

### The Cycle of the Judges (c. 1365 BC)

Judges 2:7, 10–23

7 And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel.

10 And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

11 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:

12 And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that *were* round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.

13 And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

14 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

15 Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.

16 Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.

17 And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; *but* they did not so.

18 And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them.

19 And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, *that* they returned, and corrupted *themselves* more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way.

20 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice;

21 I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died:

22 That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep *it*, or not.

23 Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered he them into the hand of Joshua.

### The Testing of Israel (c. 1365 BC)

Judges 3:1–6

1 Now these *are* the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, *even* as many *of Israel* as had not known all the wars of Canaan;

2 Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof;

3 *Namely*, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baalhermon unto the entering in of Hamath.

4 And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.

5 And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites:

6 And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

### Mesopotamian Oppression (c. 1365 – c. 1357 BC)

Judges 3:7–8

7 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgat the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves.

8 Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Chushanrishathaim eight years.

### Rest Under Othniel (c. 1357 – c. 1317 BC)

Judges 3:9–11

9 And when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, *even* Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.

10 And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushanrishathaim

king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushanrishathaim.  
11 And the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

### Moabite Oppression (c. 1317 – c. 1299 BC)

Judges 3:12–14

12 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD.  
13 And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees.  
14 So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.

### Rest Under Ehud (c. 1299 – c. 1219 BC)

Judges 3:15–30

15 But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded: and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab.  
16 But Ehud made him a dagger which had two edges, of a cubit length; and he did gird it under his raiment upon his right thigh.  
17 And he brought the present unto Eglon king of Moab: and Eglon *was* a very fat man.  
18 And when he had made an end to offer the present, he sent away the people that bare the present.  
19 But he himself turned again from the quarries that *were* by Gilgal, and said, I have a secret errand unto thee, O king: who said, Keep silence. And all that stood by him went out from him.  
20 And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting in a summer parlor, which he had for himself alone. And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of *his* seat.  
21 And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly:  
22 And the haft also went in after the blade; and the fat closed upon the blade, so that he could not draw the dagger out of his belly; and the dirt came out.  
23 Then Ehud went forth through the porch, and shut the doors of the parlor upon him, and locked them.  
24 When he was gone out, his servants came; and when they saw that, behold, the doors of the parlor *were* locked, they said, Surely he covereth his feet in his summer chamber.  
25 And they tarried till they were ashamed: and, behold, he opened not the doors of the parlor; therefore they took a key, and opened *them*: and, behold, their lord *was* fallen down dead on the earth.  
26 And Ehud escaped while they tarried, and passed beyond the quarries, and escaped unto Seirath.  
27 And it came to pass, when he was come, that he blew a trumpet in the mountain of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mount, and he before them.  
28 And he said unto them, Follow after me: for the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over.  
29 And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valor; and there escaped not a man.  
30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years.

### Shamgar and the Philistines (c. 1279 BC)

Judges 3:31

31 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.

*Scripture quotations are from The King James Version (KJV). The KJV is in the public domain.*

#### Chronological Notes

- 1) The first oppression mentioned in Judges began c. 1365 BC. If we add all the years mentioned in Judges 3:7–16:31 (oppression years and judgeship years), we obtain a total of 410 years: 1365 BC - 410 = 955 BC. Clearly, we have a problem—this date conflicts with the relative certainty of the chronology of the reigns of Saul (c. 1050 – 1010 BC) and David (1010 – 970 BC). This means that there must be some overlap between one or more oppressions or judgeships.
- 2) The Samson/Philistine Overlap.

- A) Samson's 20-year judgeship took place during the Philistine oppression—"he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines" (Judg 15:20). This means we can subtract 20 years, bringing the total down from 410 years to 390 years.

### 3) The Philistine/Ammonite Overlap.

- A) The last foreign oppression of Israel mentioned in Judges is the forty year oppression of the Philistines. Judges 10:7 notes that this oppression coincided with the Ammonite oppression of the Transjordan tribes. The Ammonite oppression was broken by Jephthah in c. 1106 BC, some 300 years after the conquest of Sihon in 1406 BC (Judg 11:21–26). Since the Ammonite oppression lasted 18 years (Judg 10:8), it follows that the Ammonite oppression began in c. 1106 BC + 18 = c. 1124 BC.<sup>1</sup> The Philistine oppression was concurrent with the Ammonite oppression and thus lasted from c. 1124 BC to c. 1084 BC. This means we can subtract 40 years, bringing the total down from 390 years to 350 years.

- (1) Samson was born at the beginning of the Philistine oppression (Judg 13:1–3). His years of leadership fell within the forty-year span of Philistine rule (Judg 14:4) but apparently did not outlast it, for the Philistines seem to have been a threat for a short time after Samson pulled down the temple of Dagon (Samuel subdued them at Mizpah). Most likely, Samson began his heroic deeds about midway through the oppression, when he was around twenty years old, and after twenty years of judgeship he died just preceding the end of the oppression.<sup>2</sup>
- (2) It is interesting to note that the final blow against the Philistine incursion occurred under Samuel at Mizpah in c. 1084 BC (1 Sam 7:11, 13), some twenty years after the ark of the covenant had been taken by the Philistines (1 Sam 7:2).<sup>3</sup> The battle of Aphek, which resulted in the capture of the ark, therefore took place in c. 1104, or at the midpoint of the forty-year Philistine period.<sup>4</sup> It is possible that the capture of the ark provoked Samson to begin his judgeship.
- (3) Samuel was also born during the Philistine oppression. We derive this from 1 Samuel 8:1, 5 which says that Samuel was "old" when he anointed Saul as king of Israel. Merrill comments: "Admittedly, 'old' is a subjective term and one should not use it to establish chronological exactness. However, Eli, contemporary with Samuel, was 'very old' at age ninety-eight (1 Sam 2:22; cf. 4:15) and David was 'old' at seventy, so one may reasonably posit at least seventy as the age of Samuel at the time of Saul's coronation."<sup>5</sup> The corruption of the MT of 1 Samuel 13:1 means that we cannot date Saul's and David's reigns with the certainty of Solomon and the other kings. However, a date of c. 1050 BC for the beginning of Saul's reign will give us no more than a 1 or 2 year error. If we assume that Samuel was seventy in 1050 BC—that puts his birth in 1050 + 70 = c. 1120 BC, just a few years after Samson's birth and the beginning of the Philistine oppression.

### 4) The Ehud/Jabin/Deborah Overlap.

- A) The 18-year Moabite oppression and the 80-year rest under the judgeship of Ehud is focused on the central portion of Israel (see Jericho, "the city of the Palms," in Judg 3:13). Given the unusual length of the rest period, and the fact that Ehud's death is not directly connected to the end of the rest (Judg 4:1), it appears this period is a good candidate for an overlap.<sup>6</sup>
- B) The 20-year Canaanite (Jabin) oppression and the 40-year rest under the judgeship of Deborah is focused on the northern portion of Israel (see Hazor in Judg 4:2). If we assume Ehud lived for 20 years after defeating Eglon, the 60-year period of Jabin/Deborah might overlap with the last 60 years of the Ehud's 80-year rest. Thus Ehud's rest and Deborah's rest both come to an end with the Midianite invasion, and the time periods again connect in series. This would allow us to subtract 60 years, bringing the total down from 350 years to 290 years.

<sup>1</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, Second Edition, (Baker Publishing, 2008), 168. So also David M. Howard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*, (Moody Press, 1993), 103; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age Through the Jewish Wars*, (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 176; Israel P. Loken, *The Old Testament Historical Books: An Introduction*, (Xulon Press, 2008), 86.

<sup>2</sup> Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 168.

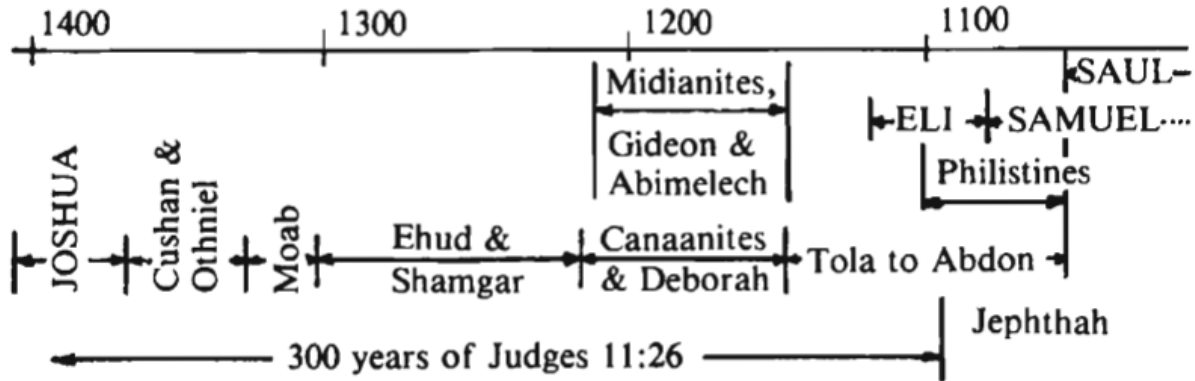
<sup>3</sup> Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 10 (Waco: Word, 1983), 65–66.

<sup>4</sup> Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 168.

<sup>5</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, "Paul's Use of 'About 450 Years' in Acts 13:20," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138:551 (July 1981): 251.

<sup>6</sup> J. W. Schmidt, *The Joshua-Judges Chronology* (Ph.D. diss., Central Baptist Theological Seminary, 1954). So also J. C. Whitcomb, *Chart of Old Testament Patriarchs and Judges* (Grace Theological Seminary, 1965).

- 5) The overlaps mentioned above allow us to reduce the total number of years in Judges from 410 years to 290 years. If we examine this length relative to our starting point of c. 1365 BC, we get  $c. 1365 \text{ BC} - 290 = c. 1075 \text{ BC}$ . This fits nicely within the chronological bookends of Joshua's death and Saul's anointing, and leaves enough time for Samuel to grow old and put his sons into power before the people demand a king in c. 1050 BC.
- A) Peet argues for an overlap between the Midianites/Gideon and the Canaanites/Deborah (as shown below).<sup>7</sup> Is this a better explanation of the data than the Ehud/Jabin/Deborah overlap? It's difficult to say—I remain open on the topic.



<sup>7</sup> J. H. John Peet, "The Chronology of the Judges," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* Vol. 9, No. 1&2 (Winter 1982–83): 216–242. The image is sourced from J. H. John Peet, "Biblical Chronology," *Foundations* No. 14 (Spring 1985): 19–29.