General Editors

R. K. HARRISON
(1968–1993)

ROBERT L. HUBBARD, JR.
(1994– )
To my mother, Gladys Webb,
who passed away on 29 July 2009,
soon after her 100th birthday
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TODAY THE NEW INTERNATIONAL COMMENTARY ON THE OLD TESTAMENT ENJOYS A WIDE READERSHIP OF SCHOLARS, PRIESTS, PASTORS, RABBIS, AND OTHER SERIOUS BIBLE STUDENTS. THOUSANDS OF READERS ACROSS THE RELIGIOUS SPECTRUM AND IN COUNTLESS COUNTRIES CONSULT ITS VOLUMES IN THEIR ONGOING PREACHING, TEACHING, AND RESEARCH. THEY WARMLY WELCOME THE PUBLICATION OF EACH NEW VOLUME AND EAGERLY AWAIT ITS EVENTUAL TRANSFORMATION FROM AN EMERGING “SERIES” INTO A COMPLETE COMMENTARY “SET.” BUT AS HUMANITY EXPERIENCES A NEW CENTURY OF HISTORY, AN ERA COMMONLY CALLED “POSTMODERN,” WHAT KIND OF COMMENTARY SERIES IS NICOT? WHAT DISTINGUISHES IT FROM OTHER SIMILARLY WELL-ESTABLISHED SERIES?

ITS VOLUMES AIM TO PUBLISH BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY. EACH CONTRIBUTOR WRITES AS AN EXPERT, BOTH IN THE BIBLICAL TEXT ITSELF AND IN THE RELEVANT SCHOLARLY LITERATURE, AND EACH COMMENTARY CONVEYS THE RESULTS OF WIDE READING AND CAREFUL, MATURE REFLECTION. ULTIMATELY, ITS SPIRIT IS ECLECTIC, EACH CONTRIBUTOR GLEANING INTERPRETIVE INSIGHTS FROM ANY USEFUL SOURCE, WHATEVER ITS RELIGIOUS OR PHILOSOPHICAL VIEWPOINT, AND INTEGRATING THEM INTO HIS OR HER INTERPRETATION OF A BIBLICAL BOOK. THE SERIES DRAWS ON RECENT METHODOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS IN BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP, FOR EXAMPLE, CANON CRITICISM, THE SO-
called “new literary criticism,” reader-response theories, and sensitivity to
gender-based and ethnic readings. NICOT volumes also aim to be irenic in
tone, summarizing and critiquing influential views with fairness while de-
fending their own. Its list of contributors includes male and female scholars
from a number of Christian faith-groups. The diversity of contributors and
their freedom to draw on all relevant methodologies give the entire series an
exciting and enriching variety.

What truly distinguishes this series, however, is that it speaks from
within that interpretive tradition known as evangelicalism. Evangelicalism is
an informal movement within Protestantism that cuts across traditional de-
nominational lines. Its heart and soul is the conviction that the Bible is God’s
inspired Word, written by gifted human writers, through which God calls hu-
manity to enjoy a loving personal relationship with its Creator and Savior.
True to that tradition, NICOT volumes do not treat the Old Testament as just
an ancient literary artifact on a par with the *Iliad* or *Gilgamesh*. They are not
literary autopsies of ancient parchment cadavers but rigorous, reverent
wrestlings with wonderfully human writings through which the living God
speaks his powerful Word. NICOT delicately balances “criticism” (i.e., the
use of standard critical methodologies) with humble respect, admiration, and
even affection for the biblical text. As an evangelical commentary, it pays
particular attention to the text’s literary features, theological themes, and im-
plications for the life of faith today.

Ultimately, NICOT aims to serve women and men of faith who desire
to hear God’s voice afresh through the Old Testament. With gratitude to God
for two marvelous gifts — the Scriptures themselves and keen-minded schol-
ars to explain their message — I welcome readers of all kinds to savor the
good fruit of this series.

Robert L. Hubbard Jr.
AUTHOR’S PREFACE

Commentaries are generally judged good or bad according to what the reader expects of them. I hope this one will satisfy those who want the meatiness and analytical character normally expected of a commentary that includes an original translation and notes. But I have chosen to write it in an emotionally warm, rather than cool, detached, academic way, partly because that is my natural writing style, partly because I think it is what is needed to engage properly with a dynamic, narrative work like the book of Judges, and partly because I think it is what people who buy and read NICOT commentaries will most want and appreciate. I have always felt cheated by the kind of exegetical vivisection that kills by analysis until all that’s left is lifeless bits and pieces, classified and arranged, conquered rather than read. For me the text is a living thing, whose life has to be respected if it is to be understood.

In keeping with this general approach, I have not tried to achieve the kind of exhaustive thoroughness that insists on putting back into the text all the data that the author has left out. There is a perverseness about this that is not only pedantic but damaging, especially when it obscures the light and shade of the text, and its background and foreground distinctions, as though they don’t matter. There is a proper place for background, of course, especially in an ancient work like Judges, where the original readers presumably had a knowledge of it that cannot be assumed for modern readers. No text exists in a vacuum, and the historical setting is often important for understanding. Nevertheless, the commentator, like the original author, must be selective and not try to say everything, even if this were possible. What I have tried to do in what follows, especially in the body of the commentary, is to concentrate on what the text itself throws into prominence, and give space to background issues only where I think they throw significant light on the foreground. Of course this has required judgments to be made which I am sure I have not always gotten right. But that is where footnotes prove useful; they provide a convenient middle ground between inclusion and exclusion, where
those who want more may hopefully find it, or at least be pointed in the right
direction. All translations from the Hebrew are my own, unless otherwise
identified.

My labors on Judges began a long time ago. I spent most of 1982-84
in Sheffield, England, working on it for my Ph.D., which was published as a
monograph in 1987 and again in 2008. Those familiar with it will recognize
the echoes of it here. But they will also find much that is new. In particular,
large parts of Judges that were treated only in summary fashion in the mono-
graph have been treated here with the kind of even-handed thoroughness re-
quired for a commentary. New material has been added, and old material re-
worked in the light of new research that has been done since the 1980s. The
result is a new and different kind of work. I have had to start again, even if
building on old, proven foundations.

The commentary itself has been in the making, off and on, for twelve
years. I am grateful to Eerdmans for giving me the time I needed, and trust-
ing me to finally produce what I promised them. Thanks are also due to the
Governing Board of Moore College, Sydney, for their generous provision of
study leave, and to the Warden and staff of Tyndale House, Cambridge,
where much of the research and writing was done. Like all commentary writ-
ers, I have benefited enormously from the labors and hard-won insights of a
host of other scholars and students, some of whom I have met and been able
to thank personally, but most of whom I have not. I am indebted to them all,
and have hopefully acknowledged them appropriately in the bibliography
and footnotes.

Alison, my wife now for forty years, has shared my excitement when
Ih a v em a d i s c o v e r i e s,a n dp a t i e n l ye n d u r e dm a n ym e a l t i m e sw h e nIh a v e
been brooding over knotty problems instead of talking to her. I know she for-
gives me, but want her to know that I do not take her love for granted.

Judges is not a nice book. It’s rough and raw and confronting.
Working on it has been like living with someone who always tells you the
truth: it is good for you, but not pleasant. In this commentary I have tried to
let Judges be what it is instead of taming it. Readers will have to judge
whether or not I’ve succeeded.

I am an evangelical Christian, and have tried to put whatever scholarly
abilities I have at God’s disposal. I trust this commentary will serve, in some
way, his purposes for his church and his world.

BARRY G. WEBB

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**PRINCIPAL ABBREVIATIONS**

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<td>ABD</td>
<td>Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. D. N. Freedman</td>
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<tr>
<td>ABR</td>
<td>Australian Biblical Review</td>
</tr>
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<td>ABRL</td>
<td>Anchor Bible Reference Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARM</td>
<td>Archives royales de Mari</td>
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<tr>
<td>AV</td>
<td>The Authorised (King James) Version</td>
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<tr>
<td>BAR</td>
<td>Biblical Archaeology Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BASOR</td>
<td>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>BBB</td>
<td>Bonner Biblische Beiträge</td>
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<tr>
<td>BHS</td>
<td>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</td>
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<tr>
<td>BJRL</td>
<td>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>BO</td>
<td>Berit Olam commentary series</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBQ</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCH</td>
<td>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, ed. D. J. A. Clines</td>
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<td>edd.</td>
<td>Editions</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESV</td>
<td>The English Standard Version</td>
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<tr>
<td>ET</td>
<td>The Expository Times</td>
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<tr>
<td>FBCS</td>
<td>Focus on the Bible Commentary Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRLANT</td>
<td>Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments</td>
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<tr>
<td>GKC</td>
<td>Genesius’ Hebrew Grammar, ed. E. Kautzsch, tr. A. E. Cowley</td>
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<tr>
<td>HALOT</td>
<td>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament,</td>
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Principal Abbreviations

_Study Edition_, ed. L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, tr. M. E. J. Richardson

HCSB Holman Christian Standard Bible

HSM Harvard Semitic Monographs

HThKAT Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament

HUCA Hebrew Union College Annual

IDB *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick


JB Jerusalem Bible (1966)

JBL *Journal of Biblical Literature*

JETS *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*

JNES *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*

JPSA Jewish Publication Society of America

JPSV Jewish Publication Society Version (1917)

JSOT *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*

JSOTSup JSOT Supplement

JTS *Journal of Theological Studies*

JTNS Journal of Theological Studies, New Series

JTSSup JTS Supplement

KJV King James Version

KTU *Die Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*, ed. M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín

LCL Loeb Classical Library

LXX The Septuagint

MSS manuscripts

MT The Masoretic Text

NAC The New American Commentary

NASB The New American Standard Version


NCBC New Cambridge Bible Commentary

NEB New English Bible

NIDB *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. J. D. Douglas and M. C. Tenney

NIV New International Version

NIVAC The NIV Application Commentary

NJB New Jerusalem Bible (1985)

NJPS New Jewish Publication Society Version (1985)

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

NRV New Revised Version

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**Principal Abbreviations**

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<tr>
<td>NSBT</td>
<td>New Studies in Biblical Theology</td>
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<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>New Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>OT</td>
<td>Old Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>OTR</td>
<td>Old Testament Readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEQ</td>
<td><em>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSV</td>
<td>Revised Standard Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTR</td>
<td>Reformed Theological Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBT</td>
<td><em>The Bible Translator</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TGUOS</td>
<td><em>Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>TNIV</td>
<td>Today’s New International Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTC</td>
<td>Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TynB</td>
<td><em>Tyndale Bulletin</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VT</td>
<td><em>Vetus Testamentum</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VTSSup</td>
<td>Vetus Testamentum Supplement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBC</td>
<td>Word Biblical Commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WMANT</td>
<td>Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTJ</td>
<td><em>Westminster Theological Journal</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZAW</td>
<td><em>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZPEB</td>
<td><em>Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible</em>, ed. M. C. Tenney</td>
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INTRODUCTION
Settlement and Tribal Territories
A commentary is a book about a book. But what is a book? The question is not as simple as it appears. There are so many different kinds of books that a generic definition is hard to produce, and to assign a different definition to each kind of book is pointless. Nevertheless, generic definitions abound, and fall into four basic categories. There are material definitions that identify a book in terms of its design and what it is made of. For example, a book is a number of leaves of paper or other material, joined down one side and bound between a front and back cover. There are functional definitions that take its material features as given and define it in terms of its purpose. In English this is normally done by prefixing a descriptive term, for example, “exercise book” (a book for doing schoolwork) or “accounts book” (a book for recording commercial transactions). Then there are definitions that identify a book by its contents, normally by a following descriptive phrase, for example, a book of stamps, vouchers, or tickets. Finally, there are literary definitions. These identify a book in terms of the genre of writing it contains: a comic book, an anthology (of poetry), or a novel. In this latter kind of definition the material properties of the thing in question become irrelevant, and we are approaching the definition of a book as a literary “work” of some kind, regardless of its material form. The Hebrew and Greek terms sēper and biblos/biblion respectively, in both their biblical and extrabiblical usage, have a semantic range that can accommodate all these definitions.¹

Historically, it is the material aspect of “book” that has been most changeable, and therefore least suitable as a basis for definition. The material definition above (leaves bound between covers) is technically the definition of a codex. But the codex is only one of many forms books have taken. Before the codex was the scroll, and before that there were writing boards and

1. Sometimes they occur with a qualifier indicating the kind of book or document in view, e.g., m’gillaṭ sēper, chartion biblion (a scroll, Jer. 36:2; Ezek. 2:9 MT and LXX).
tablets of various kinds. Before paper there were vellum, papyrus, wood, baked clay, and stone. Since the invention of movable type the form of books has remained fairly stable until quite recently, but as I write this commentary it is again undergoing radical change. New forms of books are appearing, especially virtual books of various kinds, including e-books, which tend to mimic the hard-copy form as far as possible, and online books that have never existed in anything but electronic form.

Through all these changes the notion of “book” in the literary sense has remained constant. A literary “work” is a text, a piece of writing, but it is distinguished from other pieces of writing by a number of qualities. First, its length: a book is more than a bill of sale, a list, or a brief inscription. Second, its completeness: it is not a piece of text whose length is determined by non-literary factors such as the size of a page or scroll, for example, but it has a deliberately constructed beginning and end. It is a crafted unit, or a major, clearly identifiable part of such a unit. Finally, it is distinguished by its artistic, literary quality. It is different in this respect from, say, a manual on how to operate a piece of mechanical equipment. It may surprise some readers to discover that in biblical studies scholars have not always credited Judges with being a book in this sense. The present commentary does do this, and seeks to respond to it with the kind of literary sensitivity that this requires — to serve rather than dominate it. In this sense the commentary, too, has been written as a literary work. To be sure, its literary quality will be more apparent in some parts than others; more in its treatment of the Judges narratives themselves than in the more technical parts of the introduction and footnotes. But hopefully these will not spoil the enjoyment of the reader or distract him or her from the literary quality of the book of Judges itself. Readers who do not find this material suitable to their tastes or relevant to their interests should happily ignore it.

I. JUDGES AS AN ISRAELITE CLASSIC

A. AN ANCIENT BOOK

Judges has been around for a very long time indeed. What we know as the book of Judges existed as part of the documented history of Israel from the early sixth century b.c., and the oldest material in it goes back, in oral or written form, almost to the time of the judges themselves. But attestation of it as a distinct literary unit, a “book” in its own right, begins with Philo in the first century a.d., who refers to it in this way in his treatise *On the Confusion of Tongues*. In his treatment of the tower of Babel story of Genesis 11 he com-
pares God’s scattering of the builders there to Gideon’s punishment of the men of Penuel in Judges 8:8-17. Both stories involve a tower, and since for Philo they have the same allegorical significance, he can draw on the one to fill out his exposition of the other. He does this particularly with reference to the vain self-aggrandizement of the tower builders of Genesis 11:

Having received from their father [Cain] self-love as their portion, his children desire to add to it and raise it heaven high, until Justice, who loves virtue and hates evil, comes to their aid. She razes to the ground the cities which they fortified to menace the unhappy soul, and the tower whose name is explained in the book of Judges. That name is in the Hebrew tongue Penuel, but in our own “turning from God.” (On the Confusion of Tongues xxvi.128 [Colson and Whitaker, LCL; my italics])

The expression here translated in the book of Judges is en tē tôn krimatōn anagrapomenē biblīō, which, if rendered in more transparent fashion, would be “in the recorded book of judgments.” Philo distinguishes this from books he refers to elsewhere. For example, in his treatment of the expression “the sons of men” in Genesis 11:5, he refers to what is written in the books of Kings:

I bow, too, in admiration before the mysteries revealed in the books of Kings (en basilikais biblois) where it does not offend us to find described as sons of God’s psalmist David those who lived and flourished many generations afterwards (1 Kings xv.11; 2 Kings xviii.3), though in David’s lifetime probably not even their great-grandparents had been born. (On the Confusion of Tongues xxix.148 [Colson and Whitaker, LCL; my italics])

The allusion, as indicated by the references in parentheses, is to the naming of David as the “father” of such worthies as Asa and Hezekiah. The method of citation used here (reference to a named book or books) is not typical of Philo’s general practice.² His reference to the book containing the Penuel in-

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² In Confusion of Tongues, for example, the introductory quotation from Gen. 11:1-9 is introduced simply by legetī, “he [Moses] says.” The treatise contains a further 52 quotations or allusions to Pentateuchal material, only six of which are accompanied by an explicit indication of source. In each case this consists simply of “Moses” or “the law-giver.” In addition, two quotations are identified as “in the Psalms” (en hymnois, xi.39; xii.52); one, from Jer. 15:10, is attributed to “a chorister of the prophetic company possessed by divine inspiration” (xii.44), and one, from Zech. 6:2, is introduced as “an oracle from . . . one of the disciples of Moses” (xiv.62). No source is indicated for a quotation from Josh. 1:5 (xxxii.166). The only other scriptural references are the two using biblois
incident is therefore striking, and is the earliest extant reference to Judges as a distinct literary work. It had a long history prior to Philo’s reference to it, but documentation of that history is all later than he. The Greek (LXX) version of Judges to which Philo refers, predates him by a century or more. While it differs in numerous details from the still earlier Hebrew version reflected in the MT, it is unmistakably the same work.

Josephus claims to have based his *Antiquities of the Jews* on “the sacred books” (*hai hierai bibloi*), of which he tells us elsewhere there were twenty-two in all, five dealing with the period from creation to Moses and thirteen with the period from Joshua to Artaxerxes I. He does not give them individual titles, however, or indicate which of them he is utilizing at any given point. So it is not surprising that he does not refer to Judges by name. However, he does use almost its entire contents in his treatment of a quite distinct “age of judges” which he defines in the following terms:

> After Joshua’s death for full eighteen years the people continued in a state of anarchy; whereafter they returned to their former polity, entrusting supreme juridical authority to him who in battle and in bravery proved himself the best; and that is why they called this period of their political life the *age of judges*. (*Antiquities* vi.84-85; Loeb translation, my italics)

He first surveys the material in 1:1–2:5, then moves directly to the outrage at Gibeah and the resulting war in chapters 19–21. He gives a brief account of the northward migration of Dan (chs. 17–18), omitting the parts of this narrative involving Micah’s image. He then returns to 3:7 (ignoring 2:6–3:6) and moves systematically through the stories of the individual judges, omitting Tola (10:1-2), and concluding his account of the period with the Samson story (chs. 13–16). Interestingly, he does not locate the story of Ruth in this “age of judges” but in the high priesthood of Eli, implicitly bracketing it with 1 Samuel rather than Judges. For Josephus, therefore, the

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quoted above. Philo does not use *biblos* (or *biblion*) in this way elsewhere in his works, although he did write separate commentaries on Genesis and Exodus.

3. With the possible exception of a few Hebrew fragments discovered at Qumran. 4QJdg\textsuperscript{a} contains part of 6:3-13 and 4QJdg\textsuperscript{b} preserves the whole of 21:12-25 and a fragment of 16:5-7.

4. See below in Section VIII (The Text) for more regarding the Greek text of Judges.


7. *Antiquities* v.120-317.

“age” of Judges appears to be co-terminous with what we know as the “book” of Judges.

Early references to Judges in its original Hebrew form yield much the same picture. There are only three references to it in the Mishnah,⁹ but these are supplemented in the Gemara by approximately two hundred further references.¹⁰ In line with general practice in the Talmud, most of these references are made without naming the book as their source. In a couple of cases, however, it does receive specific mention. Quotations below are from the English text of the Soncino editions.¹¹

‘Abodah Zarah 25a contains a discussion of the reference to the Book of Jashar in 2 Samuel 1:18, namely, “he bade them teach the children of Judah [to handle] the bow; behold, it is written in the Book of Jashar.” In the course of this discussion R. Samuel b. Nahmani is quoted as having said:

It is the Book of Judges, which is here called the Book of Jashar, because it contains the verse, “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was Jashar [“right”] in his own eyes.” And where is [Judah’s skill in archery] referred to in it? “That the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war”; now what kind of warfare requires teaching? Surely archery. But how do we know that this verse refers to Judah? — From the scriptural verses, “Who shall go up to the Canaanites for us first, to fight them? And Yahweh said, ‘Judah shall go up.’”

The three citations in this quotation are from Judges 21:25 (the closing words of the book),¹² 3:2, and 1:1-2 (the opening words of the book), in that order.¹³ Judges is reckoned to be the second book in “the Prophets”: “Our Rabbis taught: the order of the Prophets is Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Twelve” (Baba Bathra 14b). Later in the same para-

¹³. Other identifications for the Book of Jashar suggested in the discussion include “the book of Deuteronomy” (R. Eleazar) and “the book of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (R. Johanan).
Judges

graph Samuel is credited with its authorship: “Samuel wrote his [own] book, and Judges, and Ruth.” The tractate Sopherim provides an interesting insight into scribal practice involved in the transmission of the prophetic books:

Between a book of the Prophets and another, one should not leave the same empty space as between two books of the Torah, but in each case the space must be that which has been prescribed for it. Furthermore, a book of the Prophets must begin at the top. (Sopherim 111.2)

This tractate is generally reckoned to date from the closure of the Babylonian Talmud proper, and by some from as late as the eighth century. But appeal is constantly made in it to what is established practice, with supporting “quotations” from distinguished rabbis from as early as the first century A.D. Whatever its date, this tractate witnesses to the manner in which the distinctions among the various books of the Prophets named in the Talmud were carefully preserved in subsequent transmission.

Such is the book that this commentary is concerned with. It is a given entity, a received object for study, not one whose existence or parameters must be postulated before interpretation can begin. The close scrutiny to which we will subject it is justified in part, at least, by the institutional endorsement which has guaranteed its preservation and brought it within the purview of serious interpretation. It has the antiquity and status of a classic.

B. A CONCEPTUAL UNIT?

While it is clear that early authors and commentators recognized Judges as a book with clearly defined limits and its own distinctive subject matter, it is not clear to what extent they recognized it as a conceptual unit — a literary work with its own unique message.

The descriptive title used by Philo, “the recorded book of judgments (krimatōn)” (my italics), appears to identify judgment as the ideological focus of the book. This is in keeping with the theme of judgment on impiety that he is developing in On the Confusion of Tongues at that point, and presumably the reason why he refers to it. Judgment is the allegorical meaning Philo finds in the Penuel incident of Judges 8. But whether this is for him also the theme of the whole book is impossible to determine because we do not know whether he coined the title “book of judgments” himself or inherited it from others. In contrast, the standard Greek and Hebrew titles, kritai and šōpētim respectively, refer to the divinely energized agents of Yahweh’s deliverance (the “judges”), and therefore suggest that salvation rather than judgment is the main focus.
In the Talmud, as in Philo, the message of the book as such is never discussed. The rabbis use it as a source from which texts can be extracted for use in theological discussion, but the book itself is hardly ever named as the source. It is significant only as part of a larger whole (the Prophets, the Scriptures) which is the true interpretive context for any of its parts, regardless of which “book” they come from. It is only on rare occasions, when the requirements of a particular discussion demand it, that the book as such receives any mention at all.

It is Josephus who comes closest to treating Judges as a meaningful whole. In line with his historiographical purpose he takes a more holistic approach to it, utilizing most of its contents, as we have seen. He does not use all of it, however, and his omissions significantly alter the perspective, especially in relation to particular characters. Gideon, for example, becomes “a man of moderation and a model of every virtue”; all mention of his involvement with the ephod cult at Ophrah is omitted. The arrangement of the contents, too, is drastically modified in Josephus’s account, as we saw, the civil war of chapters 19–21 coming before the advent of the first judge, Othniel. By implication, Josephus does offer an interpretation, however forced, of the book as a whole. Nevertheless, in the Antiquities, as we have seen, attention is never drawn to the separate books as such, or the breaks between them. The effect is to emphasize their continuity rather than their separateness, their meaningfulness as a corpus of sacred books (hierai bibloi) rather than as literary units in their own right.

That the stretch of material comprising our present book of Judges is part of a larger narrative, and to that extent incomplete in itself, is almost too obvious to warrant attention. Moreover, it is theoretically possible that the distribution of this larger narrative over a series of books was occasioned by the physical constraints imposed on ancient writers by, for example, the length of ancient scrolls, so that the book divisions are simply divisions of convenience without any literary significance at all. Yet, as far as I am aware, it has never seriously been proposed that the book of Judges is in fact an entirely arbitrary unit of this kind, and scholarly study of it, especially in recent years, has tended to show that the reverse is actually the case. We will return to this below; but first we turn our attention to the period of Israel’s history that the book deals with (Section II) and (as far as we are able to determine it) the process by which the book came to be in the form we have it today (Section III).

II. THE PERIOD OF THE JUDGES
IN ISRAEL’S HISTORY

Since the main focus of this commentary is literary and theological, this section will not attempt to go into the complex historical background issues in detail. Excellent treatments are available in the standard histories of Israel, and in commentaries which are more historically oriented. Matters of direct relevance to the meaning, and therefore exegesis, of particular passages will be dealt with as they come up in the commentary. But no responsible exegesis can or should proceed in a vacuum, so what we will attempt here is a general introduction to the history of the period in question and some of the more significant recent developments in the study of it.

A. DATING THE PERIOD OF THE JUDGES

The book of Judges deals with the history of Israel between the death of Joshua and the transition to the monarchy that began with Samuel. The end of this period can be established fairly securely by working backward from the reign of David (1010-970 B.C.). Allowing thirty-two years for Saul’s reign, this brings us back to 1042 B.C. Samuel and (before him) Eli are both said to have died in old age, after very long ministries: forty years for Eli (1 Sam. 4:18), and (we presume) at least that for Samuel. So it would seem reasonable to allow about eighty years for the Eli-Samuel period as whole. Since Samuel’s ministry overlapped with the first part of Saul’s reign, however, the Eli-Samuel period proper was probably more like seventy years. This would give us an approximate date of 1092 B.C. for the end of the period covered by the book of Judges.

The book of Judges begins its account of the period with the death of Joshua (1:1; 2:8), but unfortunately this event is difficult to date with the same degree of confidence. Allowing for Israel’s forty years of wilderness

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18. The statement in 1 Sam. 13:1 that “he [Saul] reigned over Israel for . . . two years” is incomplete, and the “forty years” of Acts 13:21 is probably a round number. After considering all the relevant evidence, Kitchen settles on thirty-two years for Saul’s reign, which must be correct or very nearly so (On the Reliability of the Old Testament, pp. 82-83).
wandering (which may be a round number rather than a precise one) and Joshua’s lifetime of 110 years (Josh. 24:29), and supposing that his commissioning by Moses was in about his thirtieth year, the starting point for the period covered by the book of Judges must be approximately 120 years after the exodus from Egypt. 1 Kings 6:1 locates the exodus at 480 years before Solomon began to build the temple in the fourth year of his reign, which is commonly accepted as 966 B.C. This gives a date for the exodus of 1446 B.C., close to the middle of the fifteenth century B.C. Admittedly 480 years, too, sounds more like a round number than a precise one, but the date it leads to is in line with what we would expect from the three hundred years that Israel is said to have resided in the lands east of the Jordan prior to Jephthah’s judgeship (Judg. 11:26). While this, too, is probably approximate rather than precise, it is not as immediately open to suspicion as another multiple of forty might be. Furthermore, Israelite occupation of Transjordan for this period is unproblematic in terms of the archeological evidence, and a fifteenth-century date for the exodus and conquest has been supported on broader archeological grounds by, among others, Jack, Bimson, Bimson and Livingston, Aling, and Shea. However, the majority of scholars who accept the historicity of the exodus place it, on archeological grounds, at about 1267 B.C. in the reign of Rameses II, near the middle of the thirteenth century B.C. Even such a strongly conservative scholar as Kenneth Kitchen continues to favor this date, taking the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1 as representing twelve generations (in reality only about three hundred years), and dismissing the three hundred years of Judges 11:26 as an exaggeration by Jephthah for diplomatic advantage. It is noteworthy that Hoffmeier, after a judicious weighing of all the evidence in 1997, considered the date of the exodus still an open question, and Provan, Long, and Longman in their recent history of Israel do the same, although cautiously favoring the earlier date.

It would be foolish to think that we could resolve all the difficulties
here, and there is no need to do so, given that nothing of great importance hangs on it for the exegesis of Judges. However, on balance I am more convinced by the arguments for the earlier date, and will assume for the purposes of this commentary that the exodus took place about 1446 B.C., giving us a date of 1326 B.C. for the beginning of the judges period. So we can think of the judges era as extending roughly from 1326 to 1092 B.C., about 234 years in all. This accords reasonably well with the total of 296 years obtained by simply totaling the data from the book of Judges itself, especially in view of the uncertainties involved in round numbers such as the forty years of 3:11, 5:31, 8:28, and 13:1, the eighty of 3:30, and the twenty of 15:20 and 16:31.

B. CANAAN IN THE PERIOD OF THE JUDGES

The Canaan that was Israel’s immediate environment in the judges period was diverse in every way. It was ethnically diverse in that the subjugation of the region was incomplete and various people groups still resided in different parts of it. Among the peoples that the book mentions as living in Canaan at the time are Perizzites, Jebusites, Amorites, Philistines, Sidonians, Hivites, and Hittites. It is not possible to identify all these peoples precisely, and some of the terms may simply be regional rather than ethnic, but the number of them testifies to the diversity of peoples and undoubtedly of cultures as well.

It was also diverse politically, with city-states with their own “kings” (mèlakîm) as perhaps the most clearly attested form of government, though no doubt the precise form of such kingship varied from one city to another. The Philistines, with their confederation of five cities in the southeast, seem to have had their own distinctive form of government by “lords” (sarnîm, 16:18). It was an unstable environment, with a tussle going on between Israel and some of these groups for control of certain areas; and there were periodic incursions by outside groups, such as Ammonites and Midianites. This instability was exacerbated by the fact that Egypt was in a period of weakness and

23. Assuming that Samson’s 20-year judgeship fell within the 40 years of Philistine oppression of 13:1.

24. See the comments on the relevant verses in the body of the commentary. On the complexity of the data and the impossibility of precision see David L. Washburn, “The Chronology of Judges: Another Look,” Bibliotheca Sacra 147 (1990): 414-25. Like Washburn, most scholars assume that some of the judges ruled concurrently in different regions, and that there was some overlap between them.

25. As we shall see, in Judges the word “Canaanites” is sometimes used as a general term for the pre-Israelite population, and sometimes in a more restricted sense of the pre-Israelite people of a particular area, who are distinguished by this term from others in the same area.
was unable to impose any kind of unity. In part this instability was caused by competition for arable land and (perhaps) by uprisings against the feudal power of the city-state rulers.

Most significantly for the book of Judges, it was also a very diverse environment religiously (see the comments at 2:11-13 on the nature of the Canaanite gods and the worship associated with them). The Israelites, who had been taken out of one polytheistic environment in Egypt and inserted (in the next generation) into another polytheistic environment in Canaan, found it difficult to survive there and remain faithful to their monotheistic faith. Their failure to do so is at the very heart of the account that Judges gives of the fortunes of Israel in the judges period.

C. ISRAEL’S INTERNAL AFFAIRS IN THE JUDGES PERIOD

Little is known about Israel’s way of life in the judges period apart from what can be gleaned from the Old Testament. The chief source of information is the book of Judges itself, but the books of Ruth and 1 Samuel also shed valuable light.

Israel’s territory at the time was divided into tribal areas (see Josh. 13–21). Of the twelve tribes, nine and a half occupied the region between the Jordan River (including the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea) and the Mediterranean coast. The other two and a half occupied the plateau region east of the Jordan. Incursions by neighboring peoples such as the Midianites, Moabites, and Ammonites (to the east) and the Philistines and other so-called Sea Peoples (to the west) usually involved only part of Israel’s territory, which meant that only one or two tribes were directly affected.

The essential bond between the tribes was their common history and their allegiance to Yahweh. He himself was their supreme Ruler or Judge (Judg. 11:27), and his law was their constitution. It was this covenant relationship with him which bound them together and gave them their identity as a distinct people. At least once a year a religious festival was held at which the people were reminded of their identity and of the obligations which this
entailed. One such annual festival was held at Shiloh, which was centrally located and the place where the Tent of Meeting had originally been set up after Israel’s arrival in Canaan (Josh. 18:1; Judg. 21:19; 1 Sam. 1:3). This most likely remained the place of the central sanctuary throughout the judges period, although the ark of the covenant was sometimes moved to other places, especially in times of crisis (Judg. 18:27). How well attended these festivals were and exactly what happened at them are not definitely known; the one explicit statement about them in Judges indicates that at least some of what took place was of questionable orthodoxy, and the description of the state of affairs at Shiloh in the opening chapters of 1 Samuel confirms this impression. There was a functioning priesthood (18:27), and the judge in office at the time may also have had a role in these festivals (see the comments on 2:17). Given the precedent set by Joshua (Josh. 24), it is likely that at least one of the festivals involved a covenant renewal ceremony of some kind.

For the most part, day-to-day administration of justice and oversight of community affairs was provided locally by the elders of the various clans and tribes (11:4-11; Ruth 4:1-12). But matters which could not be settled locally were brought for settlement to the judge who was in office at the time, either at some central location (4:4-5) or at certain designated towns which the judge visited regularly (1 Sam. 7:15-17). From time to time, as occasion warranted, ad hoc assemblies of representatives from the various tribes were convened to deal with matters of common concern, such as serious misconduct by one of the tribes or an enemy attack on one or more of them (10:17-18; 20:1-3). On such occasions decisive, concerted action was required to preserve the integrity of Israel. There was no standing army, so it was necessary to raise a fresh force of volunteer fighters each time a national emergency arose, and the personal charisma of an individual often played a crucial role in getting this done quickly. It seems that at least some of the judges rose to office precisely because of their ability to provide inspiring leadership on such occasions (11:1-10). Others seem to have been appointed in more peaceful circumstances (12:8-15), though precisely how this was done is not known.

In practice, however, the system (if that is the correct term for it) rarely if ever worked as smoothly as this. There was in fact little effective unity among the Israelite tribes in the period of the judges. For a start, they were separated from each other by settlements of unconquered Canaanites, some of them in fortified cities commanding major trade and communication corridors (1:19, 27-36; 4:2-3). Furthermore, the gods of these people became

30. Especially 1 Sam. 2:12-17.
31. For the meaning of šōpēt (judge) in the book of Judges, see the comments on 2:16-19.
a “snare” to the Israelites, as Joshua had warned they would (2:3; Josh. 23:12-13). This inevitably led to a weakening of their loyalty to Yahweh and to one another, and resulted in spiritual and moral decline that was so serious that it threatened to destroy Israel from within. The tribes were often slow to help one another in times of crisis (5:16-17; 12:2) and even fell to fighting among themselves (8:1-3; 12:1-6; 20:1-48). Most people were concerned only for their own interests, and took advantage of the absence of central government to do as they pleased (17:6; 21:25). This inner decay threatened to destroy the very fabric of Israel, and actually constituted a far more serious threat to its survival in the judges period than any external attack.

But as always in such circumstances, there were faithful Israelites who continued to quietly pursue lives of genuine piety. The book of Judges focuses mainly on the frequent crises that Israel faced, and gives a rather turbulent impression of the period. But it also clearly indicates that there were long periods of peace and relative prosperity, in which life at the local level could settle down into a more even tenor (3:11, 30; 8:28; 10:3-5; 12:8-10). In this respect Judges is nicely complemented by the book of Ruth with its gentle, moving story of one family’s affairs in Bethlehem. Here farmers struggled against the vagaries of the weather, people met and fell in love, and the elders sought to guide the affairs of the community along the tried and proven paths of covenant law and local custom; and both books testify to the fact that, whether in the turbulence of national crisis or the more quiet ebb and flow of village life, Yahweh was deeply involved and sovereignly at work in the lives of his people, preserving and disciplining them, and overruling all things for their good.

D. THE JUDGES PERIOD IN THE HISTORY WARS OF CRITICAL STUDY

In the context of the history of ancient Israel as a field of study, the judges period belongs to the more specific area of the history of Israelite settlement in Canaan. Specific issues relating to the book of Judges include its value as a historical source (is it, in part or as a whole, a record of real history?) and its relationship to the book of Joshua (is it an alternative, more realistic account of the Israelite settlement than the one given in the book of Joshua?).

Excellent summaries and reviews of recent developments in Israelite historiography are readily available, and it is not my intention to duplicate them here. Suffice it to say that the increasing application of sociological

approaches to Old Testament study and advances in the archeological study of early Iron Age Palestine in the latter part of the twentieth century have led to a widespread loss of confidence among scholars regarding the value of the Old Testament as a source for the study of the history of early Israel. The confident assertions of the Albright school in America and Y. Yadin and his followers in Israel regarding a basic congruence of the biblical picture of Israel’s early history with what may be known from archeology about conditions in Palestine in the relevant period have been increasingly challenged (and discredited in the minds of many scholars) by the followers of a radically revisionist approach to the history of early Israel championed by scholars such as N. P. Lemche, Philip Davies, and Keith Whitelam. According to the latter school of thought, archeology gives virtually no support to the biblical account of the Israelite conquest and settlement of Canaan, and in fact the Old Testament account of Israel’s early history is an ideologically motivated creation of the early Judaism of the postexilic period.

The same period has seen the rise of new literary approaches to the study of Old Testament texts (especially narratives) associated in America with scholars such as Robert Alter, and in Britain with the “Sheffield School” associated with David Clines. While there have been many positive results from these new approaches, they have tended to produce an artificial separation between historical study of the Old Testament (interested in the Old Testament texts only as possible sources for historical reconstruction) and literary study of the same texts (interested in them only as vehicles for the artistic exploration of themes). The popularity of the new literary approaches among evangelical scholars has had the unfortunate consequence that most of them opt out of the ongoing debate about the historicity of the Old Testament. This has meant that the critical response to the new historical minimalism has not been as robust and thorough as it could have been if the current generation of evangelical scholars had remained as engaged in the area as their forebears had been.33

Fortunately, however, the new minimalism has not had it all its own way. Significant challenges have continued to be mounted in the United States by scholars such as William Dever, James Hoffmeier, and V. Philips Long, and in Britain by the “Liverpool School” associated with Kenneth Kitchen and Alan Millard, and their followers. Kenneth Kitchen’s recent,  

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33. I have in mind specialists in ancient Near Eastern archeology and history such as R. K. Harrison, Donald Wiseman, Alan Millard, and Kenneth Kitchen.
substantial book, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (2003), is encyclopedic in the mass of hard historical data it brings to bear on the issues (something he believes his opponents fail to do). Of particular significance for the current state of the debate is the work by Provan, Long, and Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel* (also published in 2003). In a long and tightly argued first section (“History, Historiography, and the Bible”) it mounts a strong critique of the minimalist approaches at the level of epistemology (how we know things about the past) and historical method (responsible use of primary sources, including texts). Its special contribution is to bring back together historical and literary approaches to the study of Israel’s history by reinstating “narrative history” (stories about the past) as a valid source of historical knowledge, and narrative poetics (how such narratives work as literature) as essential to a correct use of them in historical study. Part 2 of the book then presents a history of Israel drawing on both textual evidence (biblical and extrabiblical) and relevant archeological data, in line with the principles presented in Part 1. This work has drawn praise from mainline scholars on both sides of the debate and goes a long way to redressing the relative lack of participation by the current generation of evangelical scholars referred to above. Of particular relevance for the task before us in this commentary is its treatment of Israel’s settlement in the land in chapter 7.

While making full allowance for the theological agenda of Judges and its literary quality (to which we will give a lot of attention in this commentary), there is no reason in principle why it should not preserve, and indeed be anchored in, real historical knowledge of the period in question. Nor is it necessary, or even right, to subordinate its witness about this history to reconstructions based on the current state of archeological knowledge. Both texts and material remains deserve respect and careful analysis, and it is more likely that sound conclusions will be reached by some kind of synthesis between what these two have to tell us than by simply dismissing one in favor of the other.

If we set aside, then, the extreme negativity at the minimalist end of the spectrum, two particular issues have featured in scholarly discussion of the period referred to in the book of Judges: how does the book of Judges relate to the various conquest/settlement models that have been proposed in critical scholarship, and does Judges present an alternate and more realistic account of Israel’s arrival and settlement in the land than Joshua does?

The various alternatives that have been proposed (the conquest, peaceful infiltration, peasant revolt, and other endogenous models that assume that Israel emerged within Canaan rather than entering it from outside) are gener-

34. Accompanying endorsements include, e.g., ones by Walter Brueggemann, Baruch Halpern, and William Dever.
ally well known, and good summaries are given in the recent works just re-
ferred to. The conquest model, at one end of the spectrum, gives primary
weight to the biblical account of Israel’s entry to the land (especially the book
of Joshua) and seeks corroboration from archeology. The various endogenous
models, at the other end, base their conclusions on archeology alone and nei-
ther seek nor find confirmation from biblical material (which is regarded as of
no historical value). Conservative scholars generally favor the conquest model
associated with the work of W. Albright and his followers. However, the real-
ity is that the whole truth does not lie at one end of the spectrum or the other,
and that there is some value in most if not all of the models that have been pro-
posed. The main problems that scholars have found with the conquest model
is that the archeological evidence does not support widespread Israelite de-
struction of Canaanite sites in the relevant period. Such evidence as does exist
does not correlate well with the thirteenth-century date of Israel’s entry to the
land favored by most scholars, and in any case is distributed across too wide a
time span to have been caused solely by Joshua’s concentrated campaigns.
Furthermore, the material remains of early Iron (re)settlement of the hill coun-
try of Canaan suggest that the people involved were essentially Canaanites
rather than Israelites with a distinctive new culture.

However, it now appears that some of the crucial weaknesses of the
conquest model have been due as much to a failure to read Joshua and Judges
carefully enough as to a failure to give sufficient weight to the archeological
record. The fact is that the book of Joshua does not claim that the Israelites
causd widespread destruction of cities; in fact, it explicitly denies this (Josh.
11:13). Joshua speaks of cities being taken and people (especially kings)
being killed, but “only three cities — Jericho, Ai, and Hazor — are said to
have been burned” (Josh. 6:24; 8:28; 11:11, 13). Furthermore, some areas
seem to have been taken by something more like accommodation (or
interpenetration) than conquest (e.g., Gibeon, Josh. 9; Shechem, Josh. 24:1,
25; Gen. 34). Finally, there is abundant evidence in the biblical record, espe-
cially in Judges, of Israelites intermarrying with Canaanites and worshiping
their gods, so much so that Daniel Block can speak of “the Canaanization of
Israel” in the judges period. It should hardly surprise us, therefore, if in the
material remains of the period Israelites are virtually indistinguishable from
Canaanites. All of this suggests that the conflict between the biblical account
and the archeological evidence has been greatly exaggerated, and that both

35. Provan, Long, and Longman, History of Israel, pp. 139-47; Younger, “Early
Israel,” pp. 178-91.
38. Block, Judges, Ruth, p. 76.
need to be read and compared with one another much more carefully.\(^\text{39}\) Wholesale dismissal of either is unwarranted.

A similar problem (and solution) appears when we consider the ways in which Israel’s occupation of Canaan is described in Joshua and Judges respectively. Scholars who have rejected the conquest model, if they give credence to the biblical material at all, tend to favor Judges as an alternative and more realistic account of what happened than Joshua: a rather messy process of the meeting and mixing of various tribes and people groups. This is a picture much more compatible with the endogenous models, at the righthand end of the spectrum, which currently have the ascendancy in critical scholarship. On this view Judges covers the same historical period as Joshua, but much more realistically. It is a view that seems justified, at least in part, by the fact that there is undeniable overlap between Joshua and Judges; some material found in the former is repeated in the latter, for example, the death and burial of Joshua (Josh. 24:29-30; Judg. 2:6-9), Othniel’s capture of Debir (Kiriath-sepher), and Othniel’s marriage to Achsah, Caleb’s daughter (Josh. 15:15-20; Judg. 1:11-15). However, several things need to be borne in mind. First, such overlap is the exception rather than the rule; the vast majority of the material in Judges is quite different from that in Joshua, and, second, the way Judges opens explicitly locates the events it is about to describe as “after the death of Joshua” (1:1), that is, in a different period and situation. Third, there are repetition and overlap within the book of Judges itself, apparently for compositional and thematic purposes (1:1–2:5 and 2:6–3:6 both start from the death of Joshua and describe what happened after his death from two different and complementary perspectives). These observations provide a starting point for a much more discerning comparison of the books of Joshua and Judges as a whole than the one that simply sets them over against one another as competing and conflicting accounts of Israel’s occupation of the land.

Careful observation of the content of the two books indicates that there is more than a merely artificial or narrative sequentiality between them. As noted by Kaufmann back in 1953, “At the time of Joshua’s wars the Philistines of the Pentapolis [Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza, and Gath] were not yet in the land of Canaan. Joshua fought only against the Canaanite peoples. In his days the Philistine cities were still occupied by Anakim. The Philistines appear only in Joshua 13, in the introduction to the Book of the Distribution of the Land. However, in this chapter Israel is unconditionally promised that they will expel the Philistines from the Shephelah. The real history of the Philistines is beyond the horizon of the Book of Joshua.”\(^\text{40}\) It is
different in Judges; the first brief clash with Philistines occurs in 3:31 (Shamgar), but by the time of Samson the Philistines are firmly established in Gaza and are a major force to be reckoned with (16:21-23). This is only one of many indicators identified by Kaufmann of the genuine antiquity of the Joshua account, and the difference in time and situation between it and the book of Judges. In short, the chronological progression from Joshua to Judges is a real, not artificial one. In view of this it is best to understand the few duplications of material that occur as either the inclusion of something still future for completeness in the treatment of an aspect of the conquest settlement as a whole, or as flashbacks to provide the context for a better understanding of something in the present. We will reserve comment on particular passages for the appropriate place in the exegesis.

III. THE HISTORY OF THE BOOK’S FORMATION

In his landmark study of 1943\textsuperscript{41} Martin Noth argued that the division of the historical complex Deuteronomy–2 Kings into “books” was a secondary development in the history of the tradition that partially obscured the more fundamental unity, literary and theological, of an original Deuteronomic History. In this original work Judges 2:6ff. was the direct continuation of Joshua 23, Joshua’s speech in that chapter marking the conclusion of the “period of the conquest,” and Judges 2:6-11, 14-16, 18-19 being the Deuteronomist’s introduction to the “period of the judges,” which was formally concluded with Samuel’s farewell speech in 1 Samuel 12. Noth believed that Judges 3:7–12:15 was composed by the Deuteronomist himself by combining a collection of stories about local tribal heroes with a short list of judge figures (10:1-5; 12:7-15), Jephthah being the common factor (he occurred in both). Judges 13:1 was then followed directly by 1 Samuel 1:1ff. Thus Judges 2:6-11, 14-16, 18-19; 3:7–13:1 was the segment of this original Deuteronomic History from which the present book of Judges developed through a series of editorial revisions and expansions.

Noth argued that the “Deuteronomistically edited” passages, Joshua 24:1-28 and Judges 2:1-5, were inserted secondarily after Joshua 23 and,

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later still, and without any Deuteronomistic revision, “the mass of old traditional fragments which form the present Judges 1.”\textsuperscript{42} Finally the original introduction of chapter 2 was expanded, possibly in more than one stage, to give the present text of 2:11–3:6.\textsuperscript{43}

Noth did not absolutely exclude the possibility that the Samson complex was part of the original Deuteronomic History but considered this unlikely on the grounds that it showed no signs of being worked on by the Deuteronomist, and that Samson’s name is conspicuous by its absence in 1 Samuel 12, “a passage which clearly aims to be comprehensive.”\textsuperscript{44} Furthermore, he held that it was the Deuteronomist’s usual practice to feature only one savior figure in each period of foreign rule, and that Samuel (not Samson) originally fulfilled this role in the context of the Philistine oppression announced in 13:1.

Noth offered no comment on the last five chapters of the book except that “Judges 17–21 was not part of the Dtr’s [Deuteronomist’s] work but was added later.”\textsuperscript{45} In a subsequent article\textsuperscript{46} he does discuss the background and purpose of the narrative in chapters 17–18, but without reference to its context in Judges. In that article he remarks that “the entire story does not fit at all well into the Deuteronomistic conception of the period of the Judges.”\textsuperscript{47} Noting that the formula, “in those days there was no king in Israel . . . ,” is fully integrated into the narrative of chapters 17–18 but merely brackets that of chapters 19–21,\textsuperscript{48} he implies that those chapters were a secondary addition to chapters 17–18. The redactional history of the book of Judges as such was not a matter of primary concern to Noth, and his understanding of it must be gleaned from various asides in his treatment of other matters. Wolfgang Richter, however, in his \textit{Die Bearbeitungen des “Retterbuches” in der deuteronomischen Epoche} (1964),\textsuperscript{49} has undertaken a much more systematic analysis of the question. He works within the broad parameters of Noth’s thesis, but seeks to refine certain aspects of it, particularly those which have a direct bearing on the early redactional history of Judges.

Richter believes that the “Retterbuch” (book of deliverers), Noth’s

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Deuteronomistic History}, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{43} In particular, Noth held that 2:20–3:6 belonged to this final stage of redaction since it clearly presupposed the existence of 1:21, 27ff.
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Deuteronomistic History}, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Deuteronomistic History}, p. 121, n. 29.
\textsuperscript{47} “Background of Judges 17–18,” p. 82, n. 35.
\textsuperscript{48} “Background of Judges 17–18,” p. 79.
\textsuperscript{49} BBB 21 (Bonn: Peter Hanstein).
postulated collection of stories about local tribal heroes, had undergone at least one and possibly two redactions before its incorporation into the Deuteronomistic History. The work of the successive redactors is distinguished partly on stylistic grounds and partly in terms of their differing horizons of interest.

The first reviser of the “Retterbuch,” according to Richter, ignored its antimonarchical tendency and expressed his own theological concerns in the stereotyped editorial framework that he provided for the individual deliverer stories of chapters 3–8. In so doing he gave the periods of oppression a theological motivation (retribution), but was generally optimistic: Israel had known its rescuers who, under God, brought peace, each successive episode ending with “the land had rest.” His use of the formula, “did what was evil in Yahweh’s eyes,” suggests some dependence on Deuteronomy 17:2; hence Richter’s siglum Rdt₁ for this redactor, although no other Deuteronomic influence is discernible. Richter suggests that this edition of the Retterbuch served as a book of examples occasioned by the restoration of the people’s militia under Josiah.

Richter assigns the “example story” (“ein narratives Beispielstück”) of Othniel (minus the numbers in 3:8 and 11, the judge formula of 3:10, and the death notice of 3:11) to a second reviser, Rdt₂. The theological interests of this reviser are expressed in the amplifications he supplies to the framework pattern of his predecessor, particularly his detailing of the nature of Israel’s sin (worship of foreign gods) and his reference to Yahweh’s anger at this (3:7b, 8b). Thus he sharpens Rdt₁’s general theology of retribution into the more specific concept that worship of Yahweh brings victory while worship of other gods brings defeat, a matter greatly stressed in Josiah’s reforms. Richter believes that the influence of Deuteronomy 13 as well as that of 17:2ff. is apparent here. He is cautious about identifying the hand of this second reviser, but on balance feels that it is justified, and suggests that he may have been a Calebite (cf. 3:9).

Richter’s third redactor, DtrG, is the equivalent of Noth’s Deuteronomist. This redactor introduces the “minor judges” and revises the whole Retterbuch in the process to give the segment of the Deuteronomistic History which, on Noth’s view, was the nucleus of the present book. He paints a very dark picture of Israel, particularly emphasizing its inveterate apostasy (see, in particular, 2:7, 10–12, 14–16, 18–19, and 10:6–16), which explains the tragedy of 587 B.C. Richter apparently holds, against Noth, that the Samson complex was included in DtrG’s composition, since he notes how the mention of the gods of the Ammonites and the Philistines in 10:6 (which he attributes to DtrG) prepares the way for both chapters 11–12 and 13–16.

Richter addresses himself only to that part of the book which, on his view, formed part of the Deuteronomistic History. The subsequent redac-
tional expansion of this core into the present book did not receive his attention in any subsequent publication. Neither Noth nor Richter considers to what extent the book in its final form is a coherent whole, but we may deduce from Noth’s comments on chapters 1 and 17–18 in particular (referred to above) that he, at least, saw the subsequent additions to the work of the Deuteronomist as detracting from the coherence of the core material.

Some later studies, however, have raised doubts about this rather negative assessment of the material that introduces and concludes the present book. Timo Veijola in particular has argued that chapters 17–21 in their present form are fully compatible with both the literary structure and theological concerns of the original Deuteronomistic History, and were in fact an integral part of it. Veijola is perhaps the best-known exponent of a methodology that derives in the first instance from the work of Walter Dietrich, and ultimately from that of Rudolph Smend, whose article “Das Gesetz und die Völker: Ein Beitrag zur deuteronomistischen Redaktionsgeschichte” (1971) proved to be the point of departure for a new and influential approach to the study of the Deuteronomistic History as a whole. Smend believed that the Deuteronomist’s introduction to the Judges period in the original Deuteronomistic History began in Judges 2:10, and that in 2:17, 20-21, and 23 this original introduction had been expanded by a reviser (DtrN) whose overriding concern was with the law of Moses and the effects of its observance or nonobservance on Israel’s relationships with the “nations” (gôyim) of Canaan. He also argued that this same redactor, at the same time as his revision of the introduction in chapter 2, had inserted 1:1–2:5 (a preexisting unit which he had not himself composed) since it was fully consistent with his own distinctive understanding of the “conquest” and was perhaps even the source of it. Smend found


53. “Das Gesetz und die Völker,” in Probleme biblischer Theologie, p. 506. In contrast to Noth, Smend saw Judg. 2:10 as the direct continuation of Josh. 24:31 in the original Deuteronomistic History, Josh. 24 (to v. 31) being an original part of that work and Josh. 23 a later insertion by a redactor.


55. Probleme biblischer Theologie, pp. 508-9. Smend attributes to this reviser the
other clear examples of the work of DtrN in Joshua 1:7-9, 13:1, and chapter 23, and believed that further research would show that this redactor had effected a systematic revision of the entire Deuteronomistic History.

The further work proposed by Smend was undertaken by Dietrich, resulting in the now familiar analysis in terms of two major revisions — one “prophetic” (DtrP) and the other “nomistic” (DtrN) — of the work of the “basic” Deuteronomist (DtrG), an analysis which was accepted or even assumed in the work of an increasing number of European scholars. In two monographs Veijola, whose work we have already mentioned, has analyzed the varying perspectives on the monarchy in these successive redactions. In the first, *Die ewige Dynastie* (1975), he examines four groups of texts in which David and his dynasty are central, and concludes that the texts attributed to DtrG idealize David and his dynasty in contrast to the more critical

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introduction into the original Deuteronomistic History of the concept of “the remaining nations.” The success of Joshua and his generation against the nations of Canaan was due to their strict adherence to “the book of the law [of Moses]” (Josh. 1:8; cf. 23:6). However, at Joshua’s death there still remained some “nations” (gôyim) (Josh. 23:4) and land (Josh. 13:2ff.) to be conquered, and success in doing this depended on continued obedience to the law (Josh. 23:6ff.). Israel failed to exhibit such obedience (Judg. 1:1–2:5), and so the “remaining nations” were left permanently in Canaan as a punishment (Judg. 2:20-21).

56. In *Prophetie und Geschichte* (see above, n. 51).

57. Whereas Smend had worked with Joshua-Judges, Dietrich focused exclusively on Kings. Using methods similar to those of Smend, he argued that DtrG had contained very few prophetic traditions, and that most had been inserted by DtrP, either by utilizing old traditions or by composing his own material. The promise-and-fulfilment schema of Kings emphasized by von Rad was taken to be the contribution of DtrP. Thus for Dietrich the two later redactions by DtrP and DtrN were not minor ones, but included major additions, both of old traditions and of new compositions. By comparing the language and style of these three redactions with other Israelite literature, Dietrich concluded that DtrG had written around 580 B.C., DtrP about ten years later, and DtrN a further ten years later.

58. The surprisingly rapid acceptance of Dietrich’s analysis was documented in 1980 by Gerald E. Gerbranot in “Kingship according to the Deuteronomistic History” (diss., Union Theological Seminary, Virginia, 1980). Gerbranot cites, in addition to Timo Veijola, Tryggve Mettinger, Ernst Wüthrich, Helmut Hollenstein, Otto Kaiser, and Wolfgang Roth as being in fundamental agreement with Dietrich’s proposals. To quote Gerbranot, Wüthrich and Hollenstein in particular “suggest that this is the direction Deuteronomistic studies will take, and Kaiser’s introduction points in a similar direction” (p. 17).


60. Each cluster of passages is related to a lead text: 1 Kgs. 1–2 (ch. 2), 1 Sam. 25 (ch. 3), 1 Sam. 20:12-17, 42b (ch. 4), and 2 Sam. 21–24 (ch. 5).
and provisional attitudes displayed in DtrP and DtrN.\(^6\) In his second monograph, *Das Königtum in der Beurteilung der deuteronomistischen Historiographie* (1977),\(^62\) he extends his analysis to a second set of texts, this time from Judges and 1 Samuel, dealing with the emergence of kingship as an institution within Israel prior to David.\(^6\) He seeks to show that, in general, the same distinctions between the views of DtrG, DtrP, and DtrN respectively are evident in this set of texts as in the first set.\(^6\) Judges 17–21 is one of the texts adduced in this second monograph in support of the part of his thesis relating to the basic Deuteronomist (DtrG). He argues that the “promonarchical notices” (“königsfreundliche Notizen”) of 17:6, 18:1a, 19:1a, and 21:25 give kingship unqualified endorsement as a legitimate institution necessary for securing the realm against internal disorder, both cultic (17–18) and social (19–21) — a task beyond the competence (and specific brief) of the judges.\(^65\) By following the account of the gross cultic irregularities practiced by Micah (17:1-5) with the note that “in those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6), the redactor implicitly subordinates cultic matters to kingly jurisdiction, a concept which played an essen-

61. In the concluding chapter, “Synthese und Konsequenzen,” the views of the redactors are described. I quote here from the synopsis in *Old Testament Abstracts* 1, no. 2 (1978): 199: “DtrG idealizes David and his dynasty. He sees the king as both the nāgīd and the servant of the Lord. The monarch is exemplary in piety and justice, and his house is the legitimate and enduring dynasty. DtrP presents the king as sinful yet ready to repent. The ruler is never titled ‘the servant of the Lord,’ while two prophets are so designated. A future for the royal house is not envisaged. Finally, DtrN allows both place and future to David’s house in as far as its members are obedient to the law. Thus history, prophecy, and law, three important constituents of the religion of ancient Israel, have together shaped the Deuteronomistic David tradition and created a multifaceted image.”

62. See the reference in n. 50.

63. These, too, are each related to a lead text: Judg. 17–21 (ch. 2); 1 Sam. 7:2-17 (ch. 3); 1 Sam. 10:17–11:15 (ch. 4); 1 Sam. 8 (ch. 5); 1 Sam. 9:1–10:16 (ch. 6); 1 Sam. 12 (ch. 7); Judg. 8:22-23 and 9:7-21 (ch. 8).

64. Only the work of DtrG and DtrN is found in the texts studied. The views of these two Deuteronomists as found in these texts are characterized as follows (I quote here from the synopsis in *Old Testament Abstracts* 1, no. 2 [1978]: 200): “The basic Deuteronomist uses traditions which in outlook are similar to his own and describes the rise and role of kingship in keeping with Deut. 17:14-20. In so far as kings came to rule according to that law they are divinely called and legitimated (as ‘the Judges’ had been before them). . . . The nomistic Deuteronomist, on the other hand, condemns kingship as the result of the people’s disobedience and as the rejection of Yahweh’s kingship, the positive estimate of David notwithstanding.”

65. “. . . the judge is a savior who frees the people from external enemies. According to DtrG it is not his task to intervene against cultic or other offenses within the people of God” (p. 29). See his detailed analysis of the “promonarchical notices” on pp. 15-17.
tial role in the basic Deuteronomistic History of DtrG. 66 In particular, Veijola finds the locus of the expression, “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6; 21:25), in the cult-centralization legislation of Deuteronomy 12:8-12, which, with Smend, he attributes specifically to DtrG. 67

He contends that chapters 17–21 have undergone extensive Deuteronomistic revision, discernible (apart from the promonarchical refrain of 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, and 21:25) in 17:5, 7b, 13; 18:1b, 19, 30, 31b; 19:1b, 30; 20:4, 27b-28a. These redactional elements are identified as Deuteronomistic partly on the basis of characteristic language and style, and partly on the basis of the social/theological concerns they evince. For example, Veijola argues that the redactionally produced characterization of the Levites in both chapters 17–18 and chapters 19–21 as unpropertied sojourners (gērîm) dependent on the hospitality and support of their fellow Israelites (17:7b; 19:1b; 20:4) reflects the Deuteronomistic legislation concerning “the Levite within your gates” of Deuteronomy 12:12; 28:19; 14:27, 29; 16:11, 14; and 26:11, 12, 13. 68 It adds depth to the picture of cultic and social disorder in the two narratives. The formula “from the day that the people of Israel came up out of Egypt until this day” (Judg. 19:30) is one of the more obvious examples of Deuteronomistic language on which he draws (cf. Deut. 9:7; 1 Sam. 8:8; 2 Sam. 7:6; 1 Kgs. 8:16; 2 Kgs. 21:15; Jer. 7:25; 11:7). 69 Finally, Veijola argues that these chapters are an integral part of a final cycle of apostasy — punishment — deliverance which conforms to the DtrG’s conception of the judges period in general, and brings it to a close. After the death of the judge Samson (16:30-31), Israel again does evil in the sight of Yahweh (chs. 17–21) and suffers a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Philistines (1 Sam. 4), after which Samuel, the last judge, is raised up as a deliverer (1 Sam. 7, esp. vv. 8-15). 70

The impact of Veijola’s work is apparent in Alberto Soggin’s Judges commentary of 1981. In his introduction to chapters 17–21 Soggin comments that “the arguments put forward by Veijola in favor of a Dtr edition . . . are weighty ones, which open up a new period in the study of these chapters.” 71

66. “With this he shows at the same time that he subordinates the cultic matters to the realm of the king, which is completely in agreement with the concept that plays an important role in the later interpretation of history in DtrG” (p. 27).

67. Veijola refers (p. 16, n. 5) to a seminar presentation in which Smend held that Deut. 12:13-28 (with “you” singular) was original, while vv. 1-12 (with “you” plural) was made up of two additions, by DtrG (vv. 8-12) and DtrN (vv. 1-7) respectively.

68. Das Königtum, pp. 17-27.

69. Das Königtum, pp. 18-19.

70. Das Königtum, pp. 28-29.

Noth, Richter, Smend, and Veijola are all major scholars whose work may fairly be regarded as representing the main lines of development of redactional-critical study relevant to the Judges material. The work of Smend and Veijola taken together suggests that the opening and closing sections of the book are much more closely integrated, redactionally and conceptually, into its central section than was recognized by Noth and Richter. However, they continue to consider Judges 1 and 17–21 primarily in relation to the structure of the Deuteronomistic History with its periods as conceived by Noth, and only secondarily as the beginning and ending of the book of Judges. We conclude this redaction-critical survey by looking at the work of two scholars, Robert Boling and Graeme Auld, who, while still working within the broad parameters of Noth’s thesis, have addressed the final form of the book much more directly.

Boling’s understanding of the redactional history of Judges is summarized in the introduction to his Anchor Bible Commentary. We will not repeat the details here, but simply note the substantial agreement between Boling and the major works reviewed above and indicate where Boling’s own distinctive contribution lies, particularly with reference to the opening and closing segments of the book. Boling agrees with Noth that the author of the original Deuteronomic History combined stories of “saviors” with archival notes about so-called “minor judges” and contributed introductory material in chapter 2. He agrees with Richter, however, that the stories of the “saviors” had already been formed into an edited cycle (which he calls “the pragmatic edition”) before they came into the hands of the Deuteronomistic historian. Boling’s particular contribution comes in his treatment of the later redactional history of the book. Here his analysis is strongly determined by his acceptance of F. M. Cross’s thesis that there were two major editions of the historical work identified by Noth. Cross reserved the term “Deuteronomistic” for the second edition, which he distinguished from an earlier “Deuteronomic” edition. The first, seventh-century edition was ideologically supportive of Josiah’s reforms. The second, sixth-century edition transformed the earlier work into a sermon on history addressed to the Judean exiles. Boling discerns a similar, two-stage redaction

73. Judges, p. 36.
of the material we now know as the book of Judges. He assigns the whole of 2:1–18:31 to a Deuteronomic edition, which thus begins with Yahweh’s messenger indicting the Israelites at Bochim (= Bethel)\(^\text{76}\) and ends with a polemic against the shrine at Dan. Centrally located between these two limits is Abimelech’s disastrous reign and destruction of Shechem in chapter 9. Boling comments:

> It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the historian has deliberately arranged his presentation so that the period of the Judges begins, centers, and ends with accounts that devalue possible competitors to the Jerusalem temple, thus endeavoring to legitimate King Josiah’s policies in the late seventh century.\(^\text{77}\)

Boling attributes chapters 1 and 19–21 to a sixth-century updating which produced “the final or Deuteronomistic edition” of the book.\(^\text{78}\) For Boling, this did not detract from the coherence of the earlier edition, but supplemented and enhanced it. His sensitivity to the literary structure of the final product is apparent in the following comment on chapter 1:

> The final (exilic) redactor of the introduction was . . . supplementing the critical perspective of the seventh-century Deuteronomic Historian when he built into the interim between Joshua’s death and Othniel’s rescue of the nation (3:7-11) his prelude to the era, a little known period which he indicated unfolded from an eagerly united beginning to a scattered and indecisive conclusion. *Compare the movement within the body of the book from Othniel in the south (3:7-11) to the Danite traditions in chs. 13–16.*\(^\text{79}\) (my italics)

Boling and Smend both see chapter 1 as part of a major revision of the Deuteronomic History, and although Boling assigns chapter 1 and 2:1-5 to separate stages, he does agree with Smend that 1:1–2:5 is a logical unity (ch. 1 now documents the charge made in 2:1-5). However, Boling’s observation about the correspondence between the schematic arrangement of chapter 1 and the plan of the central section of the book counts strongly against Smend’s notion that 1:1–2:5 was added as an old, pre-formed unit. Instead, it appears to be a deliberately constructed introduction to what follows.

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\(^{76}\) An identification made explicitly in both the A and B texts of LXX Judges. Cf. “the oak of weeping” near Bethel in Gen. 35:8.

\(^{77}\) *Judges*, pp. 184-85.

\(^{78}\) *Judges*, p. 31.

\(^{79}\) *Judges*, p. 64, and cf. p. 36: “to the exilic (Deuteronomistic) redactor is left the addition of the bulk of ch. 1 (in itself a configuration of some of the oldest material of the book).”
Boling’s position vis-à-vis Smend receives independent corroboration in an article by Graeme Auld published in the same year as Boling’s commentary. Auld argues that Judges 1:1–2:5 is “a deliberately contrived introduction to the book of Judges.” Basing his case on an examination of the links between Judges and material elsewhere in the Old Testament (especially Joshua), and an analysis of the structure and development of the passage as a whole, he concludes that it is

a late prefatory note to the book of Judges which supplements, corrects, and explains the treatment by the Deuteronomistic History of the period of the Judges. Part of it suggests that the troubled history of the northern tribes, about which the body of the book is largely concerned, was due to the failures during their settlement in Canaan. Part of it compensates for the scanty mention of Judah in the rest of the book. It is not unlikely that this new preface is contemporaneous with the division of the Deuteronomistic History into the now familiar separate books.

In relation to the closing chapters of the book, Boling anticipates a major aspect of the work of Veijola in finding a link between the portrayal of the Levites in chapters 17–21 and one of the major areas of concern of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic historians. Chapters 17–18 depict “the easy exploitation and corruption of a promising young Levite at secondary shrines,” and chapters 19–21 portray an “outrage which was touched off by a failure of Yahwist ‘hospitality’ toward another Levite.” Boling differs from Veijola in assigning chapters 19–21 to a Deuteronomistic revision of the basic history, but is in agreement with him in proposing an exilic provenance for them. Evidence for the exilic dating of chapters 19–21 is found in the

81. “Judges 1 and History,” p. 265.
83. Judges, p. 35: “The disaster of 721 only heightened one of Deuteronomy’s enduring concerns — to find provision for jobless rural Levites at the central Yahweh sanctuary (Deut. 18:1-8). Provision for the Levites presents, in fact, the most notable discrepancy between the Deuteronomistic platform of reform and its implementation as reported in Kings and Chronicles. That discrepancy became a source of controversy that now provides an important clue to the redactional history of Judges: compare the contrasting characterizations of two Levites in chs. 17 and 19.”
84. Judges, p. 36.
85. But he does have the support of Noth for his view that chs. 19–21 as a unit are secondary to chs. 17–18. See the discussion of Noth above.
86. For Veijola, following Dietrich, the basic Deuteronomistic History itself was exilic. See the discussion of their work above.
prominence they give to Judah and Benjamin, and to the old general assembly (‘ēdâ/qâhâl), an institution largely suppressed during the monarchy, but which blossomed again as the postmonarchical “congregation.” Similar arguments for the setting and function of Judges 19–21 in its final form were subsequently proposed in a major monograph by H. Jüngling.

Boling’s most distinctive contribution is his thesis that chapters 1 and 19–21 now provide the entire book with a “tragicomic” framework:

In its finished form the Book of Judges begins with Israel scattered and ineffective by the close of chapter 1. It ends with a very delicate, persistent ideal — Israel, reunited at last in the wake of a tragic civil war — in an account that swarms with incongruities.

It is with this survival of “Israel” in spite of all the vicissitudes and absurdities of the judges period that the Deuteronomistic editor consoles the exiles who live in a period when, once again, there is “no king in Israel.”

In reviewing Boling’s Judges, Graeme Auld takes issue with him on points of detail. For him 1:1–2:5 and chapters 17–21 are “post-Deuteronomistic.” He does agree with Boling, however, in recognizing a strong affinity between the beginning and end of the book. He finds the close verbal parallels between 1:1-2 and 20:18, and the prominence both passages give to Judah, particularly striking.

Boling and Auld are in substantial agreement with Noth and Richter as to the earlier redactional history of Judges. What they both try to do is achieve a more precise description of the final stages of its redactional history. As we noted above, Boling’s work in particular represents an application to Judges of F. M. Cross’s work on the Deuteronomistic History — a refinement of Noth’s thesis which has commanded widespread

87. Judges, p. 278.
89. Hans-Winfried Jüngling, Richter 19 — Ein Plädoyer für das Königtum: Stilistische Analyse der Tendenzerzählung, Ri. 19,1-30a; 21,25, Analecta Biblica 84 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981). Jüngling finds the setting for the final redaction of the whole unit, 19–21, to be the exilic or postexilic period, in which it served to instruct the community (on the basis of ancient precedent) how a sinning brother is to be disciplined (excommunicated and restored) in a context where “there is no king in Israel.” See esp. pp. 244-46.
92. “One cannot but agree with Boling, even if in different spirit, that the repetition of the oracular device and the primacy of Judah in 1:1-2 and 20:18 ‘is something quite out of the ordinary’” (“Boling’s Judges,” p. 45). Compare his analysis of the literary interdependence of these two passages in “Judges 1,” pp. 267-68.
acceptance, particularly in American scholarship. Hence the area of agreement between Boling and Auld represents a refinement of earlier major studies. Taken together, their work suggests that the final editing of the Deuteronomistic History in effect redefined the period of the judges so that its limits now correspond to those of the book of Judges, which in its final form is a rounded literary unit. A further, distinct transitional period (from the birth of Samuel to the death of Saul) is covered in 1 Samuel before the monarchy period proper begins with David’s accession to the throne in 2 Samuel.

My monograph of 1987 was a literary rather than a historical study of Judges. However, the evidence it found for the distinctiveness and coherence of the book in its own right lent support to conclusions that were already emerging from historical-critical study of Judges. Since then the flourishing of new literary-critical methods and the continued questioning and revision of Noth’s thesis about an original Deuteronomistic History have opened the way for reconsideration of the redactional history of Judges and its contribution to the biblical account of Israel’s history in the premonarchy period. In 2003, the fresh treatment of Joshua, Judges, and 1 and 2 Samuel in Provan, Long, and Longman’s A Biblical History of Israel was a clear sign of renewed interest in the contribution these books as such could make to the historical and theological study of the Old Testament.

The most striking manifestation of these trends to date is the recently published HThKAT Judges commentary by Walter Gross. Applying traditional German-style literary-critical method, he finds ten redactional layers in Judges, from a core of ancient hero stories, through a pre-Deuteronomistic edition of them, to two Deuteronomic redactions (DtrR, DtrS), expansions by two postexilic authors and three supplementers, to completion by a final postexilic author who supplied the frame of chapters 1 and 17–21. The result is a book with a clear structure and well-defined boundaries, but with an unresolved tension between a core that has a negative view of kingship (2:6–16:31) and a frame (chs. 1 and 17–21) that sees it as a necessity if Israel is to overcome the chaos of the judges period and move forward. In its canonical

94. This is a more adequate description of the literary structure of the text, in my judgment, than Veijola’s proposal of a final cycle of the judges period extending from Judg. 17 to 1 Sam. 12.
95. The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading, JSOTSup 46 (Sheffield: JSOT).
96. For the latter, see the detailed review of developments from Noth’s original work to the present in Trent C. Butler, Judges, WBC 8 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), pp. xliii-li.
97. Richter, HThKAT (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2009).
context it acts as a bridge between Exodus–Joshua, which describe Israel’s development as a nation before the emergence of kingship, and 1 Samuel–2 Kings, which describe its existence under the monarchy.

Gross’s understanding of the unique character and function of Judges emerges from his redaction-critical analysis. It is not clear yet how his account of its formation will be received, and whether his attempt to combine final form literary-canonical criticism with historical criticism can be judged successful. Nevertheless, given his stature as a scholar and the status of the HThKAT commentary series, his work may fairly be taken as representative of the state of redactional-critical study of Judges at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Further comment on Gross’s commentary will be made in Section V. By way of summary of the ground covered here, however, it is clear that the redactional unity of the central section of Judges, dealing with the careers of Othniel to Samson, has long been recognized, and insofar as historical-critical scholars have addressed themselves to the final stages of the book’s formation, early skepticism about it being a distinct work in its own right has effectively been answered.

IV. ITS SHAPE AND CONTENT

Whatever its history, Judges as we now have it has a very clear structure. The long central section that deals with the careers of the judges themselves extends from 3:7 to 16:31. It is preceded by an introduction in two parts (1:1–2:5 and 2:6–3:6) and followed by an epilogue, also in two parts (chs. 17–18 and 19–21). The question that is asked at the beginning of the book (1:1-2) is asked again in very different circumstances at the end (20:18). So as we come to the end of the book we are invited to reflect on the point from which we set out, and on all that has happened in between.

The first part of the introduction (1:1–2:5) is about the progressive deterioration in Israel’s position vis-à-vis the Canaanites that followed the
death of Joshua (1:1). The efforts of the various tribes to possess and occupy the lands that had been allocated to them (Josh. 13–19) run into increasing difficulties as the Canaanites, particularly on the coastal plain and in key fortified cities in the north, put up very determined resistance (see esp. vv. 19, 27-28). This leads to a tense stalemate situation in which Israelites and Canaanites live side by side. The Israelites hold the upper hand but are still excluded from significant parts of the land. The tribe of Dan in particular is confined to the hills and is unable to get a secure foothold in its allotted territory near the coast (1:34). It is a situation that falls far short of the expectations with which Israel had set out, expectations grounded in the promises God had made to their ancestors (Josh. 23:1-5; cf. Gen. 12:1-3; 15:12-21; 28:13-15). This part of the introduction ends with the Israelites weeping before Yahweh at Bochim (Bethel) and being told what has gone wrong (2:1-5). The reason for their failure has not been the iron chariots or strong fortifications of the Canaanites, but their own unfaithfulness. In the territory they had succeeded in taking they had begun to compromise by allowing the altars of the Canaanites to remain standing, and because of this Yahweh had withdrawn his help from them. In addition to looking back, this key speech by Yahweh’s messenger also looks forward, with the prediction that the Canaanites and their gods will become a snare to the Israelites.

The second part of the introduction (2:6–3:6) returns to the beginning (notice how Joshua reappears in 2:6) and makes this underlying spiritual problem the main focus of attention. In a few deft strokes Israel’s initial decline into apostasy is sketched (2:6-10) and then the whole pattern of the ensuing judges era is laid out (2:11-19). It is presented as a period of persistent apostasy, in which Yahweh alternately judges the Israelites by handing them over to foreign oppressors, and then (when they are in great distress) has pity on them and raises up a judge to save them. At these times the Israelites temporarily give up their apostasy, but quickly return to it when the judge dies (v. 19a). In short, despite Yahweh’s many attempts to retrieve them from their evil ways, the Israelites persist in them (v. 19b). This leads to another crucial speech in 2:20-22, in which Yahweh announces what he intends to do as his final response to all that has taken place. The nations which were originally left (at the time Joshua died) to test Israel’s faithfulness will now be left permanently as a punishment for her unfaithfulness. This is the climax of the second part of the introduction, and to the introduction as a whole. The verses that remain (2:23–3:6) are essentially a summary of all that has gone before.

So the introduction, as well as diagnosing what went wrong and mapping out what is to follow, makes it very clear what the central issue of the book is, namely, Israel’s persistent apostasy in the judges period and Yahweh’s response to it. The book answers the question, “Why didn’t Israel
ever fully possess the land that God promised to their ancestors?” and gives the answer, “Because of the apostasy that followed the death of Joshua, and continued in spite of all Yahweh’s efforts to reclaim Israel from it.” Judges defends Yahweh’s action in leaving the remaining nations long-term as fully justified in view of Israel’s behavior. The later books of the Deuteronomistic History go on to explain and justify his later, more drastic act of evicting Israel from the land altogether.

The central section of the book (3:7–16:31) fills out the outline already given in the introduction (2:11-19) and develops a number of subthemes in the process. It records the careers of twelve judges in all: Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Barak, Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, and Samson. Deborah and Jael both play very significant roles in the Barak episode, and Deborah is even said to have judged Israel (4:4-5), but in terms of the overall design of the book chapters 4–5 must be seen as essentially about Barak; and although the activities of Gideon’s son Abimelech are recounted in some detail, he is not a judge at all in terms of the way that office has been described in the introduction.

Just as the first part of the introduction began with Judah and ended with Dan (1:1-34), so this central section begins with judge Othniel from Judah (3:7-11) and ends with judge Samson the Danite (chs. 13–16). Othniel is a model judge whose career exemplifies what a judge was meant to be and do. The following judges represent a series of variations on this basic pattern, culminating with Samson, whose behavior is so bizarre that he is barely recognizable as a judge at all. The pattern of this part of the book has frequently been described in terms of a repeating cycle of apostasy, oppression, calling on Yahweh, deliverance, peace, and renewed apostasy. There is certainly much repetition in this long central section, but there is also progressive change, so that the result is better described in terms of a downward spiral than a simple cycle. Disunity among the Israelites first appears in the Barak episode (5:16-17, 23), and grows worse under later judges. After the forty years that follow Gideon’s victory (8:28) the land is never again said to enjoy rest, and by the time of Samson the Israelites no longer even cry out to Yahweh to save them. Furthermore, as these chapters run their course, the judges themselves gradually become more and more implicated in the wrongdoing of the nation as a whole. The climax is reached in Samson, whose personal waywardness and reluctance to embrace his calling perfectly epitomize the waywardness and struggle of Israel. As Israel had been set apart from other nations by God’s covenant with her, so Samson is set apart from other men by his calling as a Nazirite. As Israel went after foreign gods, Samson goes after foreign women. Israel wanted to be as other nations; Samson wants to be as other men; and as Israel repeatedly called on Yahweh in its distress, so does Samson. In short, the subthemes that run through the whole
central section of the book (Israel’s struggle against her destiny and Yahweh’s perseverance with her in judgment and grace) are finally brought to a sharp focus in the story of Samson. His personal story is also the story of Israel as a whole in the judges period.

The two stories that form the epilogue (chs. 17–21) are also located in the judges period (when “there was no king in Israel”) but do not follow chronologically from what has gone before. There is also a shift of focus in them, from the sin of Israel as a whole to the sins of the individuals and communities that comprise it: everyone does what is right in his own eyes (17:6). The first story, in chapters 17–18 (Micah and his idols), is about the religious chaos of the period; the second, in chapters 19–21 (the Levite and his concubine), is about the accompanying moral chaos. Together they show that Israel was even more endangered by its own internal decay, morally and spiritually, than by any external attack. In particular, the second story shows how the very institutions which should have provided stability (the Levitical priesthood, hospitality and family life, eldership, and the assembly of tribal leaders) were all rendered ineffective, and even positively harmful, because of the moral bankruptcy of individuals. The way the book ends leaves us in no doubt that it was certainly not the quality of its leadership or its institutions that held Israel together. Israel’s survival in the period of the judges was a miracle of God’s grace.

The refrain that runs through the epilogue (“In those days there was no king in Israel . . .,” 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) rings down the curtain on one period and anticipates another. Kingship, like judgeship, will have its place in Israel’s ongoing history and prove useful in its time. But it, too, will fail through human sinfulness. As the Deuteronomistic History as a whole shows, no institution, however valid, holds the key to Israel’s future. It is only God’s ongoing commitment to his people, in spite of everything, that does this.

V. RECENT SCHOLARLY STUDY OF JUDGES

The 1970s and early 1980s saw two developments in biblical studies that had major significance for the study of Judges, as for all other biblical books. The first was the advent of canonical criticism, heralded by the publications of Brevard Childs, especially his Biblical Theology in Crisis (1970) and Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture (1979).100 The second was the emergence of what might be called “pure” literary criticism (the study of

texts as literature rather than as sources for history or theology), which was popularized by the work of Robert Alter, especially in *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981).\(^{101}\) Both were fresh ways of studying biblical texts which gave new freedom and energy to the scholarly study of them.

Canonical criticism reinstated the final (canonical) form of the text as an object of primary concern for biblical scholars. It also placed the canon back in place as the primary context in which to consider the theological contribution of each of the books to the theology of the Bible and the church. The new literary criticism was quite different from this in its motivation, having very little interest in either theology in the traditional sense or the canon as such, but complemented canonical theology in two key ways: it shared with it an interest in the final form of the text, but brought a new sophistication to the study of the literary craftsmanship exhibited by the biblical texts. The combination of the two has proved to be a potent brew which has produced some excesses (inevitable in an age of experimentation) but also many fine and insightful new explorations of how the biblical texts “work” as finished pieces, including the book of Judges. My own doctoral thesis, published in 1987, was the first attempt, as far as I am aware, to apply the new literary approach to the book as a whole. This commentary has given me the opportunity to update it where necessary, and bring its findings into connection with the theological concerns normally associated with canonical criticism; that is, to work through the book of Judges again, this time as both literature and Scripture. But first, let us take time to note here some of the more significant studies of Judges since 1987 which show the influence of these new approaches but move beyond them in the spirit of emerging postmodernism with its unabashed acceptance of the subjectivity involved in the reading of texts, including biblical texts.

Mieke Bal’s *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (1988) is a feminist reading of Judges which is deliberately subversive, marginalizing what has been regarded as central (theology, history) and focusing on what has been marginalized by traditional (and mostly male) biblical scholarship.\(^ {102}\) She seeks to bring to light the roots of the gender-bound violence she finds in Judges, and argues that the murders of young women in the book are caused by “uncertainty about fatherhood” (p. 6). She summarizes her findings as follows:

> Reading the book of Judges within the margins of the traditional readings has led us to realise how deeply violence is anchored in the domes-

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