

The Cycle of the Judges (c. 1365 BC)

Judges 2:7, 10–23

- 7 And the people served Yahweh all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who saw all the great work Yahweh had done for Israel.
- 10 Moreover, that entire generation was gathered to their ancestors, and another generation grew up after them who did not know Yahweh or the work he had done for Israel.
- 11 The Israelites did evil in the eyes of Yahweh, and they served the Baals.
- 12 They abandoned Yahweh the God of their ancestors, who brought them out from the land of Egypt. They followed other gods from the gods of the people who *were* around them; and they bowed down to them, and they provoked the anger of Yahweh.
- 13 They abandoned Yahweh, and they served Baal and the Ashtaroth.
- 14 So the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel, and he gave them into the hand of plunderers; and they plundered them, and he sold them into the hand of their enemies from all sides. They were unable to withstand their enemies any longer.
- 15 Whenever they went out, the hand of Yahweh was against them to harm *them*, just as Yahweh warned, and just as Yahweh had sworn to them. And they were very distressed.
- 16 Then Yahweh raised up leaders, and they delivered them from the hand of their plunderers.
- 17 But they did not listen to their leaders, but lusted after other gods and bowed down to them. They turned away quickly from the way that their ancestors went, who had obeyed the commandment of Yahweh; they did not do *as their ancestors*.
- 18 And when Yahweh raised leaders for them, Yahweh was with the leader, and he delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the leader, for Yahweh was moved by their groaning because of their persecutors and oppressors.
- 19 But when the leader died they relapsed and acted corruptly, more than their ancestors, following other gods, serving them, and bowing down to them. They would not give up their deeds or their stubborn ways.
- 20 So the anger of Yahweh burned against Israel, and he said, "Because this people transgressed my covenant that I commanded their ancestors, and have not obeyed my voice,
- 21 I will not again drive out anyone from before them from the nations that Joshua left when he died,
- 22 in order to test Israel whether or not they would observe the way of Yahweh, to walk in it just as their ancestors did."
- 23 So Yahweh left those nations; he did not drive them out at once, and he did not give them into the hand of Joshua.

The Testing of Israel (c. 1365 BC)

Judges 3:1–6

- 1 These *are* the nations that Yahweh left, to test Israel by them (*that is, to test* all those who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan,
- 2 in order that the generations of Israel would know war, to teach those who had not experienced it before):
- 3 the five rulers of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites living on Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal Hermon up to Lebo-Hamath.
- 4 They were *left* for testing Israel, to know *whether* they would keep the commands of Yahweh that he commanded their ancestors through the hand of Moses.
- 5 And the Israelites lived in the midst of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.
- 6 And they took their daughters as wives for themselves, and they gave their daughters to their sons, and they served their gods.

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

Judges 3:7–8

- 7 The Israelites did evil in the eyes of Yahweh. They forgot Yahweh their God, and they served the Baals and the Asheroth.
- 8 And the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim, the king of Aram Naharaim; and the Israelites served Cushan-Rishathaim eight years.

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

Judges 3:9–11

- 9 The Israelites cried out to Yahweh, and Yahweh raised up a deliverer for the Israelites who delivered them, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.
- 10 And the spirit of Yahweh came upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and Yahweh gave Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram into his hand, and he prevailed over Cushan-Rishathaim.
- 11 So the land rested forty years. Then Othniel son of Kenaz died.

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

Judges 3:12–14

12 And again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of Yahweh. So Yahweh strengthened Eglon king of Moab against Israel, because they did evil in the eyes of Yahweh.

13 He gathered to himself the Ammonites and Amalekites, and he went and defeated Israel, and they took possession of the city of palms.

14 And the Israelites served Eglon king of Moab eighteen years.

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

Judges 3:15–30

15 And the Israelites cried out to Yahweh, and Yahweh raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud son of Gera, a Benjaminite and a left-handed man. And the Israelites sent a tribute to Eglon king of Moab through him.

16 Ehud made for himself a short, two-edged sword (a cubit in length), and he fastened it under his clothes on his right thigh.

17 Then he presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Eglon *was* a very fat man.

18 When Ehud had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who carried the tribute.

19 But he turned back from the sculptured stones that *were* near Gilgal, and he said, “I have a secret message for you, O king.” And he said, “Silence!” So all those standing in his presence went out,

20 and Ehud came to him *while* he *was* sitting alone in his cool upper room. And Ehud said, “I have a message from God for you.” So he got up from his seat.

21 Then Ehud reached with his left hand for the sword on his right thigh, and he thrust it into his stomach.

22 And the handle also went *in* after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade because he did not draw back the sword from his stomach; and it went protruding out the back.

23 And Ehud went out the vestibule, and he closed the doors of the upper room and locked *them* behind him.

24 After he left, his servants returned. When they saw *that* the doors of the upper room *were* locked, they thought, “Surely he is relieving himself in the cool inner room.”

25 And they waited so long they became embarrassed because he did not open the doors of the upper room. So they took the key and opened *the doors*, and there their lord was lying on the ground dead.

26 And Ehud escaped while they delayed. He passed by the sculptured stones and escaped to Seirah.

27 And when he arrived he sounded the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went down from the hill country with him leading them.

28 And he said to them, “Follow after me! Yahweh has given Moab your enemies into your hand.” So they went down after him, and they captured the fords of the Jordan toward Moab; and they did not allow anyone to cross over.

29 And they struck Moab at that time, about ten thousand men, all strong and able men; no one escaped.

30 And Moab was subdued on that day under the hand of Israel. And the land rested eighty years.

Shamgar and the Philistines (c. 1279 BC)

Judges 3:31

31 And Shamgar son of Anath came after him, and he killed six hundred Philistines with the goad of an ox; he also delivered Israel.

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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.¹ 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.²
 - (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).³ 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.⁴ 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.”⁵ 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.⁶
 - 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.
- 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 BC - 290 = c. 1075 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

¹ 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.

² Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 168.

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

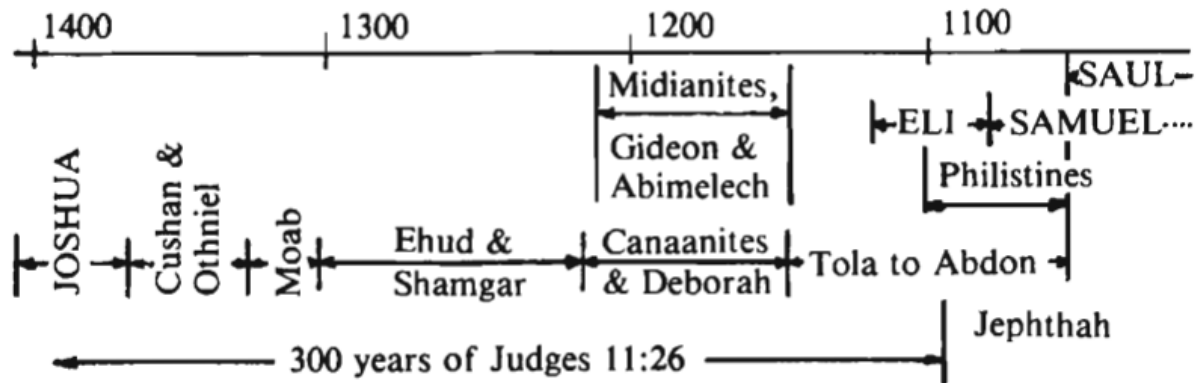
⁴ Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 168.

⁵ Eugene H. Merrill, “Paul’s Use of ‘About 450 Years’ in Acts 13:20,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138:551 (July 1981): 251.

⁶ 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).

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).⁷ 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.



⁷ 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.