

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

Judges 2:7, 10–23

- 7 The people worshiped the LORD throughout Joshua’s lifetime and as long as the elderly men who outlived him remained alive. These men had witnessed all the great things the LORD had done for Israel.
- 10 That entire generation passed away; a new generation grew up that had not personally experienced the LORD’s presence or seen what he had done for Israel.
- 11 The Israelites did evil before the LORD by worshiping the Baals.
- 12 They abandoned the LORD God of their ancestors who brought them out of the land of Egypt. They followed other gods—the gods of the nations who lived around them. They worshiped them and made the LORD angry.
- 13 They abandoned the LORD and worshiped Baal and the Ashtars.
- 14 The LORD was furious with Israel and handed them over to robbers who plundered them. He turned them over to their enemies who lived around them. They could not withstand their enemies’ attacks.
- 15 Whenever they went out to fight, the LORD did them harm, just as he had warned and solemnly vowed he would do. They suffered greatly.
- 16 The LORD raised up leaders who delivered them from these robbers.
- 17 But they did not obey their leaders. Instead they prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. They quickly turned aside from the path their ancestors had walked. Their ancestors had obeyed the LORD’s commands, but they did not.
- 18 When the LORD raised up leaders for them, the LORD was with each leader and delivered the people from their enemies while the leader remained alive. The LORD felt sorry for them when they cried out in agony because of what their harsh oppressors did to them.
- 19 When a leader died, the next generation would again act more wickedly than the previous one. They would follow after other gods, worshiping them and bowing down to them. They did not give up their practices or their stubborn ways.
- 20 The LORD was furious with Israel. He said, “This nation has violated the terms of the agreement I made with their ancestors by disobeying me.
- 21 So I will no longer remove before them any of the nations that Joshua left unconquered when he died.
- 22 Joshua left those nations to test Israel. I wanted to see whether or not the people would carefully walk in the path marked out by the LORD, as their ancestors were careful to do.”
- 23 This is why the LORD permitted these nations to remain and did not conquer them immediately; he did not hand them over to Joshua.

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

Judges 3:1–6

- 1 These were the nations the LORD permitted to remain so he could use them to test Israel—he wanted to test all those who had not experienced battle against the Canaanites.
- 2 He left those nations simply because he wanted to teach the subsequent generations of Israelites, who had not experienced the earlier battles, how to conduct holy war.
- 3 These were the nations: the five lords of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites living in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal Hermon to Lebo-Hamath.
- 4 They were left to test Israel, so the LORD would know if his people would obey the commands he gave their ancestors through Moses.
- 5 The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.
- 6 They took the Canaanites’ daughters as wives and gave their daughters to the Canaanites; they worshiped their gods as well.

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

Judges 3:7–8

- 7 The Israelites did evil in the LORD’s sight. They forgot the LORD their God and worshiped the Baals and the Asherahs.
- 8 The LORD was furious with Israel and turned them over to King Cushan-Rishathaim of Aram-Naharaim. They were Cushan-Rishathaim’s subjects for eight years.

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

Judges 3:9–11

- 9 When the Israelites cried out for help to the LORD, he raised up a deliverer for the Israelites who rescued them. His name was Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother.
- 10 The LORD’s spirit empowered him and he led Israel. When he went to do battle, the LORD handed over to him King Cushan-

Rishathaim of Aram and he overpowered him.  
11 The land had rest for forty years; then Othniel son of Kenaz died.

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

Judges 3:12–14

12 The Israelites again did evil in the LORD's sight. The LORD gave King Eglon of Moab control over Israel because they had done evil in the LORD's sight.  
13 Eglon formed alliances with the Ammonites and Amalekites. He came and defeated Israel, and they seized the City of Date Palm Trees.  
14 The Israelites were subject to King Eglon of Moab for eighteen years.

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

Judges 3:15–30

15 When the Israelites cried out for help to the LORD, he raised up a deliverer for them. His name was Ehud son of Gera the Benjaminite, a left-handed man. The Israelites sent him to King Eglon of Moab with their tribute payment.  
16 Ehud made himself a sword—it had two edges and was eighteen inches long. He strapped it under his coat on his right thigh.  
17 He brought the tribute payment to King Eglon of Moab. (Now Eglon was a very fat man.)  
18 After Ehud brought the tribute payment, he dismissed the people who had carried it.  
19 But he went back once he reached the carved images at Gilgal. He said to Eglon, "I have a secret message for you, O king." Eglon said, "Be quiet!" All his attendants left.  
20 When Ehud approached him, he was sitting in his well-ventilated upper room all by himself. Ehud said, "I have a message from God for you." When Eglon rose up from his seat,  
21 Ehud reached with his left hand, pulled the sword from his right thigh, and drove it into Eglon's belly.  
22 The handle went in after the blade, and the fat closed around the blade, for Ehud did not pull the sword out of his belly.  
23 As Ehud went out into the vestibule, he closed the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them.  
24 When Ehud had left, Eglon's servants came and saw the locked doors of the upper room. They said, "He must be relieving himself in the well-ventilated inner room."  
25 They waited so long they were embarrassed, but he still did not open the doors of the upper room. Finally they took the key and opened the doors. Right before their eyes was their master, sprawled out dead on the floor!  
26 Now Ehud had escaped while they were delaying. When he passed the carved images, he escaped to Seirah.  
27 When he reached Seirah, he blew a trumpet in the Ephraimite hill country. The Israelites went down with him from the hill country, with Ehud in the lead.  
28 He said to them, "Follow me, for the LORD is about to defeat your enemies, the Moabites!" They followed him, captured the fords of the Jordan River opposite Moab, and did not let anyone cross.  
29 That day they killed about ten thousand Moabites—all strong, capable warriors; not one escaped.  
30 Israel humiliated Moab that day, and the land had rest for eighty years.

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

Judges 3:31

31 After Ehud came Shamgar son of Anath; he killed six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad and, like Ehud, 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.<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

<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.

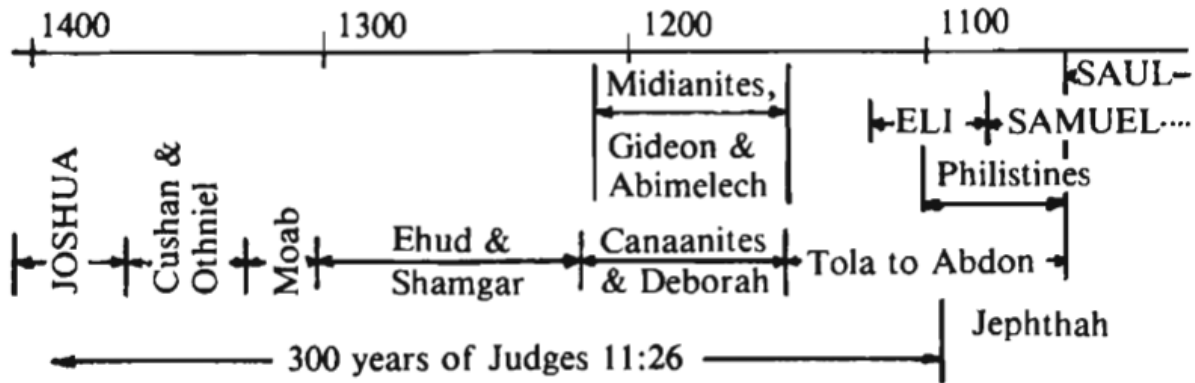
<sup>4</sup> Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 168.

<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).

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 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.