back home, they stopped to sleep in Gibeah, where the woman was raped and killed by the wicked men of the town (Judg. 19.24-27). The husband conveyed this awful news to all the tribes of Israel in graphic fashion (Judg. 19.29). There is much similarity between this story and the events in Genesis 19.[61] Also noteworthy is the name of the town where she is killed: Gibeah. This is the city of King Saul, and thus this story portrays Saul's city as wicked like unto Sodom.
3. Civil war – Judges 20-21.
    a. Benjamin's refusal to turn over those who were guilty in Gibeah led to a bloody war. On the first two days Israel was defeated, for reasons that are not clear. On the third day they overpowered Benjamin, leaving only 6oo people. This description raises problems to which there is no solution, and also relies upon the well-known story of Israel's war against Ai (Joshua 7-8).[62]

[60] *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 547.

[61] The violence of the people of Gibeah is reminiscent of the Sodomites: Both try to break into the host's house and want to sodomize the guests. But while in Sodom the guests were angels, here they were ordinary human beings; hence the different result. The host protected the Levite, offering his own virgin daughter and the concubine. At the end the Levite gave them his concubine, whom they abused all night long, until in the morning she was found dead at the threshold of the house. This description entails many strange features, indicating its relation to the story of Sodom, and on the other hand its incomplete editing. It is strange that the host offers them the concubine, who was a guest. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 551.

[62] *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 552.