

## **The Book of Judges**

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## **1. Introduction**

Old Testament History in regard to the book of Judges is an interesting subject to study. With the debate about Israel's origins in mind, this essay provides the follow-up concerning Israel's history and considers both the liberal and the conservative viewpoint, again. The following chapter two was shaped by a variety of sources that more or less implicitly reveal distinct approaches to the book. Chapter three discusses the historical context of Judges introducing different chronological models. At times we will draw reasonable conclusions.

## **2. Judges: Approaches and Interpretation**

### **a. Compilation of Saga**

It is commonly argued that the book of Judges mainly consists of ancient stories about some Israelite judges which are loosely tied together by editorial notes. The episodes assumingly have independent origins and are not in chronological order. Due to the inherent nature of the writings including its tendency to the miraculous, the majority of scholars reject the claim of historicity of the book and degrade the episodes as fables or allegories. Furthermore it is frequently theorized that the stories were brought together by a later editor who used a common 'deuteronomistic framework' in line with Joshua, Samuel and Kings.

In regard to structure, Judges is divided into three sections (1:1-2:10; 2:11-16:31; 17:1-21:25) “which seem not to share anything in common.”<sup>1</sup> *Sweeney* agrees that such an assessment results in a “fragmented reading of Judges in which the interrelationship of its component parts is not entirely clear.”<sup>2</sup> He prefers to link the appendixes with the major section. Whereas the introduction lays the background to the problem addressed, the body of Judges “provides an account of the deterioration and increasing Canaanization of the tribes of Israel.”<sup>3</sup> The degeneration was caused by intermarriage (Judg 3:1-6) and brought consequences as shown in the appendixes. While *Cundall* does not object the threefold division, he contrary to most scholars maintains a more consistent interpretation of Judges throughout his commentary.<sup>4</sup>

However, the episodes in Judges are commonly treated as ‘saga’ and as such they are taken out of context. For example, Brettler says the conquest of Othniel against Cushan-rishathaim king of Aram-naharaim (Judg 3:7-11) is an allegory masquerading as history which suggests the Judean victory over wickedness, since the

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<sup>1</sup> Marc Brettler, “The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989): 395.

<sup>2</sup> Marvin A. Sweeney, “Davidic Polemics in the Book of Judges,” *Vetus Testamentum* 47 (October 1997): 519.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 527.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur E. Cundall, “Judges – An Introduction and Commentary,” in *The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Judges & Ruth*, ed. D.J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: InterVarsityPress, 1968), 7-215.

symbolic name ‘Cushan-rishathaim’ means ‘the dark double-wicked one.’<sup>5</sup> Also Täubler overall neglects the question of historicity and focuses on literary analysis of names. He interprets the king’s name as a play on words and presupposes a literal transformation of a Midianite ‘Cushan’ (located close to Edom) into a Kushi of Babylonia. The writer’s contempt against Babylon (and Edom) is expressed in the title ‘rishathaim’ (= ‘of double wickedness’). Accordingly, ‘Aram-naharaim’ is a substitute name for Babylon. Täubler comes to the conclusion by implying a late dating of the editorial writing to Israel’s exilic period.<sup>6</sup> His analysis stands in contrast to Billington who translates the king’s name simply as “Cushan of the Rishataim people, king of Aramaean [northwest] Mesopotamia.”<sup>7</sup>

Margalith states that the story of Samson (Judg 13:1-16:31) resembles the mythology of the Minoan-Mycenean world and thus was “probably adopted from their Philistine neighbours by the Danites and absorbed into the corpus of their tribal lore.”<sup>8</sup> Though, despite many arguments Margalith cannot disprove the accuracy of the biblical record but presupposes that the Samson story is a legend. Particularly, she

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<sup>5</sup> Marc Brettler, “The Book of Judges,” 404f.

<sup>6</sup> Eugen Täubler, “Cushan-Rishathaim,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 20 (1947): 137-142.

<sup>7</sup> Clyde E. Billington, “The Rosh People In History And Prophecy: Part Two – The origin and Early History of the Rosh People,” *Michigan Theological Journal* 3 (Fall 1992): 148; cf. Roger Dalman, *Yahweh’s Song*, 251, n. 1381.

<sup>8</sup> Othniel Margalith, “Samson’s Riddle and Samson’s Magic Locks.” *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (April 1986): 234.

cannot prove that the cited Greek mythology emerged *before* the Samson narrative.

Auld proposes “that the Gideon story is an example of late biblical narrative.”<sup>9</sup> (cf. Judg 6:1-8:35) In his opinion the ‘deuteronomistic materials’ (2:11-23; 6:7-10; 10:6-16) that would link the whole book to a ‘Deuteronomistic History’ are later additions to an already formed narrative. The Gideon account itself was written after the books of Samuel since the pagan Baal name Jerubbaal (1 Sam 12:11; 2 Sam 11:21; Judg 9) seems to be edited into Gideon (= ‘Hacker’) in Judges (cf. Judg 7:1; 8:35), hence the episode might be a retelling of an earlier story about Jerubbaal. The significant point here is that the later the writing is dated, the less historical it appears to be. However, Auld nowhere conclusively disproves the viewpoint that the record is historically true. His approach that Judges is a loose composition of various stories and additions rather than a literary unit remains an unproved presupposition.

Brettler proposes a date for Judges after the division of the monarchy, since Judges 2:11-21 and 2 Kings 17 are similar and thus might derive from the same circle.<sup>10</sup> Dumbrell relates Judges to Israel’s exilic period in Assyria or Babylonia, solely based on the mention of “the captivity of the land” in Judg 18:30.<sup>11</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup> A. Graeme Auld, “Gideon: Hacking at the Heart of the Old Testament,” *Vetus Testamentum* 39 (1989): 263.

<sup>10</sup> Marc Brettler, “The Book of Judges,” 417.

<sup>11</sup> W.J. Dumbrell, “‘In Those Days There Was No King in Israel; Every Man Did What Was Right in his Own Eyes.’ The Purpose of the Book of Judges Reconsidered,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 25 (1983): 29; contra

liberals are supported by Drews who says that the ‘chariots of iron’ (Judg 1:19; 4:3.13) either refer to scythed chariots or to chariots with iron-tired wheels, and “neither type was known before ca. 700 BCE.”<sup>12</sup> Though, the biblical record does not provide details about the exact use of iron here. Since iron technology is said to be introduced by the Hittites (and the Sea Peoples) already in the twelfth century BC<sup>13</sup>, Drews’ argumentation is probably wrong.

The question of historicity notwithstanding, the ‘editorial unity’ of Judges is challenged by Exum who shows that the book is not held together by a ‘deuteronomistic framework’ as commonly argued. Repentance is not a major theme in Judges. Rather, God’s deliverance follows the circumstances out of mercy and not according to a fixed pattern.<sup>14</sup> In the Samson episode, “the pivotal theological principle ... is that Yhwh is the guiding force behind events.”<sup>15</sup> Likewise Greenspahn rejects the theory that Judges is deuteronomistic. The book’s theology is not about

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Arthur E. Cundall, “Judges – An Introduction and Commentary,” 192.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Drews, “The ‘Chariots of Iron’ of Joshua and Judges,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 45 (1989): 21.

<sup>13</sup> John H. Walton et al., *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsityPress, 2000), 235, No. 17:16.

<sup>14</sup> J. Cheryl Exum, “The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judge,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (July 1990): 410ff.

<sup>15</sup> J. Cheryl Exum, “The Theological Dimension of the Samson Saga,” *Vetus Testamentum* 33 (January 1983): 36; cf. Victor H. Matthews, “Freedom and Entrapment in the Samson Narrative: A Literary Analysis,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 16 (Fall 1989): 247.

reward and punishment but about punishment and grace.<sup>16</sup> Exum and Greenspahn remind the reader that God is not restricted by frameworks. More significantly, they in effect refute the theory of a deuteronomistic editor and that Judges was written late after David, even during the exilic period.

#### **b. Historical Tradition**

Many scholars maintain that the book of Judges is historically true. One example is van der Toorn who promotes such opinion by pointing to the detail given in Judg 16:21 that Samson was set in prison for ‘grinding.’ He emphasises that such practice was common in Mesopotamia which shows that the Samson narrative “fits in with a broadly accepted cultural pattern.”<sup>17</sup> Others relate the writing to the witness of archaeology and the Amarna letters. Merrill says that Joshua’s early date conquest was more or less non-destructive and relates the excavated destruction sites to the period of the judges.<sup>18</sup> He concludes that “the narratives in the Book of Judges, commencing no earlier than 1350 BC, describe some of the chaos of Amarna times (Judges 1-2) but focus primarily on the century of greatest internal upheaval in Israel,

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<sup>16</sup> Frederick E. Greenspahn, “The Theology of the Framework of Judges,” *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (October 1986): 386.

<sup>17</sup> K. van der Toorn, “Judges XVI 21 in the Light of the Akkadian Sources,” *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (April 1986): 248.

<sup>18</sup> See Eugene H. Merrill, “The Late Bronze/Early Iron Age Transition and the Emergence of Israel,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (April 1995): 153ff.

namely, that of the judgeships of Deborah and Gideon (1250-1150 BC).”<sup>19</sup> Above all, evangelicals in this context defend and maintain the belief that the Bible is inerrant and therefore also historically reliable.<sup>20</sup>

However, the chronological setting of the book of Judges is still debated. Scholars who defend the biblical exodus and conquest model yet differ in their opinions on the dating of these events. If an early date for the exodus is assumed (~1445 BC), the period of the judges covers a time span of about 400 years until the enthronement of Saul in 1042 BC and the beginning of Israel’s monarchy. If a late date exodus within the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC is defended, the same events are pressed into about 200 years. The following table provides a rough outline of each view:<sup>21</sup>

12 judges	18 <sup>th</sup> dynasty exodus	19 <sup>th</sup> dynasty exodus
Othniel	1370	1200
Ehud	1315-	1170

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>20</sup> Bobby Hayes, “The Evangelical Doctrine of Inspiration and Inerrancy – Restated,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 1 (August 1997): 166.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew E. Steinmann, “The Mysterious Numbers of the Book of Judges.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48 (September 2005): 499; Arthur E. Cundall, “Judges – An Introduction and Commentary,” 32f; Kenneth A. Kitchen in Roger Dalman, *Yahweh’s Song: A Handbook for Understanding Old Testament Historical Theology* (Trinity Online Learning Center, 2006), 249f.

Shamgar	-1235	1150
Deborah	1215	1125
Gideon	1170	1100
Tola	1130	1130
Jair	1110	1110
Jephthah	1090	1070
Ibzan	1080	1060
Elon	1080	1060
Abdon	1070	1050
Samson	1050	1070

The different dating mainly affects the period from Othniel to Gideon. Othniel fought against a Mesopotamian invasion, Ehud against the Moabites, Ammonites and Amalekites, Shamgar against the Philistines, Deborah against Jabin king of Hazor and Gideon against the Midianites. The Philistine oppression recorded in Judges 3:31 seems to be distinct from the more widespread domination when they were ‘ruling over Israel’ during Samson’s time. (cf. Judg 14:4) The six hundred Philistines killed by Shamgar appear to be a rather small number comparing to the victories of Samson. Because it is commonly said that the influence of the Philistines increased

significantly with the arrival of the so-called Sea Peoples around 1200 BC<sup>22</sup>, oppression in Israel by other nations is more likely just before this time. Besides, Yadin who excavated at Hazor says that this city was destroyed within the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>23</sup> If this is accurate, the archaeological evidence corresponds with the Deborah account in Judges 4:24 more likely in an early exodus date context.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, if a 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty exodus is defended, one frequently has to argue that the period of the individual judges are partly overlapping as in the case of Jephthah and Samson. We follow the argumentation that the judges acted individually in rather limited areas related to the tribal structure of Israel. Indeed, the gradual breakdown of the intertribal organization contributed to the deterioration of Israel and finally to the establishment of the monarchy.<sup>25</sup> Dalman argues against the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty viewpoint that “the Judges account seems to describe successive judges” and “traced how Israel’s leaders slowly lost their spiritual strength.”<sup>26</sup> Here, we believe that the Bible’s theological idiom often rests on the literary arrangement of events and not necessarily on historical chronology. The purpose of the biblical writings is not

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<sup>22</sup> Roger Dalman, *Yahweh’s Song*, 253f.

<sup>23</sup> Yigael Yadin, “Is the Biblical Account of the Israelite Conquest of Canaan Historically Reliable?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* (March/April 1982): 19.

<sup>24</sup> The assumption that Deborah fought Hazor before Seti I (-1290 BC) destroyed the city contradicts the above dating for Deborah; cf. Roger Dalman, *Old Testament History*, cassette no. 6, side B.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Arthur E. Cundall, “Judges – An Introduction and Commentary,” 36.

<sup>26</sup> Roger Dalman, *Yahweh’s Song*, 249.

primarily to provide historical information but to address the reader's heart. While we agree that the value of Judges also rests on its inherent historicity, we tend to disagree that its chronology provides for the interpretation. In regard to Judges, the theological emphasis is not on Israel's declining human leadership but on God's gracious activity remembering his covenant despite the people's increasing apostasy.<sup>27</sup> We think that Israel's deterioration is well illustrated regardless the number of years involved.

The difficulty of the historical issue is illustrated by Warner who goes so far to say that a dating of Judges is not possible, even proposing the theory "that the period be placed *before* the Conquest and not *after* it."<sup>28</sup> He presupposes that the reference to Joshua's death is found in either 'problematical' or 'secondary and unreliable' material. (cf. Judg 1:1; 2:6ff.) Furthermore, "in none of the stories is any of the earlier or later figures in Israel's history mentioned, e.g., Moses, Aaron, Eli, or Samuel, and in none of the stories is any of the earlier or later events of Israel's history mentioned, e.g., the Exodus, the Conquest."<sup>29</sup> Such argumentation from silence is not compelling. His view that a correlation between the people mentioned in Judges and those

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<sup>27</sup> See also Daniel I. Block, "Will the Real Gideon Please Stand Up? Narrative Style and Intention in Judges 6-9," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 (September 1997): 365.

<sup>28</sup> Sean M. Warner, "The Dating of the Period of the Judges," *Vetus Testamentum* 28 (October 1978): 463; cf. Sean M. Warner, "The Period of the Judges within the Structure of Early Israel," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 47 (1976): 57-79.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 456.

mentioned in extra-biblical sources is lacking also opposes the standpoint of those who say that the Amarna letters relate to this period. Warner furthermore admits that the main Philistine occupation of Palestine begun around 1225 BC which then fits well Samson's battle against this folk.

Though it is certainly crucial to place the book *after* the Conquest and the death of Joshua according to the Scriptures, it is the author's opinion that theologically a dating within a 400 or 200 years period is rather insignificant. Yet we do agree with an early exodus date and thus affirm that the time of the judges covers a 400 years period. The argumentation for the accurate dating is provided by the two biblical statements given in 1 Kings 6:1 and Judges 11:26. The former says that 480 years after the exodus Solomon built the Temple which equals a ~1445 BC exodus date. The latter confirms this view since Jephthah states that in his time the Israelites already occupied the land for 300 years. Moreover, all (successively) recorded periods in Judges add up to about 550 years.<sup>30</sup> Admittedly some judges were contemporaries, yet the 550 years are closer to 400 rather than 200 years.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Roger Dalman, *Yahweh's Song*, 249.

<sup>31</sup> See also the conclusion drawn by David L. Washburn, "The Chronology of Judges: Another Look," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (October 1990): 424.

### c. Suggested Interpretations

Interpretations vary according to the presuppositions made. If one assumes a late writing or editing of Judges framed by a 'Deuteronomistic History', "the purpose of the work was to explain the events of 722 and 587 BC."<sup>32</sup> Some assume that the Deuteronomist intended to show how the fall of the northern and southern kingdom was the result of religious apostasy and failure to keep the Law. As we have seen, this interpretation is difficult to uphold since Judges is not consistently deuteronomistic.

Dumbrell interprets the book to be a "recommendation for post-exilic Israel" to learn from the lessons of the past and to start again as they did after the anarchic time of the judges.<sup>33</sup> Survival was in God's hand as in those times. Without regard to the historical context Sweeney somehow similarly posits, as mentioned above, that the primary purpose of Judges is to show the gradual decline of Israel caused by Canaanization, and in result the record of its consequences imply a strong warning. His view is somehow supported by Taylor who argues that the Song of Deborah with its Ugaritic goddess imagery shows Israel's intense religious struggle in Canaan.<sup>34</sup> However, since many scholars tend to study 'through' the text rather than 'into' it,

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<sup>32</sup> David M. Howard Jr., "The Case for Kingship in Deuteronomy and the Former Prophets," *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (Spring 1990): 103; he refers to Martin Noth who started with the idea of a 'Deuteronomistic History.'

<sup>33</sup> W.J. Dumbrell, "The Purpose of the Book of Judges Reconsidered," 30.

<sup>34</sup> Glen Taylor, "The Song of Deborah and Two Canaanite Goddesses," *Journal of the Study of the Old Testament* 23 (July 1982): 99-108.

distinctive theological statements about Judges are often difficult to extract.

Brettler pinpoints the central message of Judges to be an allegory indicating “the superiority of Judah at the expense of the north. ... The supremacy of southern leadership emerges as the clear central theme of the central section of Judges.”<sup>35</sup> (cf. Judg 2:11-16:31) Overall the “book was composed as a political allegory fostering the Davidic monarchy.”<sup>36</sup> Besides Brettler proposes that chapters 17-18 serve as “a polemic against royal worship at the sanctuary at Dan” (which was established late in the time of Jeroboam; cf. 1 Ki 12:29-30) and chapters 19-21 as an anti-Saul polemic.<sup>37</sup> His interpretation is based on his dating of Judges. Brettler says “the polemic of Judges makes sense in any context after the division of the monarchy”<sup>38</sup> since Judges favours Judah in contrast to the north. Without regard to its date Sweeney agrees that “Judges presents a polemical view of early Israelite history that promotes the interests of the tribe of Judah and the Davidic dynasty by pointing to the inadequacies of the judges from the northern tribes of Israel.”<sup>39</sup> He views Judges as a literary work with primarily socio-political aspects and thus diminishes the importance of historicity. Contrary, Cundall states the writer’s “concern was to trace the moral, political and

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<sup>35</sup> Marc Brettler, “The Book of Judges,” 408.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 416.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 402, 409 and 412.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 417.

<sup>39</sup> Marvin A. Sweeney, “Davidic Polemics in the Book of Judges,” 517.

religious decline of the period,”<sup>40</sup> hence the book’s historicity is essential in his view.

In comparison to the liberal views, evangelicals traditionally advocate that Judges was written by Samuel at the beginning of the monarchy to show that a king was necessary because of the decline of the preceding theocracy. Dalman says that “the book of Judges was written during King David’s time to justify David’s reign.”<sup>41</sup> Judges’ last verse can be regarded as the key verse (21:25): “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.” Set against the gradual process of increasing political and religious chaos, the verse strongly implies that things would have been better had there been a king of Israel.

With reference to the Harris Papyrus No.1, Greenspahn showed that the “Egyptian pharaohs often contrast their own effectiveness with that which had come before” and concludes:

Just as the Egyptian text intends to demonstrate the effectiveness of a pharaoh, so too should there be little doubt as to the pro-monarchic sentiment of the statement in Judges. The parallel phrasing clearly illustrates the meaning of both authors who regarded monarchy as a beneficial institution which brought an end to the preceding period of anarchy.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Arthur E. Cundall, “Judges – An Introduction and Commentary,” 43.

<sup>41</sup> Roger Dalman, *Yahweh’s Song*, 250.

<sup>42</sup> Frederick E. Greenspahn, “An Egyptian Parallel to Judg 17:6 and 21:25,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (March 1982):130; see also Roger Dalman, *Yahweh’s Song*, 267.

In sum, the progressive nature of Judges with stories that show the increasing decline of Israel, its historical context set after the conquest and before the monarchy, and extra-biblical sources such as the Egyptian text seen together with the concluding verse in Judges 21:25 support the conservative theory that Judges is a documentation of Israel's history during a long and significant period screening the process towards its monarchy and revealing God's active work in the salvation history of his people. The doctrine of inspiration, of course, implies that the book of Judges is not anything like propaganda material but the very Word of God itself.

### **3. Judges: Near Eastern Historical Context**

#### **a. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Exodus Model**

Dalman links the history of the judges period to the history of the ancient Near East.<sup>43</sup> His starting point is the presupposition that the exodus took place in the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC and that at this time a Pharaoh of the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty reigned in Egypt in accordance with the conventional Egyptian chronology. He suggests that Amenhotep III ruled Egypt during Joshua's conquest in Palestine.

The Amarna Letters then provide historical information about Palestine shortly after the conquest, since they are for the most part addressed to this Pharaoh

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<sup>43</sup> Roger Dalman, *Yahweh's Song*, 250ff.

and dated accordingly.<sup>44</sup> Rulers from Canaanite city-states sent letters to the Pharaoh and asked for help against the attack of the ‘Habiru’ people (= ‘Hebrews’). Also because the topographical and chronological picture drawn by the letters does not really match the one described in the Bible, scholars widely agree that the ‘Habiru’ were not (or at least not exclusively) the Israelites. Dalman concludes that “if Israel entered Palestine during the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, they attacked the region while wooded highlands across the Levant contained angry and hungry peasants who had been driven to a *Habiru* lifestyle by Egypt’s vassal rulers.”<sup>45</sup> The theory says that the Israelites fought beside or, even more probably, *against* the ‘Habiru’ people.<sup>46</sup>

Around the time when Joshua died, Pharaoh Akhenaton (Amenhotep IV) succeeded his father Amenhotep III. Dalman says that the letters from Abdu-Heba of Jerusalem to Akhenaton fit the biblical account of Judges 1:8 that Judah attacked and finally burned the city.<sup>47</sup> Some scholars say that Judges 1 only sets the background for the time of the judges.<sup>48</sup> If this is right, the Amarna evidence does not apply.

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<sup>44</sup> Edward F. Campbell Jr., “The Amarna Letters and The Amarna Period,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 23 (February 1960): 10; cf. James F. Ross, “Gezer in the Tell el-Amarna Letters,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 30 (May 1967): 62.

<sup>45</sup> Roger Dalman, *Yahweh’s Song*, 245.

<sup>46</sup> See also Meredith G. Kline, “The Ha-BI-ru – Kin or Foe of Israel?” *Westminster Theological Journal* 19 (November 1956): 1-24; (May 1957): 170-184; (November 1957): 46-70.

<sup>47</sup> Roger Dalman, *Yahweh’s Song*, 247f.

<sup>48</sup> Arthur E. Cundall, “Judges – An Introduction and Commentary,” 51; Marc Brettler, “The Book of Judges,” 399ff., parallels Judges 1 to Joshua.

Judges 3:8-11 records the oppression that Israel faced by Cushan-rishathaim from Aram Naharaim, possibly after Akhenaton and during Horemheb's reign. The Hittites controlled the region and threatened the Egyptian dominion. Dalman proposes that the oppression was caused by the Hittites' expansion southwards into Israel. Horemheb's peace treaty with the Hittites provided for the years of peace. (cf. Judg 3:11) The idea is plausible but not conclusive evidence.

Another context debated is the history of the Sea Peoples. The Philistines lived in Palestine since the time of the Patriarchs, but their influence increased significantly after their arrival around 1200 BC. The common theory posits that Shamgar defeated a minor Philistine oppression, but Samson later fought against a more dominant Philistine control.<sup>49</sup> Dalman also argues that an invasion by the Midianites and Amalekites (cf. Judg 6:3) had been impossible after the influence of the Sea Peoples and therefore Gideon's time should be dated before 1200 BC.<sup>50</sup> It should be noted that the conventional theory about the 'Sea Peoples' has also been questioned.<sup>51</sup> Besides, Judges does not reveal much about Shamgar's ministry.

While Shamgar ministered in the south, Deborah battled against Jabin king of Hazor in the north. Dalman points out that Hazor became stronger possibly due to the

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<sup>49</sup> Roger Dalman, *Yahweh's Song*, 253f.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>51</sup> J.J. Bimson, "The Philistines. Their Origins and Chronology Reassessed," *Journal of the Ancient Chronology Forum* 4 (1990/1991): 58-76.

Hittite expansion. (cf. Judg 4:3) Dalman further argues that Pharaoh Horemheb's tomb showed Canaanite refugees driven from Palestine by Israelites of Deborah's time.<sup>52</sup> The Bible lacks related passages but tells us that the Israelites frequently fought against the Canaanites during the judges period and the monarchy.

Dalman also suggests that Seti I in his Karnak relief described Gideon's battle. After Gideon's victory, Seti I eventually defeated the *Shasu* bedouin which might "have been the Egyptian name for the Midianites and Amalekites."<sup>53</sup> We feel that the linguistic link is speculative, and the biblical testimony about Gideon's 'deliverance' gives way to a dependency of Israel upon a dominant Egyptian force.

The Egyptian control even increased with Seti's successor Ramesses the Great who defeated the Hittites and "crushed any opposition to Egyptian rule."<sup>54</sup> Notably, an invasion of Ramesses II into Palestine is not recorded in Judges. The same is true for the successor Merenptah's invasion against Libya and Israel. His 'Israel Stela' has been widely recognized as evidence for the existence of Israel around 1210 BC and thus in favour of a 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty exodus model.<sup>55</sup> He records the defeat and 'desolation' of Israel, yet such an event is not mentioned in Judges.

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<sup>52</sup> Roger Dalman, *Yahweh's Song*, 256.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 266; cf. James H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt: Historical Documents from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest*, vol. 3, *The Nineteenth Dynasty* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1906), 264, no. 617.

Dalman proposes that the Ammonites of Jephthah's time invaded Palestine because of drought just like the Sea Peoples, threatening Israel in the highlands.<sup>56</sup> Gradually the Egyptian influence in Palestine decreased and the Philistines grew stronger until Samson's time. The theory appears to be consistent and supported by archaeological pottery evidence that shows a radical cultural change in Palestine.<sup>57</sup>

In sum, Dalman's construction is largely based on circumstantial evidence and thus relies heavily on the assumption that the proposed chronologies are accurate.

#### **b. 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Exodus Model**

The 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty exodus model has been challenged in two directions. Traditionally some scholars like Kenneth A. Kitchen<sup>58</sup> replace the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty with the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty model. The main arguments in favour of an exodus in the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC were already outlined in chapter two. Another approach maintains the dating but questions the conventional Egyptian chronology. Some say the time of the exodus relates to a 13<sup>th</sup> dynasty reign in Egypt.<sup>59</sup> The present author points only briefly to three main arguments that speak for this model:

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<sup>56</sup> Roger Dalman, *Yahweh's Song*, 270.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 271f.

<sup>58</sup> Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1966), 57-69.

<sup>59</sup> David Rohl, *A Test of Time. Volume I: The Bible – From Myth to History* (London: Arrow Books, 1995), 333-349; Uwe Zerbst and Peter van der Veen, ed., *Keine Posaunen vor Jericho?* (Baiersbronn: Hänssler-Verlag, 2005), 51-60.

First, if the Amarna Letters indeed fit the period shortly after the conquest, one wonders why the letters do not more consistently fit the situation described in Joshua and Judges addressing the drastic change caused by the Israelite invasion at that time. The 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty model implies that Israel then played a rather minor role in Palestine. The issue becomes even more problematic once we consider that “while some *Habiru* in the Amarna Letters clearly were not Israelites, others may have been... The Israelites often claimed to be *Habiru*.”<sup>60</sup> One is tempted to select some of the Amarna references to ‘Habiru’ as evidence in favour of the biblical (conquest) narratives, placing all other ‘Habiru’ outside the Bible. Van der Veen has shown that the term ‘Habiru’ is used in the letters in the same fashion as ‘ibrim’ in 1 Samuel, a book that was written later.<sup>61</sup> We would also expect that the Israelites, coming from Egypt and the wilderness region, were recognized as a unified nation somewhat distinct from the local peasants and not mixed up with them into one ‘Habiru’ class. The 13<sup>th</sup> dynasty approach studies the ‘Habiru’ of the Amarna letters in comparison with the people living at the time of Saul and David. Based on the new chronology, also the topographical picture of the letters matches the relevant biblical accounts.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Roger Dalman, *Yahweh’s Song*, 245; Dalman refers to Genesis 14:13; 39:14-17; 40:15; 41:12; 43:32.

<sup>61</sup> Peter van der Veen, “The el-Amarna Habiru and the Early Monarchy in Israel,” *Journal of the Ancient Chronology Forum* 3 (1989/1990): 72-78.

<sup>62</sup> B. Newgrosh, D. Rohl and P. van der Veen, “The el-Amarna Letters and Israelite History,” *Journal of the Ancient Chronology Forum* 6 (1992/1993): 33-64.

Second and more significantly, if, as we believe, the miracles that crushed Egypt and delivered Israel are historically true as recorded in Exodus, one would assume that Egypt's dominance in Palestine diminished for at least the next decades. On the contrary, Dalman proposes that Amenhotep II invaded Palestine and brought back 89,600 captives as a replacement for the lost Israelite slavery workforce (and so weakened Palestine so that Joshua could conquer it).<sup>63</sup> Contrary, we argue that Egypt was significantly weakened after the exodus and in result overcome by the Hyksos people according to the 13<sup>th</sup> dynasty model.<sup>64</sup> Theologically, the question would otherwise remain why God should have led Israel out of slavery into a land where his people again were largely dominated by Egypt, their former oppressor.

Finally, if Amenhotep II and III<sup>65</sup>, Horemheb<sup>66</sup>, Ramesses II and Merenptah did invade Palestine around the period of the judges, one might expect a related biblical reference since Israel's close background was Egyptian. The position that Egypt dominated Palestine though biblical records are lacking is weak, in our view. The new chronology approach relates Ramesses II to the biblical Shishak.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Roger Dalman, *Old Testament History* (Trinity Online Learning Center, 2006), cassette no. 4, side A.

<sup>64</sup> David Rohl, *A Test of Time*, 352ff.

<sup>65</sup> It is debated whether Amenhotep III invaded Palestine; see Roger Dalman, *Yahweh's Song*, 242.

<sup>66</sup> Roger Dalman, *Old Testament History*, cassette no. 7, side B.

<sup>67</sup> See 1 Ki 14:25f.; 2 Chr 12:2-9; e.g. David Rohl, *A Test of Time*, 175ff.

### c. Thutmose III and Ramesses II

The campaigns of Thutmose III and Ramesses II into Palestine are well preserved in their annals. Thutmose III is conventionally dated to the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC and possibly ruled shortly before a 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty exodus.<sup>68</sup> He often campaigned to Syria and Palestine and especially his defeat at Megiddo is well recorded.<sup>69</sup> He claimed to have conquered 119 Asiatic cities partly at the coastal plains of Palestine.<sup>70</sup> In defence of the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty exodus this might explain why Israel was later unable to conquer this area controlled by Egypt. It also provides the background for the Amarna correspondence which revealed the Canaanite's dependency on Egypt.

Ramesses II assumingly lived in the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC; he is understood as the Pharaoh of Israel's oppression for those who opt for the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty model. He was the successor of Seti I who fought against the Hittite expansion as discussed above. Ramesses II continued with this task over a period of twenty years. He also campaigned in Palestine to suppress a revolt incited by the Hittites. Ramesses finally solved the struggle by way of a peace treaty with the Hittites.<sup>71</sup> In case of a 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Roger Dalman, *Old Testament History*, cassette no. 4, side A.

<sup>69</sup> See James H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt: Historical Documents from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest*, vol. 2, *The Eighteenth Dynasty* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1906), 175-190, no. 408-443.

<sup>70</sup> Roger Dalman, *Old Testament History*, cassette no. 4, side A.; cf. James H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, vol. 2, 170, no. 402.

<sup>71</sup> James H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, vol. 3, 123f., no. 294.

dynasty exodus one would expect that the Hittites grew stronger after Egypt had been weakened by the exodus event. Assuming a 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty exodus, the struggle with the Hittites would explain the political currents described in Judges.

In sum, the reigns of Thutmose III and Ramesses II were the most powerful Egypt had ever met. The influence of Egypt upon Palestine around this time was dominant. The 13<sup>th</sup> dynasty exodus model places these rulers about 300 years later at the end of the judges period and within Israel's time of the monarchy.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The issues debated in the realms of Old Testament History are countless, and sometimes we are at risk to be lost in details. It is the author's conviction that the big picture is best described by the 13<sup>th</sup> dynasty exodus model. The Judges account portrays the historical period after the conquest and before the monarchy. Israel was oppressed by and battled against the Canaanites, Moabites, Midianites, Ammonites, Amalekites, Philistines and other people according to the biblical testimony. Egyptian oppression is not mentioned in Judges. Egypt had been weakened by God's hand and thus was without much influence on the history of Palestine. One final biblical reference supports our view:

*Remember today that your children were not the ones who saw and experienced the discipline of the LORD your God: his majesty, his mighty hand, his outstretched arm; the signs he performed and the things he did in the heart of Egypt, both to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his whole country; what he did to the Egyptian army, to its horses and chariots, how he overwhelmed them with the waters of the Red Sea as they were pursuing you, and **how the LORD brought lasting ruin on them.** (Deut 11:2-4)*

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