TYNDALE

CORNERSTONE
BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

Joshua
Joseph Coleson

Judges
Lawson G. Stone

Ruth
Jason Driesbach

GENERAL EDITOR
Philip W. Comfort

New Living Translation

CORNERSTONE
B I B L I C A L
COMMENTARY

General Editor
Philip W. Comfort
D. Litt. et Phil., University of South Africa;
Tyndale House Publishers;
Coastal Carolina University.

Consulting Editor, Old Testament
Tremper Longman III
PhD, Yale University;
Robert H. Gundry Professor of Biblical Studies, Westmont College.

Consulting Editor, New Testament
Grant Osborne
PhD, University of Aberdeen;
Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Associate Editors
Jason Driesbach
MA, Biblical Exegesis and Linguistics, Dallas Theological Seminary;
Tyndale House Publishers.

Mark R. Norton
MA, Theological Studies, Wheaton Graduate School;
Tyndale House Publishers.

James A. Swanson
MSM, Multnomah Biblical Seminary;
MTh, University of South Africa;
Tyndale House Publishers.

CORNERSTONE BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

Joshua

Joseph Coleson

Judges

Lawson G. Stone

Ruth

Jason Driesbach

GENERAL EDITOR
Philip W. Comfort

featuring the text of the
NEW LIVING TRANSLATION

TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC. CAROL STREAM, ILLINOIS

Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Volume 3

Visit Tyndale online at www.tyndale.com.

Designed by Luke Daab and Timothy R. Botts.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cornerstone biblical commentary.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-8423-3429-7 (hc : alk. paper)
1. Bible—Commentaries. I. Coleson, Joseph II. Stone, Lawson G.
III. Driesbach, Jason
BS491.3.C67 2006
220.7′7—dc22 2005026928

Printed in the United States of America

18 17 16 15 14 13 12
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

CONTRIBUTORS TO VOLUME 3

Joshua: Joseph Coleson
BA, Indiana Wesleyan University;
MS, Brandeis University;
PhD, Brandeis University;
Professor of Old Testament, Nazarene Theological Seminary.

Judges: Lawson G. Stone
BA, Asbury College;
MDiv, Asbury Theological Seminary;
PhD, Yale University;
Professor of Old Testament, Asbury Theological Seminary.

Ruth: Jason Driesbach
BA, Cedarville University
MA, Dallas Theological Seminary
Tyndale House Publishers.

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* is based on the second edition of the New Living Translation (2007). Nearly 100 scholars from various church backgrounds and from several countries (United States, Canada, England, and Australia) participated in the creation of the NLT. Many of these same scholars are contributors to this commentary series. All the commentators, whether participants in the NLT or not, believe that the Bible is God's inspired word and have a desire to make God's word clear and accessible to his people.

This Bible commentary is the natural extension of our vision for the New Living Translation, which we believe is both exegetically accurate and idiomatically powerful. The NLT attempts to communicate God's inspired word in a lucid English translation of the original languages so that English readers can understand and appreciate the thought of the original writers. In the same way, the *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* aims at helping teachers, pastors, students, and laypeople understand every thought contained in the Bible. As such, the commentary focuses first on the words of Scripture, then on the theological truths of Scripture—inasmuch as the words express the truths.

The commentary itself has been structured in such a way as to help readers get at the meaning of Scripture, passage by passage, through the entire Bible. Each Bible book is prefaced by a substantial book introduction that gives general historical background important for understanding. Then the reader is taken through the Bible text, passage by passage, starting with the New Living Translation text printed in full. This is followed by a section called "Notes," wherein the commentator helps the reader understand the Hebrew or Greek behind the English of the NLT, interacts with other scholars on important interpretive issues, and points the reader to significant textual and contextual matters. The "Notes" are followed by the "Commentary," wherein each scholar presents a lucid interpretation of the passage, giving special attention to context and major theological themes.

The commentators represent a wide spectrum of theological positions within the evangelical community. We believe this is good because it reflects the rich variety in Christ's church. All the commentators uphold the authority of God's word and believe it is essential to heed the old adage: "Wholly apply yourself to the Scriptures and apply them wholly to you." May this commentary help you know the truths of Scripture, and may this knowledge help you "grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord" (2 Pet 1:2, NLT).

PHILIP W. COMFORT
GENERAL EDITOR

ABBREVIATIONS

GENERAL ABBREVIATIONS

b.	Babylonian Gemara	ibid.	*ibidem*, in the same place	OL	Old Latin
bar.	baraita			OS	Old Syriac
c.	*circa*, around, approximately	i.e.	*id est*, that is	OT	Old Testament
		in loc.	*in loco*, in the place cited	p., pp.	page, pages
cf.	*confer*, compare			pl.	plural
ch, chs	chapter, chapters	lit.	literally	Q	Quelle ("Sayings" as Gospel source)
contra	in contrast to	LXX	Septuagint		
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls	M	Majority Text	rev.	revision
ed.	edition, editor	*m.*	Mishnah	sg.	singular
e.g.	*exempli gratia*, for example	masc.	masculine	sv.	*sub verbo*, under the word
		mg	margin		
et al.	*et alii*, and others	ms	manuscript	*t.*	Tosefta
fem.	feminine	mss	manuscripts	TR	Textus Receptus
ff	following (verses, pages)	MT	Masoretic Text	v., vv.	verse, verses
		n.d.	no date	vid.	*videtur*, it seems
fl.	flourished	neut.	neuter	viz.	*videlicet*, namely
Gr.	Greek	no.	number	vol.	volume
Heb.	Hebrew	NT	New Testament	*y.*	Jerusalem Gemara

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

ASV	American Standard Version	NAB	New American Bible	NKJV	New King James Version
		NASB	New American Standard Bible	NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
CEV	Contemporary English Version	NCV	New Century Version	NLT	New Living Translation
ESV	English Standard Version	NEB	New English Bible	REB	Revised English Bible
		NET	The NET Bible		
GW	God's Word	NIV	New International Version (1984)	RSV	Revised Standard Version
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible	NIrV	New International Reader's Version	TEV	Today's English Version
JB	Jerusalem Bible	NJB	New Jerusalem Bible	TLB	The Living Bible
JPS	Jewish Publication Society Translation (*Tanakh*)	NJPS	The New Jewish Publication Society Translation (*Tanakh*)		
KJV	King James Version				

ABBREVIATIONS FOR DICTIONARIES, LEXICONS, COLLECTIONS OF TEXTS, ORIGINAL LANGUAGE EDITIONS

ABD *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols., Freedman) [1992]

ANEP *The Ancient Near East in Pictures* (Pritchard) [1965]

ANET *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Pritchard) [1969]

BAGD *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker) [1979]

BDAG *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich) [2000]

BDB *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Brown, Driver, Briggs) [1907]

BDF *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Blass, Debrunner, Funk) [1961]

BHS *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Elliger and Rudolph) [1983]

CAD *Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* [1956]

COS *The Context of Scripture* (3 vols., Hallo and Younger) [1997–2002]

DBI *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman) [1998]

DBT *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (2nd ed., Leon-Dufour) [1972]

DCH *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (7 vols., D. Clines) [2000]

DLNTD *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development* (R. Martin, P. Davids) [1997]

DJD *Discoveries in the Judean Desert* [1955–]

DJG *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Green, McKnight, Marshall) [1992]

DOTP *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (T. Alexander, D.W. Baker) [2003]

DPL *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Hawthorne, Martin, Reid) [1993]

DTIB *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Vanhoozer) [2005]

EDNT *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (3 vols., H. Balz, G. Schneider. ET) [1990–1993]

GKC *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Gesenius, Kautzsch, trans. Cowley) [1910]

HALOT *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, J. Stamm; trans. M. Richardson) [1994–1999]

IBD *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (3 vols., Douglas, Wiseman) [1980]

IDB *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (4 vols., Buttrick) [1962]

ISBE *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (4 vols., Bromiley) [1979–1988]

KBL *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros* (Koehler, Baumgartner) [1958]

LCL Loeb Classical Library

L&N *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (Louw and Nida) [1989]

LSJ *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9th ed., Liddell, Scott, Jones) [1996]

MM *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Moulton and Milligan) [1930; 1997]

NA^{26} *Novum Testamentum Graece* (26th ed., Nestle-Aland) [1979]

NA^{27} *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th ed., Nestle-Aland) [1993]

NBD *New Bible Dictionary* (2nd ed., Douglas, Hillyer) [1982]

NIDB *New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Douglas, Tenney) [1987]

NIDBA *New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* (Blaiklock and Harrison) [1983]

NIDNTT *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (4 vols., C. Brown) [1975–1985]

NIDOTTE *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (5 vols., W. A. VanGemeren) [1997]

PG *Patrologia Graecae* (J. P. Migne) [1857–1886]

PGM *Papyri graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri.* (Preisendanz) [1928]

TBD *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Elwell, Comfort) [2001]

TDNT *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (10 vols., Kittel, Friedrich; trans. Bromiley) [1964–1976]

TDOT *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (15 vols., Botterweck, Ringgren; trans. Willis, Bromiley, Green) [1974–]

TLNT *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (3 vols., C. Spicq) [1994]

TLOT *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (3 vols., E. Jenni) [1997]

TWOT *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (2 vols., Harris, Archer) [1980]

UBS^{3} *United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (3rd ed., Metzger et al.) [1975]

UBS^{4} *United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (4th corrected ed., Metzger et al.) [1993]

WH *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (Westcott and Hort) [1882]

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

Old Testament

Gen	Genesis	Deut	Deuteronomy	1 Sam	1 Samuel
Exod	Exodus	Josh	Joshua	2 Sam	2 Samuel
Lev	Leviticus	Judg	Judges	1 Kgs	1 Kings
Num	Numbers	Ruth	Ruth	2 Kgs	2 Kings

1 Chr	1 Chronicles	Song	Song of Songs	Obad	Obadiah
2 Chr	2 Chronicles	Isa	Isaiah	Jonah	Jonah
Ezra	Ezra	Jer	Jeremiah	Mic	Micah
Neh	Nehemiah	Lam	Lamentations	Nah	Nahum
Esth	Esther	Ezek	Ezekiel	Hab	Habakkuk
Job	Job	Dan	Daniel	Zeph	Zephaniah
Ps, Pss	Psalm, Psalms	Hos	Hosea	Hag	Haggai
Prov	Proverbs	Joel	Joel	Zech	Zechariah
Eccl	Ecclesiastes	Amos	Amos	Mal	Malachi

New Testament

Matt	Matthew	Eph	Ephesians	Heb	Hebrews
Mark	Mark	Phil	Philippians	Jas	James
Luke	Luke	Col	Colossians	1 Pet	1 Peter
John	John	1 Thess	1 Thessalonians	2 Pet	2 Peter
Acts	Acts	2 Thess	2 Thessalonians	1 John	1 John
Rom	Romans	1 Tim	1 Timothy	2 John	2 John
1 Cor	1 Corinthians	2 Tim	2 Timothy	3 John	3 John
2 Cor	2 Corinthians	Titus	Titus	Jude	Jude
Gal	Galatians	Phlm	Philemon	Rev	Revelation

Deuterocanonical

Bar	Baruch	1–2 Esdr	1–2 Esdras	Ps 151	Psalm 151
Add Dan	Additions to Daniel	Add Esth	Additions to Esther	Sir	Sirach
Pr Azar	Prayer of Azariah	Ep Jer	Epistle of Jeremiah	Tob	Tobit
Bel	Bel and the Dragon	Jdt	Judith	Wis	Wisdom of Solomon
Sg Three	Song of the Three Children	1–2 Macc	1–2 Maccabees		
		3–4 Macc	3–4 Maccabees		
Sus	Susanna	Pr Man	Prayer of Manasseh		

MANUSCRIPTS AND LITERATURE FROM QUMRAN

Initial numerals followed by "Q" indicate particular caves at Qumran. For example, the notation 4Q267 indicates text 267 from cave 4 at Qumran. Further, 1QS 4:9-10 indicates column 4, lines 9-10 of the *Rule of the Community*; and 4Q166 1 ii 2 indicates fragment 1, column ii, line 2 of text 166 from cave 4. More examples of common abbreviations are listed below.

CD	Cairo Geniza copy of the *Damascus Document*	1QIsa[b]	Isaiah copy [b]	4QLam[a]	Lamentations
		1QM	*War Scroll*	11QPs[a]	Psalms
		1QpHab	*Pesher Habakkuk*	11QTemple[a,b]	*Temple Scroll*
1QH	*Thanksgiving Hymns*	1QS	*Rule of the Community*	11QtgJob	*Targum of Job*
1QIsa[a]	Isaiah copy [a]				

IMPORTANT NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

(all dates given are AD; ordinal numbers refer to centuries)

Significant Papyri (𝔓 = Papyrus)

𝔓1 Matt 1; early 3rd
𝔓4+𝔓64+𝔓67 Matt 3, 5, 26; Luke 1–6; late 2nd
𝔓5 John 1, 16, 20; early 3rd
𝔓13 Heb 2–5, 10–12; early 3rd
𝔓15+𝔓16 (probably part of same codex) 1 Cor 7–8, Phil 3–4; late 3rd
𝔓20 Jas 2–3; 3rd
𝔓22 John 15–16; mid 3rd
𝔓23 Jas 1; c. 200
𝔓27 Rom 8–9; 3rd
𝔓30 1 Thess 4–5; 2 Thess 1; early 3rd
𝔓32 Titus 1–2; late 2nd
𝔓37 Matt 26; late 3rd
𝔓39 John 8; first half of 3rd
𝔓40 Rom 1–4, 6, 9; 3rd

𝔓45 Gospels and Acts; early 3rd
𝔓46 Paul's Major Epistles (less Pastorals); late 2nd
𝔓47 Rev 9–17; 3rd
𝔓49+𝔓65 Eph 4–5; 1 Thess 1–2; 3rd
𝔓52 John 18; c. 125
𝔓53 Matt 26, Acts 9–10; middle 3rd
𝔓66 John; late 2nd
𝔓70 Matt 2–3, 11–12, 24; 3rd
𝔓72 1–2 Peter, Jude; c. 300
𝔓74 Acts, General Epistles; 7th
𝔓75 Luke and John; c. 200
𝔓77+𝔓103 (probably part of same codex) Matt 13–14, 23; late 2nd
𝔓87 Philemon; late 2nd
𝔓90 John 18–19; late 2nd
𝔓91 Acts 2–3; 3rd
𝔓92 Eph 1, 2 Thess 1; c. 300
𝔓98 Rev 1:13-20; late 2nd
𝔓100 Jas 3–5; c. 300
𝔓101 Matt 3–4; 3rd
𝔓104 Matt 21; 2nd
𝔓106 John 1; 3rd
𝔓115 Rev 2–3, 5–6, 8–15; 3rd

Significant Uncials

א (Sinaiticus) most of NT; 4th
A (Alexandrinus) most of NT; 5th
B (Vaticanus) most of NT; 4th
C (Ephraemi Rescriptus) most of NT with many lacunae; 5th
D (Bezae) Gospels, Acts; 5th
D (Claromontanus), Paul's Epistles; 6th (different MS than Bezae)
E (Laudianus 35) Acts; 6th
F (Augensis) Paul's Epistles; 9th
G (Boernerianus) Paul's Epistles; 9th
H (Coislinianus) Paul's Epistles; 6th
I (Freerianus or Washington) Paul's Epistles; 5th
L (Regius) Gospels; 8th
P (Porphyrianus) Acts—Revelation; 9th
Q (Guelferbytanus B) Luke, John; 5th
T (Borgianus) Luke, John; 5th
W (Washingtonianus or the Freer Gospels) Gospels; 5th
Z (Dublinensis) Matthew; 6th
037 (Δ; Sangallensis) Gospels; 9th
038 (Θ; Koridethi) Gospels; 9th
040 (Ξ; Zacynthius) Luke; 6th
043 (Φ; Beratinus) Matthew, Mark; 6th
044 (Ψ; Athous Laurae) Gospels, Acts, Paul's Epistles; 9th
048 Acts, Paul's Epistles, General Epistles; 5th
0171 Matt 10, Luke 22; c. 300
0189 Acts 5; c. 200

Significant Minuscules

1 Gospels, Acts, Paul's Epistles; 12th
33 All NT except Rev; 9th
81 Acts, Paul's Epistles, General Epistles; 1044
565 Gospels; 9th
700 Gospels; 11th
1424 (or Family 1424—a group of 29 manuscripts sharing nearly the same text) most of NT; 9th-10th
1739 Acts, Paul's Epistles; 10th
2053 Rev; 13th
2344 Rev; 11th
f^{1} (a family of manuscripts including 1, 118, 131, 209) Gospels; 12th-14th
f^{13} (a family of manuscripts including 13, 69, 124, 174, 230, 346, 543, 788, 826, 828, 983, 1689, 1709—known as the Ferrar group) Gospels; 11th-15th

Significant Ancient Versions

SYRIAC (SYR)

syr^{c} (Syriac Curetonian) Gospels; 5th
syr^{s} (Syriac Sinaiticus) Gospels; 4th
syr^{h} (Syriac Harklensis) Entire NT; 616

OLD LATIN (IT)

it^{a} (Vercellenis) Gospels; 4th
it^{b} (Veronensis) Gospels; 5th
it^{d} (Cantabrigiensis—the Latin text of Bezae) Gospels, Acts, 3 John; 5th
it^{e} (Palantinus) Gospels; 5th
it^{k} (Bobiensis) Matthew, Mark; c. 400

COPTIC (COP)

cop^{bo} (Boharic—north Egypt)
cop^{fay} (Fayyumic—central Egypt)
cop^{sa} (Sahidic—southern Egypt)

OTHER VERSIONS

arm (Armenian)
eth (Ethiopic)
geo (Georgian)

TRANSLITERATION AND NUMBERING SYSTEM

Note: For words and roots from nonbiblical languages (e.g., Arabic, Ugaritic), only approximate transliterations are given.

HEBREW/ARAMAIC

Consonants

א	*aleph*	= ʾ	מ, ם	*mem*	= *m*
ב, בּ	*beth*	= *b*	נ, ן	*nun*	= *n*
ג, גּ	*gimel*	= *g*	ס	*samekh*	= *s*
ד, דּ	*daleth*	= *d*	ע	*ayin*	= ʿ
ה	*he*	= *h*	פ, פּ, ף	*pe*	= *p*
ו	*waw*	= *w*	צ, ץ	*tsadhe*	= *ts*
ז	*zayin*	= *z*	ק	*qoph*	= *q*
ח	*heth*	= *kh*	ר	*resh*	= *r*
ט	*teth*	= *t*	שׁ	*shin*	= *sh*
י	*yodh*	= *y*	שׂ	*sin*	= *s*
כ, כּ, ך	*kaph*	= *k*	ת, תּ	*taw*	= *t, th* **(spirant)**
ל	*lamedh*	= *l*			

Vowels

◌ַ	*patakh*	= *a*	◌ֹ	*qamets khatuf*	= *o*
◌ַח	*furtive patakh*	= *a*	◌ֹ	*holem*	= *o*
◌ָ	*qamets*	= *a*	◌ֹו	*full holem*	= *o*
◌ָה	*final qamets he*	= *ah*	◌ֻ	*short qibbuts*	= *u*
◌ֶ	*segol*	= *e*	◌ֻ	*long qibbuts*	= *u*
◌ֵ	*tsere*	= *e*	◌ֻו	*shureq*	= *u*
◌ֵי	*tsere yod*	= *e*	◌ֲ	*khatef patakh*	= *a*
◌ִ	*short hireq*	= *i*	◌ֳ	*khatef qamets*	= *o*
◌ִ	*long hireq*	= *i*	◌ְ	*vocalic shewa*	= *e*
◌ִי	*hireq yod*	= *i*	◌ַי	*patakh yodh*	= *a*

GREEK

α	*alpha*	= *a*	ι	*iota*	= *i*
β	*beta*	= *b*	κ	*kappa*	= *k*
γ	*gamma*	= *g, n (before* γ, κ, ξ, χ*)*	λ	*lamda*	= *l*
			μ	*mu*	= *m*
δ	*delta*	= *d*	ν	*nu*	= *n*
ε	*epsilon*	= *e*	ξ	*ksi*	= *x*
ζ	*zeta*	= *z*	ο	*omicron*	= *o*
η	*eta*	= *ē*	π	*pi*	= *p*
θ	*theta*	= *th*	ρ	*rho*	= *r* (ῥ = *rh*)

σ, ς	*sigma*	*= s*	ψ	*psi*	*= ps*
τ	*tau*	*= t*	ω	*omega*	*= ō*
υ	*upsilon*	*= u*	῾	*rough breathing mark*	*= h (with vowel or diphthong)*
φ	*phi*	*= ph*			
χ	*chi*	*= ch*			

THE TYNDALE-STRONG'S NUMBERING SYSTEM

The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series uses a word-study numbering system to give both newer and more advanced Bible students alike quicker, more convenient access to helpful original-language tools (e.g., concordances, lexicons, and theological dictionaries). Those who are unfamiliar with the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek alphabets can quickly find information on a given word by looking up the appropriate index number. Advanced students will find the system helpful because it allows them to quickly find the lexical form of obscure conjugations and inflections.

There are two main numbering systems used for biblical words today. The one familiar to most people is the Strong's numbering system (made popular by the *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance to the Bible*). Although the original Strong's system is still quite useful, the most up-to-date research has shed new light on the biblical languages and allows for more precision than is found in the original Strong's system. The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series, therefore, features a newly revised version of the Strong's system, the Tyndale-Strong's numbering system. The Tyndale-Strong's system brings together the familiarity of the Strong's system and the best of modern scholarship. In most cases, the original Strong's numbers are preserved. In places where new research dictates, new or related numbers have been added.[1]

The second major numbering system today is the Goodrick-Kohlenberger system used in a number of study tools published by Zondervan. In order to give students broad access to a number of helpful tools, the Commentary provides index numbers for the Zondervan system as well.

The different index systems are designated as follows:

TG	Tyndale-Strong's Greek number	ZH	Zondervan Hebrew number
ZG	Zondervan Greek number	TA/ZA	Tyndale/Zondervan Aramaic number
TH	Tyndale-Strong's Hebrew number	S	Strong's Aramaic number

So in the example, "love" *agapē* [^{TG}26, ^{ZG}27], the first number is the one to use with Greek tools keyed to the Tyndale-Strong's system, and the second applies to tools that use the Zondervan system.

The indexing of Aramaic terms differs slightly from that of Greek and Hebrew. Strong's original system mixed the Aramaic terms in with the Hebrew, but the Tyndale-Strong's system indexes Aramaic with a new set of numbers starting at 10,000. Since Tyndale's system for Aramaic diverges completely from original Strong's, the original Strong's number is listed separately so that those using tools keyed to Strong's can locate the information. This number is designated with an S, as in the example, "son" *bar* [$^{TA/ZA}$10120, ^{S}1247].

1. Generally, one may simply use the original four-digit Strong's number to identify words in tools using Strong's system. If a Tyndale-Strong's number is followed by a capital letter (e.g., ^{TG}1692A), it generally indicates an added subdivision of meaning for the given term. Whenever a Tyndale-Strong's number has a number following a decimal point (e.g., ^{TG}2013.1), it reflects an instance where new research has yielded a separate, new classification of use for a biblical word. Forthcoming tools from Tyndale House Publishers will include these entries, which were not part of the original Strong's system.

Joshua

JOSEPH COLESON

INTRODUCTION TO *Joshua*

MANY CHRISTIANS first learned of Joshua when they were Sunday school children. They heard the exciting story of Jericho's falling walls and Rahab's faith. Perhaps later they learned that "Joshua" and "Jesus" are two forms of the same name in Hebrew (*yehoshua' / yeshua'* [TH3091/3442, ZH3397/3800]; cf. Neh 8:17), and were taught that Joshua's bringing Israel into Canaan was an Old Testament precursor of Jesus' bringing us out of our bondage to sin and into fellowship with God in the "new land" of freedom in Christ. While these things are important and true, the book of Joshua merits deeper reading on its own account.

Israel's preparations east of the Jordan, the crossing of the Jordan, and the taking of Jericho occupy fully one quarter of the book's chapters (chs 1–6). It then records Joshua's leadership in two major military campaigns, one southern and one northern, bringing Israel into position to begin settling the previously sparsely occupied Canaanite hill country west of the Jordan (chs 7–12). Some of the theological issues raised by a hurried reading of these accounts turn out to have profound significance upon closer reading. Allocation of the land, with some descriptions of boundaries and lists of towns, is the subject of most of the second half of Joshua (chs 13–21). Joshua's farewells, his death, and the burials of three leaders bring the book to its touching conclusion (chs 22–24).

Joshua 1–12 is a consciously crafted unity reporting Israel's penetration into Canaan, just as 13–24 is a consciously crafted unity reporting the beginnings of Israel's settlement in the land. Among many evidences of this crafting is the "bridge" between chapters 1–6 and 7–12, comprising chapters 6–9:

Chapter 6—Jericho: victory following obedience to God's instructions for war
Chapter 7—Ai: defeat following disobedience to God's instructions for war
(Chapter 8—Ai: victory following repentance and judgment)
Chapter 9—Gibeon: troublesome treaty following neglect of God's instructions (specifically, instruction to make oracular inquiry for war)

The book of Joshua has much to teach us and much with which to inspire the church today as we, too, follow where God would have us go. Joshua's ringing farewell affirmation, "But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD" (24:15), is reason enough to study this important and stirring book, to discover how Joshua became a faithful follower of God.

AUTHORSHIP, DATE, AND OCCASION OF WRITING

Over the past 150 years, biblical scholars have proposed several "new" theories about the authorship, date, and occasion of the writing or compilation of Joshua. These issues are so thoroughly intertwined we cannot consider them separately.

The Talmud (early Jewish commentary on the Hebrew Bible) records the earliest tradition, which would have been held by synagogue and church alike in the early centuries AD, that Joshua himself wrote the book bearing his name, with the exception of the last few verses concerning his death (*b. Bava Batra* 15a). The book itself names no author and, for a number of reasons (see below), all scholars today agree it evidences an editorial process spanning some period of time.

First, whoever the author(s) or editor(s) of Joshua were, the book names one of its sources: *The Book of Jashar* (cited in 10:13). A second book is mentioned in 18:9, though its title is not preserved; it records descriptions of the final seven tribal territories to be allotted. Essentially early datings for Joshua accept this as evidence that Joshua's descriptions of these territories were taken from this book. Another evidence of editorial process in Joshua is the 14 occurrences of the phrase "to this day": 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 22:17; 23:9. Twice (22:3; 23:9) this phrase appears in a speech by Joshua, and once in a speech by Phinehas (22:17). Thus, the phrase does not require the assumption of a long period of time between the events and the writing of the book. (The assumption of some that the speeches were invented by the later author/compiler is another issue.) Still, by any accounting, this phrase comprises evidence of, at the very least, a minimal editorial process in the book of Joshua (Woudstra 1981:11).

Julius Wellhausen and others put forth the earliest of the modern, nontraditional proposals, namely, that literarily, Joshua is the final part of a Hexateuch. That is, Joshua belongs together with the traditional Pentateuch as a set of six, not five, books in the earliest section of the biblical canon. This was combined with the idea that four often parallel literary sources, commonly called J, E, P, and D, had been merged together into one larger work to form the Pentateuch. With Joshua as part of a Hexateuch, then, Joshua 2–11, the Joshua "conquest tradition," originally was (and still is by some) assigned to the "E" source, the Elohist, because it is thought to reflect an expanded version of the same events as Judges 1, which is thought to be from the "J" source, the Jahwist. Others have suggested that the Joshua material, too, is from the Jahwist, not the Elohist, or, more commonly, have assigned it to the combined "JE," which preceded the work of the Deuteronomist, without trying seriously to separate them. Whatever its origin, Joshua 2–11 was adapted and supplemented by "the Deuteronomist." The Deuteronomist (or the Deuteronomistic "school"), in this view, is thought to have worked during the reign of Josiah (640–609 BC), and to have been responsible for editing most of Joshua through Kings; in this work the Deuteronomist emphasized the covenant theology of the book of Deuteronomy (hence the name, "Deuteronomist") together with God's later covenant of a continuing Davidic kingship. The Priestly author/redactors, on this view, were responsible for most of the material in the second half of Joshua, since it comprises mostly tribal lists and other matters of priestly concern, the Levitical cities, and the cities of refuge. According to this view, then, some of

the material of the first half of Joshua may be early, but the book as we have it is exilic or postexilic.

The German scholar Albrecht Alt, followed most notably by his student Martin Noth, considered all of Joshua to be the work of the Deuteronomist, who in their view used a different set of source materials than the traditional "J" and "E." Noth, particularly, described the first half of Joshua as a series of "hero stories" and etiological tales, stories told to explain place names, customs, etc. (Note that etiologies are *not*, by definition, false; some tell the true stories of how places received their names.) Since the action of Joshua 2–11 centers in the later tribal territory of Benjamin, Noth described Joshua as a local Benjaminite hero, whose exploits first were recorded at the Benjaminite sanctuary of Gilgal—also prominent in this section of Joshua. Joshua the man was transformed into a national hero when the entry and "conquest" were adopted as the epic of all Israel, beginning at the amphictyonic (Israelite tribal league) shrine and sanctuary of Shiloh (Noth 1971).

The second half of Joshua, on the view of Alt, Noth, and their followers (including, e.g., Aharoni), derives from the period of the monarchy, adopted and adapted from royal or priestly administrative lists from the reigns of Solomon and/or of Josiah. A good summary of both the Wellhausenian and the Alt/Noth theories that discusses briefly both supporting and divergent evidence is found in Harrison (1969:666-673; on Noth's view, see also Wright 1982:59-66).

Recent developments affecting the study of Joshua have not necessarily focused on the composition or redaction history of the book, whether the precritical traditional approaches, Wellhausen's conclusions, or Alt and Noth's redirection of Wellhausen and the Documentary approach. Rather, emphasis has been on the history of Israel's origins in the land of Canaan, and whether that history is reflected in, or distinct from, Israel's theologizing about its origins.

One theory, by now no longer "new," is rooted in Mendenhall's idea that at least a part of the settlement of the hill country can be attributed to breakaway elements from the various Canaanite city-states—outlaws, runaways, and others—finding refuge in the large areas of the hill country that were nearly empty of permanent settlement at the end of the Late Bronze Age. Some of Mendenhall's students, notably Gottwald (1979), have posited a "peasant revolt" that established a new social, economic, and political order. This revolt turned the tables following decades of piecemeal retreat into the hill country to escape the supposedly heavy-handed aristocracies of the Late Bronze Age system of small city-states reflected in the Amarna Letters of the fourteenth century BC. (This takes Mendenhall's thesis further than he himself is comfortable with, as I have heard him testify in a public forum.)

Another nontraditional reading of early Israel's history that now has superseded Mendenhall's approach is perhaps most popularly known as the "minimalist" view. A more descriptive label may be the "internal transformation model"; among its best-known proponents are William Dever and Israel Finkelstein. (In fairness to both, significant differences exist between their approaches, though both can be characterized as minimalist.) Rather than the peasant revolt postulated by Mendenhall's students, minimalists view the rise of Israel in Canaan as resulting from the breakdown of political, economic, and social stability in Late Bronze Age Canaan.

The internal transformation that birthed ancient Israel was driven not by outside invasion or internal class unrest, but by the necessities of survival. Numerous small communities sprang up in the previously sparsely settled central highlands, communities characterized by the need to clear forested lands, build houses and cisterns, and provide for most of their own needs through subsistence agriculture—mainly wheat and barley, olives, vineyards, and kitchen gardens, and the keeping of small numbers of cattle, sheep, and goats.

Minimalists view the accounts of Israel's exodus from Egypt and entrance into Canaan in a military conquest under Joshua as the inventions of later Israelite religion to give Israel a proper national history, an epic origin worthy of the worshipers of Yahweh. Israel and Judah as recognizable political entities date from about the mid-ninth century, perhaps with, or just before, Omri and Ahab. (Such a "minimal" sketch as this cannot be said to do justice to the internal transformation model, but we may hope at least not to have misrepresented it and its adherents.)

Anson Rainey has recently marshaled evidence from a wide variety of biblical and extrabiblical sources to suggest a similar transformation model *process*, but originating with a pastoral people who saw themselves as originally Aramean (witness Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel), and who entered Canaan from Transjordan. Thus, Rainey's view differs from the theories of peasant revolt and internal transformation (see above) in regarding the transformation from Late Bronze to Iron Age culture in the central highlands of Canaan as coming from outside, and those effecting it identifying themselves as "Israel" from the beginning. He differs from the traditional view (see below) in minimizing or discounting the numbers and effect of Israel/Israelites involved in an Egyptian sojourn and exodus, and in discounting a "conquest" under Joshua (Rainey and Notley 2006:103, 111-116).

One complicating factor in all this is a common misreading of Joshua and Judges, concluding that they relate opposing versions of Israel's early years in Canaan. (I am not charging the current scholars named above with this misreading.) On this by now almost traditional interpretation of the two books, Joshua records a quick and easy triumph for Israel, almost total annihilation of the Canaanites, and nearly total occupation of all the land by the Israelites. Judges, on the other hand, gives a more "realistic" picture, showing that Israel did not conquer all the land early and at once, did not destroy all the Canaanites, and had considerable trouble occupying the whole land once they were there. A more careful reading of the two books will show that they really do not paint such radically opposing pictures.

My view, traditionalist but updated, is that upon close reading, Joshua does *not* claim Israel conquered all the land of Canaan easily and also does *not* claim Israel annihilated all the Canaanites—or even most of them; and it does *not* claim Israel settled the land in its entirety early on. Joshua does claim much, and is saturated with an optimistic and thankful spirit because of what God did accomplish for Israel through Joshua. However, the person of faith and the skeptic should be united in one purpose, at least: not to read what is absent, and not to miss what is present, in reading the Bible or any other document.

If Joshua and Judges present a complementary, rather than a contradictory, picture, we are not obliged to explain major differences by finding evidence for the

lateness of Joshua; we can notice evidences of dating that actually exist in the book. These include, among many: (1) The phrase "to this day" occurs 14 times, indicating at least minor editing some generations after Joshua's day, but not requiring either an exilic or a postexilic date for the book. (2) The importance of Sidon and the nonmention of Tyre is an argument for an early date—Tyre supplanted Sidon as the preeminent Phoenician city during the period of (perhaps in conjunction with) David's bringing Israel to ascendancy over the Philistines (B. Mazar 1986). (3) Archaeology does *not* prove Jericho was unoccupied when Israel entered the land; recent reexamination of the evidence shows, if anything, support for the account in Joshua (Wood 1990a). We could (and will) note other evidence, but these points already show that the book of Joshua, in substantially the form we have it today, could date from the early period of the judges, not long after Joshua's death. If substantial interest in Israel's history arose during the "Golden Age" of David and Solomon, as we have reason to believe, Joshua hardly would need to date later than that, though we need not rule out subsequent minor editorial activity, either.

We can be quite certain that at least some of the important sources of the book first were written in Joshua's own day, and many of them, if not the book itself, not long afterward (see Woudstra 1981). On the early date of the Exodus, this would be about the first half of the fourteenth century (1400–1350 BC); on the late date, about the second half of the thirteenth century (1250–1200 BC). (Of course, those unconvinced of Joshua's essential historicity will date the book much later, usually in the exilic/postexilic period, perhaps conceding the use of some earlier source material.) As implied above, the early date for Israel's exodus from Egypt is usually given as about 1440 BC, giving a date for the entrance into Canaan under Joshua of about 1400 BC. Much of the archaeological evidence, however, excepting that from Jericho,[1] seems to indicate the late date, which usually places the Exodus at about 1290 BC and the entrance into Canaan about 1250 BC. Further, the earliest nonbiblical reference to "Israel" occurs in the famous "Victory Hymn" of the Merneptah Stela. That Merneptah reigned as pharaoh from 1212 to 1202 BC (Rainey and Notley 2006:103) would seem to support the late date schema for Israel's exodus from Egypt and entry into Canaan. Therefore, most scholars who accept the historical value of the Joshua account favor the late date. I, too, tend toward the late date, hoping betimes for someone to advance a reconciliation of the Jericho data with it, if this is indeed the correct conclusion.

Since by every account several sources were available for the writing of Joshua, we can, in one sense, speak of a "compiler" of the book; Noth did use this word (German, *Sammler*). Yet a history writer, though utilizing various sources for the whole of an account, is still an author. The author decides the material to use, the emphases to give it, the arrangement of the various events (e.g., chronologically, or some other order), and the theme(s) of the work. In these and other tasks God's Spirit guided the human author(s) of the book of Joshua.

AUDIENCE

The first audience for the book of Joshua was ancient Israel. Some of its dramatic stories certainly were passed from generation to generation through oral tradition.

OUTLINE

The following outline, though not the only possible one, emphasizes that through Joshua, God really did bring Israel into the land and really did apportion it as their inheritance—even though by the close of the book some of the land was yet to be taken, and much of it was yet to be occupied fully in peace and security.

I. Israel's Entrance into Canaan (1:1–6:27)
  A. God's Commission; Joshua's Acceptance (1:1-18)
    1. God's promise to Joshua (1:1-5)
    2. God's command to Joshua to heed the Torah (1:6-9)
    3. Joshua's charge to Israel; Israel's charge to Joshua (1:10-18)
  B. Joshua Sends Spies into Jericho (2:1-24)
    1. Rahab shelters the spies (2:1-7)
    2. Rahab's request for her family (2:8-13)
    3. The oath and the rope as signs (2:14-24)
  C. Israel's Crossing of the Jordan (3:1–5:1)
    1. Preparations for crossing the Jordan (3:1-8)
    2. Joshua's promise of a miracle (3:9-13)
    3. Crossing on the Jordan's dry bed (3:14-17)
    4. The memorial stones (4:1-9)
    5. Resumption of the Jordan's flow (4:10-18)
    6. Israel's memorial at Gilgal (4:19–5:1)
  D. First Circumcisions and First Passover (5:2-15)
    1. Circumcision of every male (5:2-9)
    2. First Passover in the land (5:10-12)
    3. The Divine Warrior (5:13-15)
  E. God's Conquest of Jericho (6:1-27)
    1. God's siege instructions to Joshua (6:1-7)
    2. Circling Jericho for six days (6:8-14)
    3. Jericho's fall on the seventh day (6:15-21)
    4. The spies' faithfulness to Rahab (6:22-23)
    5. Joshua's destruction of Jericho (6:24-27)

II. Joshua's Victories over Two Canaanite Coalitions (7:1–12:24)
  A. Achan's Sin and Judgment (7:1-26)
    1. Israel's defeat at Ai (7:1-5)
    2. Joshua's prayer; God's response (7:6-15)
    3. Achan's conviction and execution (7:16-26)
  B. Joshua's Conquest of Ai on the Second Try (8:1-35)
    1. Joshua's ambush strategy at Ai (8:1-13)
    2. Joshua's success at Ai (8:14-29)
    3. Covenant renewal at Mount Ebal (8:30-35)

C. Gibeon's Successful Deception (9:1-27)
   1. Negotiation with Gibeon's envoys (9:1-15)
   2. The Gibeonites' sentence of servitude (9:16-27)
D. Joshua's Victory at Aijalon (10:1-43)
   1. Gibeon's call for help (10:1-6)
   2. Israel's response and God's response (10:7-15)
   3. Execution of five kings (10:16-27)
   4. End of the southern campaign (10:28-43)
E. Joshua's Victory over the Northern Coalition (11:1-23)
   1. Joshua's defeat of Jabin of Hazor (11:1-15)
   2. End of the northern campaign (11:16-23)
F. The List of Defeated Kings (12:1-24)
   1. Moses's conquests east of the Jordan (12:1-6)
   2. Joshua's conquests west of the Jordan (12:7-24)

III. The Tribal Allotments (13:1–21:45)
A. Allotments of the Transjordanian Tribes (13:1-33)
   1. The remaining land (13:1-7)
   2. General description of Transjordanian territories (13:8-14)
   3. Reuben's inheritance (13:15-23)
   4. Gad's inheritance (13:24-28)
   5. The inheritance of half-Manasseh (13:29-33)
B. Caleb's Portion (14:1-15)
   1. Introduction to the western allotments (14:1-5)
   2. Caleb's witness to God's faithfulness (14:6-12)
   3. Caleb's town of Hebron (14:13-15)
C. Judah's Portion (15:1-63)
   1. Judah's boundaries (15:1-12)
   2. Acsah's request (15:13-19)
   3. Judah's allotments: Negev, Shephelah, hill country, and wilderness (15:20-63)
D. Joseph's Portions (16:1–17:18)
   1. Ephraim's southern border and inheritance (16:1-10)
   2. The case of Zelophehad's daughters (17:1-6)
   3. The rest of Manasseh's inheritance (17:7-13)
   4. Joseph's additional territory (17:14-18)
E. The Allotments of the Remaining Tribes (18:1–19:48)
   1. Survey of the remaining land (18:1-10)
   2. Benjamin's borders and cities (18:11-28)
   3. Simeon's inheritance (19:1-9)
   4. The final five (19:10-48)
F. Joshua's Portion (19:49-51)

G. Cities of Refuge and Levitical Cities (20:1–21:45)
1. The law of refuge (20:1-6)
2. Cities of refuge, west and east (20:7-9)
3. The Levitical cities (21:1-42)
4. Benedictory summary (21:43-45)

IV. Joshua's Farewells; Three Burials (22:1–24:33)
A. The Return of the Transjordanian Tribes (22:1-34)
1. Joshua's commendation (22:1-9)
2. Israel's confrontation of the Transjordanian tribes (22:10-20)
3. The Transjordanian tribes' defense (22:21-34)
B. Joshua's Farewell to the Leaders (23:1-16)
1. Joshua's call to faithfulness (23:1-10)
2. Joshua's warning (23:11-16)
C. Covenant Renewal (24:1-28)
1. Joshua's review of God's grace to Israel (24:1-13)
2. Joshua's charge and the people's response (24:14-18)
3. Joshua's rhetorical skepticism (24:19-24)
4. Formal renewal of the covenant (24:25-28)
D. Burial of Joshua, Joseph, and Eleazar (24:29-33)

ENDNOTE

1. I regard the strongest evidence for the early date of the Exodus to be Bryant Wood's reevaluation of the archaeological evidence from Jericho. We must note that John Garstang excavated Jericho from 1930 to 1936, concluding that the city indeed had been destroyed as recorded in Joshua 6. Garstang's reasonable inference was that Jericho probably had been destroyed by Joshua. Acting on Garstang's request to check his results, Kathleen Kenyon renewed the excavations at Jericho, digging from 1952 to 1958. She concluded that the destruction Garstang had found was too early to be ascribed to Israel under Joshua, and that Jericho was unoccupied at the end of Late Bronze Age I (1400 BC). Bryant Wood (conveniently available in Wood 1990a) reevaluated Garstang's and Kenyon's excavation records (most of Kenyon's data was published only in the early 1980s).

   Wood's reanalysis (1990a) revealed data that Kenyon had missed in her evaluations of her findings. Wood concluded that many details of the Joshua account of Jericho's destruction in fact do have parallels in the archaeological record: (1) Jericho was strongly fortified (cf. 2:5, 7, 15; 6:5, 20); (2) the attack occurred just after the spring harvest (cf. 2:6; 3:15; 5:10); (3) Jericho's citizens could not flee with newly harvested food supplies (cf. 6:1); (4) the siege was short (cf. 6:15); (5) the city walls were leveled, possibly by an earthquake (cf. 6:20); (6) the city was not plundered for personal gain (cf. 6:17-18); (7) the city was burned (cf. 6:24).

   Some dispute Wood's evaluation (e.g., Bienkowski 1990; but cf. Wood 1990b), but I find Wood's analysis compelling, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the archaeological record apparently preserves an independent witness to Joshua's capture and destruction of Jericho.

COMMENTARY ON

Joshua

◆ I. Israel's Entrance into Canaan (1:1–6:27)

A. God's Commission; Joshua's Acceptance (1:1–18)

1. God's promise to Joshua (1:1–5)

After the death of Moses the LORD's servant, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant. He said, 2"Moses my servant is dead. Therefore, the time has come for you to lead these people, the Israelites, across the Jordan River into the land I am giving them. 3I promise you what I promised Moses: 'Wherever you set foot, you will be on land I have given you—4from the Negev wilderness in the south to the Lebanon mountains in the north, from the Euphrates River in the east to the Mediterranean Sea* in the west, including all the land of the Hittites.' 5No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. For I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will not fail you or abandon you.

1:4 Hebrew *the Great Sea.*

NOTES

1:1 ***After the death of Moses.*** The opening of the book of Joshua ties it firmly to the account of Moses's death at the end of Deuteronomy (Deut 34), which it follows. Moses, who had led Israel out of Egypt and throughout the years in the wilderness, had died on Mount Nebo east of the Jordan. Now it was time to cross the Jordan and enter Canaan. The first order of business was to confirm Joshua as Moses's successor.

1:2 ***Moses my servant is dead.*** This first short sentence is laden with finality: Moses was gone; he had fulfilled the tasks God had assigned to him; Israel had grieved for him the customary and respectful 30 days; Moses would not be back. Therefore, it was time for Joshua and Israel to rise up from their grief and enter into the land God was giving them. Even unconditional gifts must be received; Israel could receive the land only by going into it.

1:3 ***I promise you what I promised Moses.*** God took pains throughout this charge to assure Joshua that Moses's death would not end God's presence with Israel, nor God's guidance of Israel's leaders.

1:4 ***the Negev wilderness in the south.*** This is the area around Beersheba, stretching westward toward the Mediterranean and eastward toward the Dead Sea. "Negev" is not in the Hebrew text, but is a legitimate inference here, because the Negev was the southernmost region of settlement proper for ancient Israel. See also "The Negev" under "The Central Hill Country" in the Introduction.

Lebanon mountains. The northernmost of Israel's tribes settled southern portions of these mountains, becoming neighbors of the Phoenicians. Joshua did not lead Israel as far as the Euphrates River, but later David and Solomon ruled some of the kings of those regions in a suzerain-vassal relationship.

1:5 ***No one will . . . stand against you. . . . I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will not fail you or abandon you.*** This is a fantastic set of promises, and Joshua and Israel needed them. Moses, their father figure, was gone. They had very little confidence without him, either in themselves, or in God's steadfastness now that the one who had talked with God face-to-face was no longer present to talk with God for them. The modern Christian believer must understand and act on these promises in the light of the Holy Spirit's indwelling. God promises to be with us, never to fail us or abandon us.

COMMENTARY

Finally, Israel was ready for the great adventure! Through awesome deliverance from Egyptian slavery (Exod 5–14), through nation-making at Sinai, through rebellious unbelief at the edge of the Land of Promise, through the death of an entire generation, God had led and borne with Israel. Now that Moses the great leader had died, Joshua assumed leadership as the people prepared to enter the land that their parents' fears had kept them out of (Num 13–14). It was a new day with a new leader, as the new generation prepared to enter the new land. Bolstered by God's presence, Israel knew that every good thing God had promised was about to happen!

These first six chapters, the first quarter of the book of Joshua, record ancient Israel's actual setting foot into the land of Canaan for the first time and securing a foothold by the conquest of Jericho. God had promised Israel this entrance for several centuries, but the memory of the promise had grown dim in the generations of Egyptian servitude. Many of these people had come out of Egypt as children. They had waited 40 years for this entrance.

Entrances are important. The first time of doing something is an important milestone in the life of an individual or of a people. It is fitting that one-fourth of the book of Joshua is devoted to Israel's entrance into the land God had promised their ancestors so long before.

Chapter 1, God's charge to Joshua, introduces most of the themes of the book. God's sovereignty and God's initiative are highlighted. It was God who commanded Joshua to end 38 years of Israelite inactivity by leading the people across the Jordan to possess the land. The beginning of the charge to Joshua gives three promises: (1) all the land would be theirs; (2) no enemy would withstand them; (3) God would be with them and never forsake them.

We should not transfer this historical narrative in a material way when we consider whether it offers anything of promise for God's people after Joshua. We cannot conclude that, because God promised all this to Joshua, God promises a Christian today one particular house, one particular spouse, or one particular position. The transfer of a specific promise in a particular ancient context to a particular modern context is risky, because the contexts usually are not really parallel. But we can make a legitimate transfer of promise or of principle from the specific context of the ancient situation to the general human context in all ages. God gives the Christian all the "land" of his/her experience, for an eternal inheritance. Even though the Christian may suffer reverses in this life, ultimately no enemy of the soul can stand before the one whose trust is in God. No Christian ever awoke to find that God had forsaken him or her.

The land of Israel was always more than a physical entity. If we err by "spiritualizing" the material or the temporal, we equally err by "unspiritualizing" them.

God created the human race with one foot in the world of space, time, and matter, and the other foot in the eternal world. The spiritual creature is also the material creature; for this life, at least, our material destiny is an important part of our spiritual destiny. While we are here, the two really cannot be separated. The land as the promised rest for God's people is also presented in this first chapter. What Israel had held in hope for many years was soon to become a reality. This theme continues to be important, as the New Testament writer to the Hebrews picks it up again (Heb 3:18–4:11) and enlarges on it for all God's people.

Moses had been God's chosen agent to bring Israel out of Egypt to Sinai, where God made a covenant with them. Moses had been Israel's leader for 40 years, through rebellion, judgment, and repentance. Because of his own failure to give God glory for a miraculous provision of the people's need at a crucial point, Moses was forbidden entry into the Land of Promise (Num 20:2-13). As the people of Israel were poised on the east side of the Jordan River, ready to cross and enter the land God had promised them, Moses was dead.

Joshua, Moses's long-time aide, was Moses's designated successor (Num 27:18) to the leadership of Israel. But Joshua as sole leader was new, his abilities unknown and untested. How did the people, and Joshua himself, know he would be a good leader? Would God be with Joshua, as he had been with Moses? Anxiety, even fear, would be natural reactions both for Joshua and for the people at this time. Joshua may have wondered what was to come next. God had brought Israel to the plain of Moab, across the Jordan River east of Jericho. God had said he was bringing them into the land he had promised Abraham to give to his descendants. But now Moses, through whom God had worked for 40 years, was dead. What was Joshua to do now?

God reassured Joshua, first, by making himself known to him. The first verse of this narrative identifies Moses as the servant of the Lord, and Joshua as Moses's aide. Joshua had been Moses's chief aide since Israel's sojourn at Mount Sinai (Exod 24:13). The simple fact that God now spoke to Joshua as he had for years spoken to Moses was a sign that God had chosen Joshua to take Moses's place of leadership and to bring Israel into the promised land of Canaan.

Verse 2 states "Moses my servant is dead"; the last verses of Deuteronomy record Israel's 30 days of mourning for Moses. Thus, God's opening statement was not an announcement of news, but a signal that now it was time for Joshua to assume active leadership over Israel and for Israel to get moving again. God's next words emphasize the point: "the time has come." Here the command is, "Arise, cross this Jordan" (1:2, NASB). This was the goal toward which God had been leading his people for 40 years. Now it was about to happen, and God was giving Joshua his final marching orders. Israel was on the east side of the Jordan River in the plain of the Jordan Rift Valley, just north of the Dead Sea. God intended them to cross the Jordan into Canaan proper, entering opposite Jericho, and from there to proceed with the conquest of the land.

God's initiative in leading the people from Egypt to the land had been clear from the beginning, and now, as Joshua began his new role, God reminded him that this was his enterprise, not Joshua's. Joshua was to take Israel into the land, but God would give it to the Israelites. Joshua could lead Israel with confidence, knowing that God had set him to this task.

The structure of verse 3 is important because of the way it assigns emphasis. It reads literally, "Every place which the sole of your foot shall tread in it, to you I have given it, just as I spoke to Moses." The expression "every place" is first for emphasis. If Joshua walked there, it would belong to Israel. "To you" is first in its clause, again for emphasis. Finally, in case Joshua still didn't understand the force of God's declaration, God reminded Joshua that he had given Moses this same promise that Israel would enter and possess this land. God knew that Joshua needed reassurance at this time of great change. God's willingness to reassure Joshua stands as testimony to God's unfailing presence with his people always, in every situation.

God proceeded to remind Joshua of the borders of the land (1:4); God had described these borders previously to Moses (e.g., Exod 23:31). By the use of concrete geographical references, God reinforced in another way his commitment to fulfill his promise through Joshua's leadership. Joshua would remember the land as God described its borders because he had walked through it before. About 38 years earlier, Joshua had been one of the 12 men sent to scout the land, preparing for the entry, which did not happen because of Israel's unbelief (Num 13–14). Now Joshua would remember places and districts and the compass of the whole land, and his memory would help him believe that what God promised, God would deliver.

The desert refers generally to the deserts that formed the eastern and southern borders of the areas of Canaan that were already settled. This included the regions just traversed as Israel made their way from Kadesh, around Edom and Moab on the east, to their present camp east of the Jordan opposite Jericho.

Lebanon included the coastal mountain range north of upper Galilee—the land of the Phoenician cities, the inland Anti-Lebanon Mountains, and the valley between the two ranges. Since, as a geographical region, Lebanon extended in this period to the Euphrates River valley in the north, the Euphrates is mentioned here as Israel's northern boundary. Israel never actually settled most of this northern territory, but did control it for a time under David and Solomon.

As for "the Great Sea" on the west (see 1:4, NLT mg), this is the Mediterranean. The borders of Israel thus would be the deserts to the south and the east, Lebanon to the north, and the Mediterranean to the west. Throughout its history, when Israel was in right relationship with God, these were its general boundaries.

This passage is God's assurance to Joshua. In verse 5 God made a threefold, emphatic promise, with no frills, no qualifications, and no beating about the bush. Sometimes, God's people need such to-the-point reassurance. God's first promise was that Joshua did not need to fear that any enemy would be able to stand against him as he carried out the task to which God called him. Though the men of Ai did win a minor skirmish because of Achan's sin (ch 7), Joshua was victorious in every other battle throughout his life, and died having won for Israel the right to settle in the land of Canaan.

That God had been with Moses throughout his 40 years of leading the people of Israel had been evident in many ways. God's presence with Moses had encouraged, amazed, and sometimes frightened the people, but they always knew that God was with him. Joshua knew this better than any other person, for he had been with Moses on Mount Sinai when God gave him the tablets of the commandments (Exod 24:12-13). Joshua, more than any other person, had seen the effect on Moses of his

close encounters with God. This second promise to Joshua, the promise of God's continued presence with him, just as God had been with Moses, certainly encouraged Joshua tremendously.

The third promise God stated in a twofold manner, again for emphasis and for Joshua's encouragement. "I will not fail you or abandon you" (1:5) was a personal restatement of a promise God had given to all Israel through Moses. On that same occasion Moses even had said the same thing to Joshua in front of all the people (Deut 31:6-8). Now God himself made the same promise to Joshua, using the personal pronoun "I." If Joshua needed reassurance, he certainly had it!

Some writers and speakers on biblical matters have pondered when it is and is not proper for God's people of today to claim promises like this for ourselves. This certainly is one promise for all God's people through all time. Though given originally to Israel, all believers since then have become part of "the Israel of God" (Gal 6:16, NLT mg). Though here given to Joshua, all God's people are invited to walk with God throughout our lives. God promises all his children that he never will leave us nor forsake us. This was Jesus' promise to his followers just before he ascended into heaven (Matt 28:20). The reality of this presence is evident in the fact that God has given his children the Holy Spirit of Jesus (John 14:15-17).

◆ 2. God's command to Joshua to heed the Torah (1:6-9)

6"Be strong and courageous, for you are the one who will lead these people to possess all the land I swore to their ancestors I would give them. 7Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the instructions Moses gave you. Do not deviate from them, turning either to the right or to the left. Then you will be successful in everything you do. 8Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do. 9This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

NOTES

1:6 ***Be strong and courageous.*** Three times in this short paragraph (also 1:7, 9), God repeats this specific instruction to Joshua. Joshua had been Moses's assistant for nearly 40 years, and now he was in charge. His need for encouragement is understandable.

you. This is a subject pronoun, not required in the grammar of the Hebrew text at this point; it is there for emphasis. God was saying, "You, Joshua—you, and no one else—will do this." This is both instruction and reassurance.

all the land I swore to their ancestors I would give them. This is God's reminder to Joshua of his ancient promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen 17:8; 26:3; 28:13). Joshua now would become God's agent in its fulfillment. A God who remembers his promises over the centuries is a God to be trusted.

1:7 ***Be strong and very courageous.*** God's command is repeated with even greater emphasis. But now God's instruction takes an unexpected turn. God had been talking about taking possession of the land of Canaan. Strength and boldness certainly were necessary for this enterprise. The Canaanites outnumbered Israel, and Israel had relatively little experience in battle, none in conducting sieges against fortified cities.

Judges

LAWSON G. STONE

INTRODUCTION TO *Judges*

THE BOOK OF JUDGES provides some of the most memorable stories in the Bible. The stories of Gideon and Samson have entertained and inspired generations. Paradoxically, the very qualities that give the book its appeal also make it one of the most troubling in all of Scripture. Gideon's heroics are accompanied by a darker, vengeful side. Samson's victories against the Philistines never fully distract the reader from his personal foibles and ultimate tragedy. Ehud seems a tricky assassin, not a divinely empowered "savior," and the story of Jephthah encloses an obscenity within a horror. The gruesome narrative with which the book ends seems to offer little opening for an edifying theological or spiritual interpretation. More than any other book of the Bible, the book of Judges puts before the reader the issue of violence. Its major characters are all persons who perform acts of violence, sometimes heroic, other times horrific. A *Dodge City* feeling pervades the book, and one almost expects Clint Eastwood to be among its characters. Most notably the violence is visited upon women, such as Jephthah's daughter, Samson's first wife, the Levite's concubine, and the virgins of Shiloh. Violence is also wrought *by* women such as Jael and Delilah, and even celebrated by women like Deborah and, in her own blind way, Sisera's mother. And yet, somehow the book's presentation of violence, even at times with approval, does not finally encourage the reader to perpetrate violence. The book's celebration of heroic individuals who tower over ordinary Israelites, the victims, does not point toward an unbridled individualistic ethos for the community. Rather, the prowess of individuals is celebrated as an expression of Yahweh's faithfulness to his people. Indeed, Judges seems concerned to harness the energies of its restless subject matter—oppressors, liberators, villains and heroes, assassins, gangsters, whores, and tricksters—to point the reader to a larger vision of the community and kingdom toward which Yahweh is leading his people.[1]

The English book of Judges derives its name from the Latin Vulgate title, *Iudices*, translating the Greek *kritai*, which, in turn, renders the Hebrew *shopetim* [TH8199A, ZH9149] (judges). These terms reflect the terminology denoting the individuals who dominate the book's central chapters, *shopetim*. The title derives mainly from Judges 2:16-19. Rarely do the narratives refer to their protagonists by this title. Indeed, only Deborah (4:4) and Yahweh (11:27) bear the participial label *shopet* [TH8199A, ZH9149]. The other occurrences of the root appear in verbal forms (3:10; 10:2, 3; 11:27; 12:7, 11, 13, 14; 15:20; 16:31).

The title's significance goes far beyond its mere origin. For most readers, "judge" seems an odd title for the characters immortalized in these pages. The force of the

traditional translation is felt even in the NLT, which translates the root "judge" every time it occurs except once (11:27, "decide"). A brief summary of the range of usage of the Hebrew term *shapat* reveals much more than its English counterpart implies. With its noun derivatives, the word-family derived from *shapat* [TH8199, ZH9149] encloses four functions that, far from being distinct "meanings," constitute instead four overlapping circles. First, the term denotes judicial functions in which cases are heard and their merits weighed with a view to determining the best outcome. The noun *mishpat* [TH4941, ZH5477] (judgment, justice) can denote a scene or tribunal of judgment (cf. Ps 1:5). But in the social structure of ancient Israel, which was grounded in tribal and clan processes of conflict resolution, the term refers to the restoration of the community's equilibrium, its well-being, denoted by the term *shalom* [TH7965, ZH8934] (peace). While this responsibility normally fell to the elders, at the higher social levels such as the clan and tribe, the term *shapat* designated this restoration of community rhythm.

The restoration of *shalom* also denotes, secondly, an executive function, to intervene directly to effect justice. In this sense, the verb can point to a discrete action or to a sustained process. This sense dominates in the occurrences of *shapat* (or its cognates) in ancient texts outside the Old Testament, where it generally designates a governor or other royally appointed official (Soggin 1981:1-4). Yahweh is the quintessential judge in his active intervention and constant rule in history as expressed in Jephthah's appeal, climaxing his negotiations with the king of Ammon (11:27). For the ideal portrait in 2:16-19, the judges personified Yahweh's government by embodying his will and saving action. This point emerges clearly in the phrase that often concludes the early judges' careers—"and the land was quiet"—that is, the serenity of the community was restored. Perhaps the full significance of this restoration of quiet derives from the use of *shaqat* for the conclusion of the military phase of the conquest in Joshua 11:23, literally, "the land was quiet from war" (cf. Josh 14:15). The successful judge restored the community to the situation immediately following Joshua's successful campaign. Perhaps it is not entirely coincidental that *shaqat* [TH8252, ZH9200] (be quiet) shares some sounds and spelling with *shapat* [TH8199, ZH9149] (judge). Full appreciation of this nuance of *shapat* also exposes how the distinction between "major" judges (military deliverers) and "minor" judges, who are merely listed with no exploits (10:1-5; 12:8-15), is artificial from a cultural-linguistic standpoint, since the "minor judges" maintained the order effected by the "major judges." Moreover, the parallel between Yahweh as the Judge (11:27) and the prominence of human judges exposes the contradiction in rejecting human kingship based on claims of Yahweh's kingship. That Yahweh occupies a role need not preclude an analogous, derivative human role. Ironically, although some passages in Judges advocate human kingship (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25), Judges never calls God king.

The third and fourth nuances of *shapat* function as connotations of the term, but their presence is so strongly felt that they constitute an integral part of the word's function. The third emerges in the noun form, *mishpat* [TH4941, ZH5477] (justice, judgment). The act of restoring the community's balance became part of the shared heritage of the community leading to the affirmation of a code or standard of individual

and communal behavior considered to support maintenance of the community's equilibrium. Thus, *mishpat* can denote a legal claim, a right, and metaphorically a pattern, plan, or habit. To "do *mishpat*" is to conduct oneself in accordance with the traditions of the community that support its peace and welfare. This third, traditional sense of the term emerges in passages expressing ethical concerns. Thus, the translation "justice" with its frequent assumption of an abstract standard of right, or an ideological demand for egalitarian uniformity, fails utterly to grasp the term's ethical or traditional sense of living in harmony with the community's remembered heritage, defining the behavior that ensures community well-being. The casuistically formulated laws of the Covenant Code in Exodus 21–23 and the hortatory proclamation of the law seen in Deuteronomy 12–26 express the kinds of customary standards that emerged in Israel as *mishpat*.

Israel understood Yahweh to be the author of its life in the land, and so grounded all actions of governing in him. Therefore a fourth, theological nuance functions in the semantics of *shapat*. The remembered traditional standards of behavior, especially as codified in the legal corpora noted above, appear not as human reflection, though the signs of human deliberation and traditional legal formulation are unmistakably evident, but as revelation from Yahweh. The trajectory of *shapat* ultimately arrives at the emergence of documents regarded not as fossilized ideological abstractions or "laws" in the modern sense, but as standards or authoritative examples of faithful behavior seamlessly integrating the wisdom of the community with the revelation of Yahweh through the mediator Moses. Indeed, ultimately, to live in *mishpat* could well mean, in a larger, canonical sense, to live according to Scripture. The persons found in the book of Judges do reflect much of the Hebrew term's meaning, and indeed the book, as sacred canonical Scripture, might itself be a powerful embodiment of *mishpat*. Whether or not the unknown scribe who assigned the name "Judges" to this book realized its full implications, the term well articulates the book's many facets.

AUTHOR

We do not know who wrote the book of Judges. Neither the New Testament nor ancient tradition nominates a compelling name. Indeed, Judges does not seem to have resulted from a single authorial act. The book contains material of great age, and from several ages, that unknown persons compiled and organized, with unknown others supplementing the collection further at a later period. The process of composition will be discussed under "Canonicity and Textual History" but for now, I will assign the title of "author" to whoever undertook the final, substantial formation of the book, which is composed of the "deliverer narratives" of 2:6–16:31 and the framing material of 1:1–2:4; 17:1–21:25.

Though the author is unknown, a descriptive profile does emerge. First, this writer appears likely to have been a Judean. The introduction to the book (1:1–2:5) commends the Judeans for successfully conquering their territories, but exposes the failure of the northern tribes in a sweeping south-to-north movement. The ideal judge, Othniel, stands out as the only southern judge. The Ephraimites often receive negative portrayal, as do the Danites, including the sanctuary at Dan. The

final chapters present a heinous crime that took place because the Levite in the story passed up a chance to stay in Jerusalem (Jebus) and stayed instead in a town of Benjamin (Saul's home). Second, the author expresses support for the monarchy in 17:6; 18:1; 19:1-2; and 21:25, likely the Davidic monarchy, given the Judean orientation noted above. That the support comes with little reservation implies the author had not witnessed the catastrophic apostasies of kings like Manasseh. Indeed, the point of the recurring comment "Israel had no king" seems to be that the aberrations and scandals of chapters 17–21 would not have occurred had there been a king. These statements suggest a view of the kingship that advocated, first and foremost, religious leadership that restrained the selfish and centrifugal tendencies of the Israelites. So the author appears to have been a Judean supporter of the Davidic monarchy who saw this institution primarily in terms of a guardianship of the religious standard of Israel's covenant with Yahweh, but who was not yet explicitly a passionate advocate of the ideology that many scholars have termed the "Zion Theology," as articulated in passages like Psalms 48, 78, 79, 87, 89, 102, 110, 120–134, and Isaiah 2:1-4. Lastly, the substantive author needed access to oral traditions, written documents, and the time and materials to produce this book. Such a person might have been found in the court of any of the faithful Judean kings such as Hezekiah or Josiah.

DATE AND OCCASION OF WRITING

The reflections above, and those offered below under "Canonicity and Textual History," provide a framework for hazarding a date for the final composition of Judges. The final writer's Judean identity and view of the kingship as a morally restraining force would be at home in a period of the Judean monarchy prior to the radicalization of the "Zion Theology," which led to the royal complacency criticized by Jeremiah (627–585 BC). This dating of the final compilation also comports well with the absence of any strong ideology of centralization of worship and the absence of claims for the sacred status of Jerusalem. Indeed, the book locates the "house of God" in Shiloh (18:31), a place which would clash with the pejorative reference to Shiloh found in Jeremiah and the public outrage it caused (Jer 7:12-15; 26:6, 9; cf. also Ps 78:60). Then again, the story in chapters 19–21 could point to the kinds of developments at Shiloh that could have led to Jeremiah's use of it as an example of divine destruction of a sanctuary. These considerations might suggest a date prior to the time of Jeremiah. The latest event to which Judges alludes (18:30) is a deportation. The Babylonian exile seems unlikely since no other allusion to that catastrophe appears in Judges. Since the geographic context of 18:30 is the extreme north of Israel, commentators suggest that the Assyrian depredations in northern Galilee following the Syro-Ephraimite war (734–732 BC) might be in view. Since that story also satirizes an official northern sanctuary (Dan; cf. Judg 17–18), the writer could have been speaking of the deportation of the whole northern kingdom in 721 BC. In any event, either of these dates would place the book's final edition in the late eighth century at the earliest, perhaps in Hezekiah's time (715–640 BC). Hezekiah would also embody the royal religious fidelity that the author of Judges envisions.

Composition of the book in Hezekiah's reign could also suggest an occasion for writing. According to 2 Kings, Hezekiah instituted a range of reforms and political expansions based on a reassertion of the covenant between Yahweh and his people. By presenting the monarchy as a moral force necessitated by the collapse of leadership on the tribal level and the moral bankruptcy of the northern kingdom—poignant in the era of 732–721 BC—the book would have provided the aspirations of Hezekiah with a strong historical and theological rationale, especially as Judah faced the same Assyrian army that had annexed northern Galilee just a few years earlier (cf. 2 Kgs 18:13). The book would provide the ideal opening unit of a history of the monarchy that began with a demonstration of the need for kingship (Judges), proceeding through the story of kingship and climaxing with Hezekiah, the author's ideal king. This view of Judges would mesh well with suggestions that 2 Kings, at an early stage of its development, ended at 2 Kings 19 with the vindication of Hezekiah in Jerusalem's deliverance from Sennacherib, a stage in the development of the Deuteronomistic History preceding the commonly accepted Josianic and exilic editions (Stone 1988:478-481; Richter 2005:225).

AUDIENCE

A vexing question in Old Testament studies is that of the audience of the biblical material. Little is known of how widely the biblical materials were distributed, who read them, and what functions they served for the audience. If we assume a "fit" between the book's content, structure, and themes, and the audience it served, several inferences about the audience may be drawn. First, for the traditions in Judges to have a claim on ancient readers or hearers, the audience would likely have held in high regard the great heroes of Israel's past, the "judges." Indeed, if the near-universal form-critical suggestion that the main stories in Judges are popular oral tales is accurate, their very preservation points to an appreciative audience. The author showed how the monarchy was superior to these charismatic leaders, but he did so without directly attacking the validity of the earlier institution. Rather, the book allows the weaknesses of charismatic leadership to emerge naturally in the way the stories are arranged. Second, the writer focuses strongly on the northern tribes, suggesting that the audience might have held reservations about the claims of Judah to be the tribe from whom the legitimate king was to come. Addressing such a group, the story of Abimelech demonstrates the bankruptcy of Shechem, a one-time capital of the northern kingdom, as a possible home of the Israelite monarchy. Third, the exposure of the deficits of charismatic rule that emerges in chapters 3–16 could have been seen during the divided kingdom era as a critique of the northern pattern of monarchic succession, which was not dynastic, as in Judah, but resembled more the charismatic pattern. Thus, it would appear that the book was written to those who would have questions about whether Judean monarchic and dynastic claims genuinely met the true need of Israel for leadership and legitimately fulfilled the will of Yahweh. Since the final years and ultimate collapse of the northern Israelite kingdom occurred in Hezekiah's reign, we might even suggest the audience included members of the northern population and leadership who now looked to Judah, the sole surviving heir to the covenant promises, with a poignant

mixture of hope and doubt. The fall of the northern kingdom in 721 BC produced a flood of new arrivals swelling the population of Jerusalem, especially on the western hill. Hezekiah was sufficiently concerned about them to enclose part of the western hill in a new "broad wall," so it is not hard to imagine he might also be interested in presenting to them a historical apology for the Judean monarchy, of which he was the culmination. As part of a larger literary demonstration of the legitimacy of the Davidic, Judean monarchy, Judges would have addressed the concerns of this northern refugee community.

CANONICITY AND TEXTUAL HISTORY

Place in the Canon. The place of Judges in the Canon has never been disputed. A consideration of its role and function in the canons of Judaism and Christianity reveals a range of theological functions. Unlike the tradition represented in English Bibles, which groups the books of Joshua—2 Kings together with Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Chronicles as "historical books," the Hebrew Bible classifies Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings as the "Former Prophets" and follows them immediately with Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and "The Twelve" (i.e., the Minor Prophets) designating these the "Latter Prophets." This canonical categorization intimates a function transcending merely antiquarian or historiographic reportage. Prophecy in ancient Israel entailed a divine revelation that concretely addressed the historical and social particulars of a concrete circumstance in the life of Israel. These highly particular words generated a tradition of response and interpretation around the memory of their speakers, bearing fruit ultimately in the large compilations found in the Old Testament prophetic books. On first sight, discerning a prophetic function in Joshua—Kings, and especially in Judges, seems difficult. But the messages found in the classical prophetic books hardly make sense outside the framework established in the Former Prophets, which pursue relentlessly the theme of Israel as a nation whose fate is determined at every point by its response to the divine word. The Former Prophets supply the dimension of "situation" to which the Latter Prophets provide the divine revelation. The dialectical relationships between these two portions of the Canon open up a rich understanding of divine speech that is historically particular, and yet also universally applicable. It is not timeless in the sense of being abstract, but it is ever timely. The Former Prophets constitute a unified historical narrative striving not simply to inform, but to confront the reader with a proclamation of the ways, truth, and judgment of God.

The explicitly theological dimension of Joshua—Kings in general, and Judges in particular, arises directly from the compositional dynamics behind the books. Contemporary scholarship has almost uniformly seen Joshua—Kings as the work of writers with both historical and theological purposes inspired by the book of Deuteronomy. Noth (1958) suggested that a single historian, writing after the destruction of Jerusalem (587 BC), composed the core material of Joshua—Kings and included the Deuteronomic law code as a preface to present a cogent explanation for that destruction. Noth's work popularized the term "Deuteronomistic History" for the Former Prophets. Subsequent scholarship nuanced Noth's theory considerably, with North American scholarship generally moving first to a theory of

God, but has also stressed the human predicament of imprisonment in self-will, broken only by the hallowing grace of God. To the extent that Judges depicts the ravages of self-will gone amok in the community of faith, it portrays that carnality that threatens the very fulfillment of the divine promises.

Unexpectedly, the solution to human depravity proffered in Judges is not the Spirit of God. In Judges, the occasional outpouring of the Spirit is, itself, diverted and perverted as Israel falls under the weight of its own corruption. Instead, the writer calls for an authority to resist each person's doing "what is right in their own eyes." A Spirit-impelled Samson is a disaster, not for lacking propulsion, but direction—hence the call for a king and the essential Old Testament linkage of kingship with national religious fidelity. Likewise in the New Testament, the emphasis on the moral and spiritual dimensions of the Kingdom of God and its demand that the disciple of Christ deny self and take up the cross always informs and fully controls its statements about the believer and the Holy Spirit. Thus, the unknown author of Judges would affirm with the New Testament that charisma corrupts when devoid of character.

OUTLINE

Despite its diverse contents, the book possesses a coherent structure moving the reader from the beginnings of trouble after Joshua's death to the full collapse of the Israelite community and the need for kingship. The book's structure orchestrates diverse material into a coherent literary and theological witness in the final form of the text without flattening the differences among the stories. The following outline summarizes the major movement.

I. Introductory Overview: The End from the Beginning (1:1–3:6)
   A. Faltering Conquest: The View from the Outside (1:1–2:5)
   B. Fractured Covenant (2:6–3:6)
II. The Succession of the Judges: Dissolution (3:7–16:31)
   A. Othniel: The Exemplary Judge (3:7-11)
   B. Stage One: Triumph (3:12–5:31)
      1. Ehud the assassin (3:12-30)
      2. Shamgar: Minor judge, major achiever (3:31)
      3. Deborah the prophet (4:1–5:31)
   C. Stage Two: Transition (6:1–10:5)
      1. Gideon: Ambiguity embodied (6:1–8:32)
      2. Abimelech the usurper (8:33–9:57)
      3. Minor judges: Order restored (10:1-5)
   D. Stage Three: Tragedy (10:6–16:31)
      1. Jephthah: A vow tragically kept (10:6–12:7)
      2. Minor judges: Measure of mediocrity (12:8-15)
      3. Samson: A vow tragically broken (13:1–16:31)
III. The Finale: A Decadent Community (17:1–21:25)
   A. Inverted War of Conquest (17:1–18:31)
   B. Inverted War of Covenant Justice (19:1–21:25)

The complete outline of Judges for this commentary is as follows:

I. Introductory Overview: The End from the Beginning (1:1–3:6)
   A. Faltering Conquest: The View from the Outside (1:1–2:5)
   B. Fractured Covenant (2:6–3:6)
II. The Succession of the Judges: Dissolution (3:7–16:31)
   A. Othniel: The Exemplary Judge (3:7-11)
   B. Stage One: Triumph (3:12–5:31)
      1. Ehud: The assassin deliverer (3:12-30)
      2. Shamgar: Minor judge, major deliverer (3:31)
      3. Deborah and Barak: The unidentified deliverer (4:1-24)
      4. The Song of Deliverance (5:1-31)
   C. Stage Two: Transition (6:1–10:5)
      1. Gideon: Authority and ambivalence (6:1–8:32)
         a. Ambivalence before the call (6:1-40)
         b. Authority accepted (7:1–8:3)
         c. Authority exercised (8:4-21)
         d. Authority abdicated (8:22-27)
         e. Epilogue: Retirement and reversion (8:28-32)
      2. Abimelech: Authority usurped (8:33–9:57)
      3. Tola and Jair: Authority restored (10:1-5)
   D. Stage Three: Tragedy (10:6–16:31)
      1. Jephthah: A vow tragically kept (10:6–12:7)
         a. The prologue (10:6-18)
         b. The victory in battle (11:1-40)
         c. Slaughter of kinsmen (12:1-7)
      2. The Quiet Alternatives: Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon (12:8-15)
      3. Samson: A vow tragically ignored (13:1–16:31)
         a. Samson's birth: Word, vow, and spirit (13:1-25)
         b. The riddle of Samson: Marriage (14:1-4)
         c. The riddle of Samson: Mayhem (14:5-20)
         d. The revenge of Samson: Vengeance, victory, and vindication (15:1-20)
         e. The reversion and redemption of Samson (16:1-31)
III. The Finale: A Decadent Community (17:1–21:25)
   A. The Failed Mission (17:1–18:31)
      1. Substitute worship and priesthood (17:1-13)
      2. Substitute conquest (18:1-31)
   B. The Fractured Vision (19:1–21:25)
      1. The Levite and his concubine (19:1-30)
      2. Israel's war with Benjamin (20:1-48)
      3. Israel provides wives for Benjamin (21:1-25)

ENDNOTE

1. This commentary crystallizes over 30 years lived, almost daily, with the book of Judges. What began as a sermon series grew into a seminar paper and then a doctoral dissertation at Yale University in 1986–1987. For decades, studying Judges has been my passion—one drawing in my family and closest friends. Indeed, my children's honest questions about Judges shaped this commentary at many points, and my wife and life partner, Angie, who has endured my obsession with Judges for our entire marriage, read this whole commentary in draft form. I am therefore hopelessly and gratefully indebted to my family, as well as to friends, colleagues, and teachers, such as Victor P. Hamilton, David L. Thompson, Sandra L. Richter, Paul H. Wright, and Carl G. Rasmussen, whose contribution to specific aspects of this project have been crucial to its completion. Series editor Phillip Comfort displayed astounding patience with a manuscript very slow in the making that seemed to increase in size faster than it progressed to a conclusion. Jason Driesbach offered scores of insightful comments, queries, criticisms, and learned conference on this manuscript and on the book of Judges. Despite such outstanding help, many shortcomings will still be found here and, of course, they remain my own peculiar property.

COMMENTARY ON

Judges

◆ I. Introductory Overview: The End from the Beginning (1:1–3:6)

A. Faltering Conquest: The View from the Outside (1:1–2:5)

After the death of Joshua, the Israelites asked the LORD, "Which tribe should go first to attack the Canaanites?"

2 The LORD answered, "Judah, for I have given them victory over the land."

3 The men of Judah said to their relatives from the tribe of Simeon, "Join with us to fight against the Canaanites living in the territory allotted to us. Then we will help you conquer your territory." So the men of Simeon went with Judah.

4 When the men of Judah attacked, the LORD gave them victory over the Canaanites and Perizzites, and they killed 10,000 enemy warriors at the town of Bezek. 5 While at Bezek they encountered King Adoni-bezek and fought against him, and the Canaanites and Perizzites were defeated. 6 Adoni-bezek escaped, but the Israelites soon captured him and cut off his thumbs and big toes.

7 Adoni-bezek said, "I once had seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off, eating scraps from under my table. Now God has paid me back for what I did to them." They took him to Jerusalem, and he died there.

8 The men of Judah attacked Jerusalem and captured it, killing all its people and setting the city on fire. 9 Then they went down to fight the Canaanites living in the hill country, the Negev, and the western foothills.* 10 Judah marched against the Canaanites in Hebron (formerly called Kiriath-arba), defeating the forces of Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai.

11 From there they went to fight against the people living in the town of Debir (formerly called Kiriath-sepher). 12 Caleb said, "I will give my daughter Acsah in marriage to the one who attacks and captures Kiriath-sepher." 13 Othniel, the son of Caleb's younger brother, Kenaz, was the one who conquered it, so Acsah became Othniel's wife.

14 When Acsah married Othniel, she urged him* to ask her father for a field. As she got down off her donkey, Caleb asked her, "What's the matter?"

15 She said, "Let me have another gift. You have already given me land in the Negev; now please give me springs of water, too." So Caleb gave her the upper and lower springs.

16 When the tribe of Judah left Jericho—the city of palms—the Kenites, who were descendants of Moses' father-in-law, traveled with them into the wilderness of Judah. They settled among the people there, near the town of Arad in the Negev.

17 Then Judah joined with Simeon to fight against the Canaanites living in Zephath, and they completely destroyed* the town. So the town was named Hormah.* 18 In addition, Judah captured the towns of Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron, along with their surrounding territories.

19 The LORD was with the people of Judah,
and they took possession of the hill
country. But they failed to drive out the
people living in the plains, who had iron
chariots. 20 The town of Hebron was given
to Caleb as Moses had promised. And
Caleb drove out the people living there,
who were descendants of the three sons
of Anak.

21 The tribe of Benjamin, however, failed
to drive out the Jebusites, who were living
in Jerusalem. So to this day the Jebusites
live in Jerusalem among the people of
Benjamin.

22 The descendants of Joseph attacked
the town of Bethel, and the LORD was with
them. 23 They sent men to scout out Beth-
el (formerly known as Luz). 24 They con-
fronted a man coming out of the town
and said to him, "Show us a way into the
town, and we will have mercy on you."
25 So he showed them a way in, and they
killed everyone in the town except that
man and his family. 26 Later the man
moved to the land of the Hittites, where
he built a town. He named it Luz, which is
its name to this day.

27 The tribe of Manasseh failed to drive
out the people living in Beth-shan,* Taa-
nach, Dor, Ibleam, Megiddo, and all their
surrounding settlements, because the
Canaanites were determined to stay in
that region. 28 When the Israelites grew
stronger, they forced the Canaanites to
work as slaves, but they never did drive
them completely out of the land.

29 The tribe of Ephraim failed to drive
out the Canaanites living in Gezer, so the
Canaanites continued to live there among
them.

30 The tribe of Zebulun failed to drive
out the residents of Kitron and Nahalol,
so the Canaanites continued to live
among them. But the Canaanites were
forced to work as slaves for the people of
Zebulun.

31 The tribe of Asher failed to drive out
the residents of Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Aczib,
Helbah, Aphik, and Rehob. 32 Instead, the
people of Asher moved in among the
Canaanites, who controlled the land, for
they failed to drive them out.

33 Likewise, the tribe of Naphtali failed
to drive out the residents of Beth-she-
mesh and Beth-anath. Instead, they
moved in among the Canaanites, who
controlled the land. Nevertheless, the
people of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath
were forced to work as slaves for the peo-
ple of Naphtali.

34 As for the tribe of Dan, the Amorites
forced them back into the hill country
and would not let them come down into
the plains. 35 The Amorites were deter-
mined to stay in Mount Heres, Aijalon,
and Shaalbim, but when the descendants
of Joseph became stronger, they forced
the Amorites to work as slaves. 36 The
boundary of the Amorites ran from Scor-
pion Pass* to Sela and continued upward
from there.

CHAPTER 2

The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal
to Bokim and said to the Israelites, "I
brought you out of Egypt into this land
that I swore to give your ancestors, and I
said I would never break my covenant
with you. 2 For your part, you were not to
make any covenants with the people liv-
ing in this land; instead, you were to de-
stroy their altars. But you disobeyed my
command. Why did you do this? 3 So now
I declare that I will no longer drive out the
people living in your land. They will be
thorns in your sides,* and their gods will
be a constant temptation to you."

4 When the angel of the LORD finished
speaking to all the Israelites, the people
wept loudly. 5 So they called the place Bo-
kim (which means "weeping"), and they
offered sacrifices there to the LORD.

1:9 Hebrew *the Shephelah.* **1:14** Greek version and Latin Vulgate read *he urged her.* **1:17a** The Hebrew term used here refers to the complete consecration of things or people to the LORD, either by destroying them or by giving them as an offering. **1:17b** *Hormah* means "destruction." **1:27** Hebrew *Beth-shean,* a variant spelling of Beth-shan. **1:36** Hebrew *Akrabbim.* **2:3** Hebrew *They will be in your sides;* compare Num 33:55.

NOTES

1:1 ***After the death of Joshua.*** This chapter weaves blocks of material adapted from the book of Joshua into a syntactical network shaped by Hebrew consecutive and disjunctive clauses (Stone 1988:190-259). The opening temporal clause *wayhi 'akhare moth yehoshua'* [TH3091, ZH3397] begins a chain of Hebrew Waw-consecutive clauses continuing through the end of 1:8, with 1:9 beginning a new syntactical segment of the narrative. That segment, adapted from materials in the book of Joshua (see commentary below) runs through 1:15. At 1:16 a pair of Hebrew disjunctive clauses starts a new subsection running through 1:21. Starting in 1:21, the writer relies almost completely on material adapted from the book of Joshua to make the major points (cf. Stone 1988; O'Connell 1996; Brensinger 1999; Olson 1998). The critical note in BHS suggests the word "Joshua" here is a textual error for "Moses," since the events following are directly derived from Josh 13–24, which occur during Joshua's lifetime. Plus, Joshua's death appears again in Judg 2:6-10 adapted directly from Josh 24:29-31. No manuscript evidence supports the change, however, and the author of Judg 1 seems to be adapting material with a specific purpose, so "Joshua" should be retained.

the Israelites asked the LORD. The reference here, and in most other passages in which persons "inquire" of Yahweh, is to structured inquiry employing a set ritual, probably involving the Urim and Thummim. The Urim and Thummim are associated in the Pentateuch with the ephod, which was apparently used for inquiring of Yahweh, particularly in battle (cf. 1 Sam 23:9-11; 30:7-9).

Which tribe should go first to attack the Canaanites? This chapter frequently uses the Hebrew verb "go up" (*'alah* [TH5927, ZH6590]) in the sense of "move out on the attack" (cf. 1:2-4, 16, 22). The use of "go up" in the original is obscured in NLT for stylistic reasons.

1:2 ***The LORD answered, "Judah, for I have given them victory over the land."*** Normally the reference to victory specifies a foe or territory, but here Judah is given victory over "the land," suggesting a more extensive divine commission.

1:3 ***Join with us. . . . Then we will help you.*** The Hebrew construction behind "then we will help you" is emphatic, stressing Judah's promise of mutuality.

1:4 ***When the men of Judah attacked.*** Again, the verb "go up" (*'alah* [TH5927, ZH6590]) is used for a military assault. This verse looks like a generalization concerning the whole of 1:4-21, with "Canaanites and Perizzites" possibly denoting city dwellers and village dwellers, or urban and rural population. It would serve as a merism for "everyone" (ABD 5.231).

Bezek. This seems not to be Khirbet Ibzik, but Salhab, a site near Jerusalem that matches the details of this passage as well as 1 Sam 11:8-11 (ABD 1.717-718). The name "Bezek" seems to have passed from Salhab to Khirbet Ibzik by the middle of the Iron Age, suggesting the reference in Judges derives from the early part of the Iron Age.

1:5 ***Adoni-bezek.*** This looks like a typical northwest Semitic personal name in which a divine name is associated with the word "my lord," such as Adonijah, meaning "my Lord is Yah(weh)." But no deity named "Bezek" has been documented. G. E. Wright (1946) suggested the name is a corruption of "Adoni Zedeq" and should be identified with the king of Jerusalem captured and killed by Joshua in Josh 10.

Some see here the intentional change of a name to an "alias" with pejorative nuance, citing the similarity of "Bezek" to a term meaning "potsherd," thereby making "lord of the potsherd" a demeaning alias for this Canaanite king. The use of apparent "aliases" elsewhere in Judges might support this interpretation of the name. Most likely the name is simply a title: "Master of [the town] Bezek" (ABD 1.174). Since 1:1-21 stresses how Judah continued the faithful victories begun by Joshua, even replicating Joshua's achievements, some resonance with Adoni Zedeq could still be present.

1:6 ***cut off his thumbs and big toes.*** Compare the ordination of Aaron in Lev 8:23, where the sacrificial blood is dabbed on Aaron's earlobe, his right thumb, and his right big toe. There it is a symbolic enabling. The mutilation described in Judges likely served not only as a literal disabling of the king, but as a ritual humiliation or shaming. That a shaming figures in the event seems clear from 1:7, where the vanquished, mutilated king confesses the justice of what the Judeans have done.

1:7 ***paid me back.*** The text employs the verbal root *shalem* [TH7999, ZH8966] in the Piel. The popular association of this root (*sh-l-m*) with "peace" obscures its strict sense. The root denotes the equilibrium of the community resulting from every member fulfilling their obligations, and the community itself maintaining its equilibrium with its social and natural environment. Thus *sh-l-m* (often, "peace") can denote just retribution per the lex talionis (i.e., "payback"), reminding the reader that "peace" in the OT was not seen merely as the end of conflict, or an abstract serenity, but rather the restoration of the community's equilibrium, often by actions of punishment or restitution—this is the case in the present passage. That the Judeans could take Adoni-bezek to Jerusalem, where he died, suggests a modicum of control over the area around Jerusalem. That Josh 12:10 also records a vanquished "king of Jerusalem" suggests some basis for the writer in Judges asserting a victory over Jerusalem.

1:8 ***The men of Judah attacked Jerusalem and captured it, killing all its people and setting the city on fire.*** The capture of Jerusalem by the Judeans stands in tension with the report in Josh 15:63 and later tradition of an unvanquished city of Jerusalem (cf. 2 Sam 5:6-10). But no report of Judean glories could possibly be convincing without a report of Jerusalem's capture. The idiom employed for the burning of the city, lit. "to send (off) the city to the fire" is not common, appearing in the form used in 1:8 only in 20:48; 2 Kgs 8:12; and Ps 74:7. Most translations render it "set on fire," suggesting only the torching of the city, not its permanent or even complete destruction, though the usage in Ps 74:7 could suggest total destruction. Had the author wanted to stress the total destruction of the city, stronger expressions existed.

1:9 ***Then they went down.*** The NLT registers a major geographical transition here, signaled syntactically in the Hebrew by a disjunctive temporal clause *we'akhar yaredu* [TH3381, ZH3718] (go down). The Judeans turned from a successful campaign in the center of the country to the south, just as Joshua and the original conquest army turned south (Josh 10:29-43) following the successful penetration of the central highlands (Josh 6–10:28).

the western foothills. Heb., *shepelah* [TH8219, ZH9169] (Shephelah, foothills); these hills formed the critical transitional zone from the "hill country"—the high watershed ridge and the highway running atop it, to the coastal plain with its urban centers, international highways, and resources. Land forces moving between the hill country and the coast, whether the Israelites and the Philistines, the Maccabees and the Syrians, or Saladin and the Crusaders, are funneled down one of six wadis, making control of these seasonal streambeds and the valleys they have carved out a tactical necessity (Smith 1931:201). Early in the era of the judges, by 1165 BC, the Philistines had established themselves on the Coastal Plain and would eventually start pushing up through the Shephelah via these valleys, making immediate control of the Shephelah critical not just to Israel's full possession of Canaan, but to its very survival.

1:10 ***Judah marched . . . defeating the forces of Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai.*** In Judg 1:10 and 20 the author splices material from Josh 14:6, 13, 15 and 15:13-14 to create a frame for Judg 1:11-19, which in turn includes a block adapted from Josh 15:15-19 (Judg 1:11-15). The editor of BHS suggests replacing "Judah" with "Caleb" here, citing the parallel with Josh 15, ignoring the apparent intentions of the author to adapt the Joshua material

toward a different purpose. The LXX here also adds "and Hebron came out against them," which conceivably could have dropped out of the Hebrew via haplography, though no other manuscript evidence supports the reading. Also, LXX conflates the names "Kiriath Arba" and "Kiryath Sepher" (cf. 1:11) and reads "Kiriath Arbaksepher," suggesting the LXX is expansionistic here. The three commanders noted are named as "sons of Anak," and characterized by the Israelite spies as "nephilim" in Num 13:33. So daunting in appearance, their very presence unhinged 10 of the spies and caused them to despair of victory. Caleb's victory over these Anakites (cf. Josh 15:13-14) in the book of Joshua vindicated his confidence in divine power. But in Judges, these persons lack any such luster of legendary battle prowess. A number of etymological parallels might be proposed between these foes and a range of other persons, but none seems relevant to this passage (Boling 1975:374). The passage directly resonates Josh 15:13-14, which attributes the capture of Hebron and the defeat of Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai directly to Caleb. Since Josh 15 locates his inheritance lit., "in the midst of the Judahites," the writer in Judg 1 could link Caleb's victory explicitly to the Judeans. Caleb was one of only two heroes of the Exodus generation to survive into the conquest generation. Associating his victory with Judah highlights Judah's faithfulness and success.

1:11 ***From there they went to fight against the people living in the town of Debir (formerly called Kiriath-sepher).*** The narrative makes perfect topographic sense. The National Highway or Watershed Ridge route ran past Jerusalem at about 2,400 feet elevation, then climbed about 600 feet in 20 miles to Hebron before descending 840 feet over 7 miles to the "huge, impressive Bronze and Iron Age site" (Stern 1993–2008.4:1252) of Khirbet Rabud, the likely site of Debir (ABD 2:112), and then on to Beer Sheba, the southwestern gateway to Judah. Often this route runs on the narrow spine of the ridge between deep ravines, following the watershed. Clearly the Israelites understood the importance of controlling this vital thoroughfare. Still quoting Josh 15, the Judges author changes the geographically logical verb in Josh 15:15, "and he went up" (*'alah* [TH5927, ZH6590]) to the more generic "and he went." This preserves the "downward" movement of the Judeans started in 1:9, maintaining the analogy with Joshua's geographical movement in Josh 6–11. Additionally, the antecedent of the pronoun subject "he went" was "Caleb" in the Joshua passage, but with "Judah" as the named subject in 1:10, the reader must see Judah as the agent in 1:11 as well. What Caleb accomplished as an individual is assimilated into Judah's achievement.

The former name of Debir, Kiriath-sepher, is traditionally taken as "town of (the) book" or, with a repointing of the text, "Scribe Town." While the Targum envisions a city functioning as an archive, Boling (1975:56) rightly suggests reference to a monumental inscription or stele. A victory stele inscribed with the name of a conquering king and his god would constitute a religious challenge to the Israelites, as well as an appealing military objective. The obliteration of previous conqueror's names from monuments and the inscription of the new conqueror's name figure prominently in ancient Near Eastern monumental tradition (Richter 2002:153-184).

1:13 ***Othniel, the son of Caleb's younger brother, Kenaz.*** The story in 1:11-15 reproduces the account from Josh 15:15-19, but with strategic changes to highlight the writer's point. Most important is the simple addition of the phrase *haqqaton* [TH6996A, ZH7785] *mimmennu* (lit., "the one smaller than him"). Why would Judges add this phrase? Grammatically, the "younger brother of Caleb" could be either Othniel or Kenaz. The most common interpretation sees Othniel as Caleb's brother, with the author of Judges adding "the one younger than him" adjusting his age to allow marriage to Caleb's daughter. The NLT rightly parts company with this view, regarding Kenaz as the younger brother, making Othniel Caleb's

nephew. This position was most cogently argued by Bachmann (1868:114-116) and is argued in detail by Stone (1988:202-207).

The book of Judges extends the generational structure of the Pentateuch in which one generation, the Exodus generation, failed and experienced divine judgment. Within that generation, though, were two faithful men, Joshua and Caleb, who alone survived to serve as a witness to the next generation. That next generation was the faithful conquest generation, for whom Joshua and Caleb provided leadership. The third generation, according to 2:10, apostatized. To interpret Othniel as Caleb's brother violates the claim that only Joshua and Caleb survived from the conquest generation (Num 14:26-38; 32:10-12; Deut 1:34-40). However, to see Othniel as Caleb's nephew (i.e., seeing Kenaz as Caleb's younger brother) construes Othniel as a member of the faithful conquest generation. Since the third generation will be apostate, seeing Othniel as a member of the conquest generation aligns his function with that of Caleb. Each man was a faithful survivor of the preceding generation whose function was to bear witness and provide leadership for his contemporaries, the "next" generation. Since the writer of Judges works so carefully with this generational pattern, it seems likely that the addition of "the one younger than him" to the Joshua story serves this theme. The full importance of this addition only emerges in connection with the story found in 3:7-11.

1:16 ***Jericho—the city of palms.*** Here the NLT makes explicit what is not explicit in the original: the identity of the "city of palms" as Jericho. The writer anticipates the reoccupation of Jericho by Eglon in 3:13, where the same title appears; and by alluding to Jericho, the writer also evokes a connection with the conquest. To settle in the south locates the Kenites with the Judeans, reinforcing the impression of Judah as a tribe that brings the Israelites, including client groups such as the Kenites, together, in contrast to the isolation of the northern tribes seen in 1:22-36. The decision by these descendants of Moses's father-in-law to affiliate with the southern tribes contrasts directly with the choice of another Kenite named "Partner" (NLT, "Heber") to move north and ally (lit., to have *shalom* [TH7965, ZH8934]) with Israel's enemy Jabin of Hazor (4:11-12, 17).

1:17 ***they completely destroyed the town. So the town was named Hormah.*** Ironically, despite the war and destruction in Judges, the preeminent Hebrew root denoting holy war, *kharam* [TH2763, ZH3049] (to devote to destruction), appears only twice in the book (1:17; 21:11), and the derived noun *kherem* [TH2764, ZH3051] (that which is devoted) does not appear at all, probably because the enemies against which Israel typically fights in Judges are outside intruders, not the original inhabitants of the land. In contrast, the two terms occur some 27 times in Joshua and 11 times in Deuteronomy. Either the wars in Judges were not construed as classic "Yahweh war" or the writer was not influenced by the Deuteronomistic terminology. Since Judges makes direct use of the Joshua material, the latter seems more likely, especially since Judges repeatedly describes the kind of behavior that, according to Joshua, should have made Israel subject to *kherem*.

1:18 ***In addition, Judah captured the towns of Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron, along with their surrounding territories.*** The towns of Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron fell in the territory allotted to Judah (Josh 15:45-47, no mention of Ashkelon though), but they remained unpossessed in Joshua's lifetime. Gaza remained one of the last refuges of the Anakim, archetypical foes of the Israelites (Josh 11:22), and Ekron is explicitly reckoned Canaanite in Josh 13:3. It is noteworthy that Judah is not here said to destroy these towns, only to have seized them. These towns did not become Philistine territory until Ramses III settled them there around 1175 BC. Israel likely had been in Canaan since the 1240s BC, so the towns would not have been in Philistine hands when Judah seized them. In fact, Ash-

kelon had been conquered by Merneptah at the close of the thirteenth century BC (ABD 1:488-490) making it possible that the Israelites' capture of the sites would not entail a massive operation. By taking these strongholds, the Judahites exceeded the achievements of Joshua. The later association of these towns with the Philistines suggests an anticipation of the victories of David.

1:19 ***The LORD was with the people of Judah, and they took possession of the hill country. But they failed to drive out the people living in the plains, who had iron chariots.*** This verse poses a conundrum. On one hand, "[Yahweh] was with . . . Judah" expresses full divine support and approval, but on the other hand, the expression "failed to drive out the people" suggests failure. That the affirmation of Yahweh's favor should be stressed seems clear from the triple reference in 1:2-19. Yahweh's own promise "I have given . . ." in 1:2 flows into "[Yahweh] gave" in 1:4, culminating in the summary "[Yahweh] was with the people of Judah" in 1:19. This theme of uniform approval hardly leaves room for a failure report, necessitating a closer look at the problematic final clause. Literally translated, 1:19b reads "because (*ki* [TH3588, ZH3954]) not to drive out the people living in the valley." The term translated "plains" in NLT is actually the term *'emeq* [TH6010, ZH6677], typically indicating a flat-bottomed valley, such as the Soreq or Elah valleys or, more directly, the Jezreel valley. The associated reference to iron chariotry is one of only four in the OT. The other three are all situated in the Galilee, and Josh 17:16-18, the closest parallel to the Judges text, refers explicitly to Beth-shan and "the valley of Jezreel." The negation and the infinitive are an open-ended construction permitting the translation "[it was/they were] not to drive out the people" and taking the *ki* adversatively would reasonably allow "The Lord was with Judah . . . but it was not (for them) to drive out the people of the valley." If the writer in ch 1 is alluding to Josh 17, and if "the valley" refers to the Jezreel valley, then the Judean failure is mitigated by placing the locale of their failure far beyond their own allotted responsibility. Indeed, for Judah to have reached so far attests a zeal and determination not seen among the northern tribes.

1:20 ***The town of Hebron was given to Caleb as Moses had promised. And Caleb drove out the people living there, who were descendants of the three sons of Anak.*** The NLT's passive "was given" represents the Hebrew "they gave." But is this impersonal passive the best rendering? Since this section subordinates Caleb's deeds to the larger Judean campaign, the text likely wants to suggest "they [the Judeans] gave Hebron to Caleb."

1:21 ***The tribe of Benjamin, however, failed to drive out the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem. So to this day the Jebusites live in Jerusalem among the people of Benjamin.*** A clear failure notice, this verse reports that despite the capture of Jerusalem by the Judeans reported in 1:8, the Benjaminites failed to retain it. The verse quotes directly from Josh 15:63, except that in Joshua the Judeans, not the Benjaminites, fail to expel the Jebusites from Jerusalem. The tension between the two passages is resolved if we grant that the writer of Judges recognized that Jerusalem, though on the border between Judah and Benjamin, was included within the Benjaminite inheritance and was thus Benjamin's responsibility. By the author's time, Jerusalem was a Judean city. Thus, consistent with the positive portrayal of Judah in ch 1, the author clarifies that Jerusalem's persistence as a Jebusite stronghold was not the fault of Judah during the premonarchic period, but Benjamin (the tribe of Saul).

1:22 ***The descendants of Joseph attacked the town of Bethel, and the LORD was with them.*** "Descendants of Joseph" translates the literal "house of Joseph," a curious reference that appears as a descriptor of Israel only 10 times. In Josh 17:17 it clearly denotes Ephraim and Manasseh, but then in Josh 18:5 the "house of Joseph" is admonished to stay in its

portion in the north, just as Judah should stay in its portion in the south. Thus, "house of Joseph" identifies the north programmatically contrasted with the south, a usage compatible with 1:22-36, where the phrase brackets the whole account of all the northern tribes (cf. 1:35). Subsequently, the expression continues to define the northern tribes as a whole and could allude to the later northern kingdom (2 Sam 19:20; 1 Kgs 11:28). Amos also addressed the northern state as "house of Joseph" (Amos 5:6). While Obad 1:18 seems not to draw the contrast as sharply, as late as Zech 10:6, the "house of Judah" is the natural counterpoint to the "house of Joseph." The expression, used of the premonarchic community, already addresses the nation as two separate communities.

the LORD was with them. This is the last statement of divine approval in 1:1–2:5. Yahweh was "with" the house of Joseph as they attacked Bethel, but the condemnation issued in 2:1-5 suggests that somewhere between 1:22 and 1:36, the divine favor was lost.

1:23 ***They sent men to scout out Bethel.*** The Hebrew term *tur* [TH8446, ZH9365], translated "scout out," finds its most frequent usage (11 occurrences out of 24) in characterizing the mission of the spies in Num 13–14, infamous for having miscarried and become a paradigmatic rebellion. Here it appears rather than the equally common *ragal* [TH7270, ZH8078] (e.g., 18:2, 14, 17; Gen 42:9, 11, 14; Num 21:32; Deut 1:24; Josh 6:22-23, 25). Perhaps in using *tur* the writer wanted to associate the "scouting" of the house of Joseph with the abortive mission of the spies. That the word cannot be entirely or inherently pejorative appears from its use to describe Yahweh's seeking of a place for his people (cf. Deut 1:33; Num 10:33; Ezek 20:6), but the simple literary association still might suggest that the house of Joseph was duplicating an unhappy precedent.

1:23-26 ***(formerly known as Luz). . . . Later the man moved to the land of the Hittites, where he built a town. He named it Luz, which is its name to this day.*** The notation about Bethel being formerly Luz seems odd, since the name change would have been centuries old, being noted in Gen 28:19. Yet the OT notes the continued use of the older name (cf. Gen 35:6; 48:3; Josh 16:2; 18:13). Perhaps 1:23-26 provides an answer. Rather than exterminate the occupants of Canaanite Bethel, as the conquest mandate required, the house of Joseph allowed the betrayer of Luz/Bethel to escape, and he ultimately founded another city by the same name, which the writer notes existed "to this day." Here is the first departure from Israel's mandate in Canaan. Rather than destroy the Canaanite culture, the house of Joseph allowed it to exist, though at a distance—and perhaps not a great distance, since "the land of the Hittites" could refer to close-by Syria, or even the hill country near Bethel (ABD 4.420). Perhaps also the writer hoped to contrast the bold assault of the Judeans (1:1-21) with the conniving of the northerners. This possibility is suggested by the similarity of language between 1:8 and 1:25, both of which speak of striking the city with "the mouth of the sword" and of "dismissing/consigning." In 1:8, Judah is said to consign Jerusalem to the fire; in 1:25, the house of Joseph "consigns" the betrayer to banishment.

1:27 ***Beth-shan, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, Megiddo, and all their surrounding settlements.*** The cities mentioned here constitute a strategic chain of centers defining the Carmel ridge and the barrier it casts across the land, forcing north–south traffic through a limited number of routes. A high, imposing mound at the intersection of the Jordan and Jezreel valleys, Beth-shan served as an Egyptian garrison and home to some high officials, though the principle city in the vicinity during Iron Age I stood a few miles south, on Tel Rehov. An Egyptian inscription of Seti I and a set of anthropoid coffins confirm the Egyptian-Philistine identity of the town. From Beth-shan, the narrow Harod valley moves northwest bounded by Mount Gilboa on the left and Moreh on the right, like the shaft of an arrow-

head whose tip rests on the narrow pass above Yokneam. At Jezreel, the valley suddenly broadens out joining the Carmel ridge on the south at Ibleam and the Nazareth ridge to the north at Mount Tabor. These two edges of the arrowhead converge as the valley moves. Ibleam, Taanach, and Megiddo define this left "edge," and all guard strategic entries from the hills to the southwest into the valley proper. From the time of Thutmose III, Taanach and Megiddo controlled the vast bottomlands of the valley as Pharaonic estates, and they remained in non-Israelite hands until Iron Age II. Roads crossing southwest over the Carmel ridge wound their way to the major coastal highway first at the town of Dor. Thus, vital, strategic sites controlling the flow of all traffic through the Jezreel valley and, therefore, all north–south traffic, lay firmly in non-Israelite hands, separating the Israelite tribes south of the valley from those in the Galilee.

because the Canaanites were determined to stay in that region. The will of the Canaanites stressed here transcended mere stubbornness. Egypt, having momentarily been distracted by the Sea Peoples around 1200 BC, renewed its interest in controlling Canaan in the early twelfth century. In keeping with New Kingdom policy, Egypt controlled Canaan via local rulers whom Egypt either dominated or bought. The Canaanites sought to hold these cities to ensure Egypt an uninterrupted flow of trade and luxury goods through the Jezreel valley and out to the International Coastal Highway, thus also ensuring their own wealth and power under Egyptian sponsorship.

1:28 ***When the Israelites grew stronger, they forced the Canaanites to work as slaves, but they never did drive them completely out of the land.*** In ironic contrast to the dismal failure recorded in 1:27, this verse reports the Israelites reducing some Canaanites to forced labor. Here Israel actually participates in the very social evils from which they themselves were delivered by Yahweh. Moreover, as the Amarna correspondence graphically documents, forced labor characterized the Egyptian-Canaanite management style. It directly contradicted the central ethos of the covenant; the Israelites had begun to operate like their former oppressors and their current enemies.

1:29-30 ***The tribe of Ephraim failed to drive out the Canaanites living in Gezer, so the Canaanites continued to live there among them.*** Gezer occupied a strategic position on the main road running from Jerusalem and towns in the Benjaminite area westward through Upper and Lower Beth Horon, through Gezer, and out toward the coastal highway. This axial crossroad in southern Canaan is mentioned in both Egyptian and Mesopotamian documents. Destroyed, or at least damaged, by Thutmose III, Gezer revived somewhat later and served Egyptian administrative purposes, attested by the Amarna letters. In the same inscription where he claims to have annihilated Israel, Pharaoh Merneptah also boasts of capturing Gezer, which indeed remained non-Israelite until Solomon received it as a wedding present from his Egyptian father-in-law (1 Kgs 9:15-17). So not only was Gezer a point of Israelite failure, it potentially served Egyptian imperial interests through most of the period of the Judges.

1:30 ***The tribe of Zebulun failed to drive out the residents of Kitron and Nahalol.*** These two sites have not been located for certain. Nahalol is likely the same as Nahalal in Josh 19:15, thus equating Kitron with Kattath in that passage. Rainey and Notley (2006:135), following a rabbinic association of Nahalol with later Mahalul, plausibly suggest Nahalal/Nahalol should be equated with modern Tell el-Beida, which, unlike other candidates, is located in the northwest portion of the Jezreel valley where Zebulun's assigned territory lay.

1:31-32 ***The tribe of Asher failed to drive out the residents of Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Aczib, Helbah, Aphik, and Rehob. Instead, the people of Asher moved in among the Canaanites, who controlled the land, for they failed to drive them out.*** The cities noted here lie

on the plain of Acco, which extends northwest of the valley of Jezreel, opening up toward the sea from the narrow, pinched pass above Yokneam. The tribe of Asher's assigned location here along the sea likely contributed to their failure to fulfill their commission. The urban rulers of Canaan, some of whom were involved in seafaring, fretted over their sagging agricultural production due to the heavy demands of pharaoh for tribute and gifts (Na'aman 2005:216-241). Possibly the Asherites found a niche as farmers. Moreover, Stager (1988:233-234) has argued that the Asherites entered into client relationships with Canaanites and their shipping interests (cf. 5:17b). Having become economically enmeshed, even dependent, on the Canaanites, the Asherites were hardly in a position to expel them since in doing so they would be burning their meal ticket! The subordination of Asher emerges from a startling change in phrasing: Rather than the Canaanites remaining as enclaves among the Israelites (cf. 1:21, 29), both Asher and Naphtali moved in among the Canaanites as minority enclaves.

1:33 ***Likewise, the tribe of Naphtali failed to drive out the residents of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath.*** Each of these towns commemorates a Canaanite deity. Beth-shemesh honors the sun-god; Beth-anath extols the Canaanite goddess of war and the hunt, who was also Baal's paramour. The Beth-shemesh noted here is not the town in the southern Shephelah overlooking the Wadi Sorek, but rather sits, with Beth-anath, high up in the remote hills of the upper Galilee, which apparently began to be settled at the onset of Iron Age I. A steep ridge running west from near the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee almost to the coast rises abruptly over 3,000 feet and defines the starting point of these rugged, but beautiful, "heights of Naphtali." For Naphtali to "live among" Canaanites implies cultural submission. That the Canaanites periodically managed to enslave the locals only reinforces the loss of their distinct Israelite ethos. Despite this discouraging report, the city of Kadesh in Naphtali, located northwest of Hazor, became the home of an Israelite hero, Barak, who figures in chs 4–5.

1:34 ***As for the tribe of Dan, the Amorites forced them back into the hill country and would not let them come down into the plains.*** Dan's inheritance fell in the Shephelah, in the vicinity of the Sorek valley. Vigorous resistance forced them to stay in the hills in Zorah and Eshtaol overlooking the rich, red agricultural soil of the valley with its vineyards, famed for their dark red grapes. The Philistines made the Sorek valley an early staging ground for attempting to move into the hill country in their quest to control trade over both the coastal highway and the watershed ridge highway, a quest ultimately bringing them directly into conflict with Israel. Their presence and the contrast between them and the Danites is a theme in the Samson story in chs 13–16. Even (especially?) with a hero like Samson, the Danites ultimately abandoned their divinely appointed territory and moved far north in search of an easier inheritance. Once again, the "house of Joseph" being able to subject the locals to forced labor hardly counts as success by the standards of the conquest.

1:36 ***The boundary of the Amorites ran from Scorpion Pass to Sela and continued upward from there.*** Sadly, this notes the boundary of the Amorites, not the Danites! Moreover, the traditional locations of the places mentioned are southwest of the Dead Sea (cf. Num 34:4; Josh 15:3) and do not fit the locale of 1:34-35 and the vicinity of the Sorek valley. However, the reference to "rock" (*sela'* [TH5554, ZH6153]) in connection with the Danites echoes with the Samson narrative (15:8, 11) in which Samson hides out in "the cleft of the rock (*sela'*) of Etam," in Judean territory. One wonders if "Ascent of Akrabbim" is not a textual corruption for some other expression, now lost to us.

2:1 ***The angel of the LORD.*** This first appearance of the "angel of Yahweh" (2:1, 4) foreshadows his appearance commissioning Gideon (6:11, 12, 21, 22) and announcing

Samson's birth (13:3, 13, 15-18, 20-21). His role cursing those who declined to report for battle (5:23) suggests a role leading the armies of Yahweh.

went up. Heb., *'alah* [TH5927, ZH6590]; it appears in the preceding material solely in the sense of "move out against" militarily. If the sense holds, there is a hostile intent implicit as the angel of Yahweh figuratively "moves out against" the Israelites!

from Gilgal. Gilgal, just a mile northeast of Jericho, served as the base camp of the conquest and the first sanctuary of the Ark in Joshua, marked by a cairn of 12 stones commemorating the crossing of the Jordan (Josh 3–4). Here Joshua encountered the angel of Yahweh and received assurance of victory after he had circumcised the new, wilderness-bred conquest generation on the eve of the attack on Jericho (Josh 5). The victorious Israelites returned to Gilgal after the southern campaign (Josh 10:43) and from here Joshua began the apportionment of the land to the tribes (Josh 14–20) until the sanctuary moved to Shiloh (Josh 21:1-4). Gilgal remained an important religious center on Samuel's "circuit" (1 Sam 7:16), and Saul was named king there (1 Sam 11:14-15). Saul's impatient and presumptuous offering occurred at Gilgal (cf. 1 Sam 10:8; 13:8-15). Gilgal also provided the scene for Saul's rejection as king. A later religious pilgrimage to Gilgal was censured by Amos and Hosea (Hos 4:15; 12:11; Amos 5:5). In Israelite memory, Gilgal remained part of the conquest, summarized by Micah as (lit.) "what happened between Shittim and Gilgal" (Mic 6:5). The name (normally with the definite article) the Gilgal, likely refers to a circle of stones and likely designates a fortified camp. Thus, it would be fitting for Yahweh's angel to launch a sort of military attack for religious failure against the Israelites from this location.

Bokim. See note on 2:5.

said to the Israelites. This is one of three speeches in Judges in which Yahweh or a mediator, as opposed to the narrator, indicts Israel for apostasy.

my covenant with you. Explicit reference to Yahweh's covenant (*berith* [TH1285, ZH1382]) with Israel is rare in Judges, as is much of the semantic field associated with it.

2:2 ***you were not to make any covenants with the people living in this land.*** Covenant-making produced a bond or union between the covenanters. This charge calls for no bonds of cooperation or union of any kind with the inhabitants of the land.

But you disobeyed my command. Why did you do this? The narrative in 1:1-36 makes no reference to any command, nor does it ever censure the tribes who failed to drive out the inhabitants of the land as having done evil, just as the material in Josh 13–22 (from which much of ch 1 derives) refrains from criticism for this lack. But 2:1-5 looks over this process and renders a judgment: The failure of ch 1 is now to be seen as the sin of making a covenant, a bond, with the Canaanites.

2:5 ***So they called the place Bokim (which means "weeping"), and they offered sacrifices there to the LORD.*** Bokim simply means "weepers" and reflects 2:4. The location remains unknown, but the mention of sacrifices implies some connection with the sanctuary, implying the passage notes the transfer of the sanctuary from Gilgal to Bokim. Scholars typically assume this is a site near Bethel, but a transfer of the sanctuary in this context would more likely have been to Shiloh or Shechem. Ironically, the OT speaks of another "Gilgal," a site known in Arabic as *El 'Unuq* near Shechem, Ebal, and Gerizim (Deut 11:26-30). Archaeological survey reveals a hilltop stone circle, a "gilgal," in the vicinity with pottery dating from the 1200s BC and a peculiar cairn of stones at one end, on the long axis (Zertal 1991). Perhaps Bokim refers to this "second" Gilgal. The implications of this identification are noted in the commentary.

COMMENTARY

Judges 1:1–3:6 forms a long, internally diverse introduction that provides both a summary and an analysis of the dynamics at work overall during the period covered by the book. Marshaling divergent materials, the prologue asserts twice unequivocally that after Joshua and the conquest generation died, Israel steadily deteriorated. The introduction tracks the decline in two roughly parallel sections, each devoted to a distinct perspective. First, 1:1–2:5 traces the stalling of the military conquest of the land from south to north, saving any theological critique for the very end. Then 2:6–3:3 returns to the death of Joshua and retraces the same period emphasizing spiritual deterioration. Instead of proceeding geographically, as 1:1–2:5 does, 2:6–3:3 proceeds genealogically, from one generation to the next. Judges 3:5-6 then integrates the two perspectives in a terse summary.

Parallel Structure of Judges 1:1–3:6

	MILITARY AND GEOGRAPHICAL	THEOLOGICAL AND GENERATIONAL
Joshua's Death	Noted in 1:1a	Narrated in 2:6-9
Early Successes	Southern Tribes Canaan Occupied 1:1b-21	Generation I: Covenant Honored 2:7, 10a
Steady Decline	Northern Tribes Canaan Increasingly Resistant 1:22-36	Generation II Covenant Broken 2:10-19
Yahweh's Denunciation	For Compromising the Conquest 2:1-5	For Compromising the Covenant 2:20–3:4
Summary of Consequences	An Unfulfilled Destiny 3:5-6	

This unit also acts as an "overture" to the whole book, articulating emphases that are spelled out in detail in the rest of the book. This prologue or overture also removes any suspense about the book's main point: With Israel militarily impotent and spiritually bankrupt, the story is virtually finished before it begins.

Theologically, 1:1–2:5 explores an explosive and vital question. How could the nation squander its inheritance? How could it be that, having received from Joshua the possession of the Promised Land as the historical realization of the promise and oath of God, Israel would allow that gift to slip through its fingers? How could the successors of Joshua, the heirs of the divine promise, lose their grip on that gift that stood as the goal and apex of the entire work of God narrated from the Creation through the Exodus experience to the conquest? The answer given in this carefully constructed and complex chapter is chilling: Israel frittered away its inheritance a little bit at a time. Before any claims of overt apostasy appear, the text impresses on the reader a process in which the nation simply compromised the divine purpose. Before settling for something *other than* Yahweh's covenant promises, Israel settled for something *less than* Yahweh's covenant promises.

In certain ways 1:1-36 sets up a series of expectations fulfilled in the following stories:

1. Judges 1 asserts Judean/Southern superiority, illustrated preeminently by Othniel. Othniel is the first judge, and fully exemplifies the ideal of the judge.
2. Judges 1:3, 16-20 underscores cooperation, while from 3:12 through the rest of the book, the vision of cooperation will collapse.
3. Judges 1:16 identifies the Kenites as being in league with the Israelites. The note prepares the reader to understand the later actions of Jael, the wife of a Kenite, who killed Sisera (4:21), even though her husband had established a formal relationship with Israel's enemies (cf. 4:11,17b). She thus exemplified the former Kenite loyalty to Israel.
4. The reference to the "city of palms" in 1:16 possibly resonates with the reference to Eglon's oppressing Israel from the "city of palms" in 3:13.
5. The slur on Benjamin (1:21) possibly sets up a return to the questionable status of Benjamin in chapters 19–21.
6. The south-north movement in 1:1-36 generally corresponds to the course of the narrative in 3:7–16:31.
7. The pattern of deterioration set out in 1:1-36 is duplicated in 3:7–16:31.
8. Both 1:1-36 and 3:7–16:31 conclude with the tribe of Dan as the topic.
9. The narrative about Dan in chapter 18 appears to resume about where 1:34-35 leaves off: Dan is expelled from its inheritance in 1:34-35. In 18:1-2, Dan is in search of an inheritance.
10. The description of the "weepers" in 2:1-5 possibly matches the repeated weeping at Bethel in chapters 19–21 (especially 20:18-26). Proposals to relate 2:1-5 to Bethel would, if correct, strengthen this linkage. Judges 2:1-5 concludes a unit beginning with an inquiry (1:1-2) that is distinctively matched in 20:18-26.

Prologue (1:1–3). In addition to introducing the book as a whole, this section serves as the prologue to 1:4-21. The temporal formula *after the death of* also appears in Joshua 1:1 and 2 Samuel 1:1, which begin their narratives with reference to the death of Moses and Saul, respectively. The formulas demarcate a period from the death of Joshua to the death of Saul, consigning Saul to the premonarchic era. These references likely identify the eras of the premonarchic period for one of the earlier strata of the Deuteronomistic History since the formula is not similarly used again to begin a narrative block in the Deuteronomistic History. The only other similar usage is Genesis 25:11, in which the notation of Abraham's death provides a comparable transition to the next block of that book. The campaign divinely initiated in 1:1-3 unfolds in 1:4-8.

Judges 1:1-3 strikes three keynotes that resonate through the entire book of Judges. First, it dates the narrative "after the death of Joshua." More than a mere chronological notice, this reference establishes an intertextuality with the book of Joshua that pervasively shapes 1:1–2:5. Placing the events of chapter 1 after Joshua's death generates strong tensions because much of the material in chapter 1 derives directly from Joshua 13–24 and actually occurred during Joshua's lifetime. However

the historical issue is resolved, this tension establishes a canonical linkage to Joshua and reveals the writer's main theological evaluation of the era from Joshua's death to that of Saul. By making this explicit tie back to Joshua's lifetime, the writer holds up a standard. Joshua affirms the complete victory of Israel (e.g., Josh 11:23; 13:1, 14; 21:43-45), in which context Joshua 13–21 summarizes Israel's successful taking of the land, despite some territories identified as not fully under Israelite control. Other than the Othniel passage, chapter 1 excerpts only the incomplete possession reports and sets Israel's actions *after* the fulfillment of that promise. This shift in the context of the material generates the question of how faithfully Israel built on that sound beginning. The failure passages in Joshua 13–21 constitute a portrayal of the remaining task: "Yet more land" remained to be taken. In Joshua, these passages are marginalia to the overarching fact of Israel's triumph in Canaan. But in chapter 1, the accumulation of all the failure reports dramatically shifts the perception of their importance. Thus chapter 1, for the reader familiar with Joshua, has framed the time after Joshua's death as probationary, and sets out the failure reports as a scorecard.

Another function served by the death formula is to define an era from the death of Moses to the death of Joshua. That era was characterized by faithful fulfillment of the covenant requirements and promises. The death of Joshua now inaugurates another period that will run to the death of Saul. That era's crises of character and leadership contrast sharply with the time of Joshua. Already, the writer sets the stage for a clue to his assessment of the period covered by Judges: The oracular inquiry of 1:1, "which tribe should go first to attack the Canaanites?" resonates with the inquiry near the end of the book when, once again, the Israelites inquire who should go up against the enemy (20:18), where once again, the answer is "Judah is to go first." The measure of the historical process between the two passages may be seen by the enemies named: In 1:1, the enemy is the Canaanite, but in 20:18, the enemy is a fellow Israelite tribe. Again, the inquiry in 1:1 leads to success, but in 20:18 the victory over Benjamin only produces a more painful and complex circumstance.

The second note struck by 1:1-3 is the primacy of Judah, enunciated by none other than Yahweh himself, who declares Judah the custodian of the promise and offers victory as confirmation. The book's paucity of references to Judah throws this surprising claim into sharp relief. The writer will go on to expose the failures and sins of the northern tribes as a prelude to advocating monarchy, with strong hints at a Judean center of gravity for that institution. Emphasis on Judean primacy includes the third note, the stress on intertribal cooperation. Judah asks Simeon's assistance, offering to reciprocate. The rest of 1:1–2:5 unfolds these two themes in two contrasting sections. Judges 1:4-21 narrates a victorious Judean campaign and emphasizes tribal cooperation, but in 1:22-36 the separate northern tribes encounter only increasing failure and frustration as they lose their grip on the Promised Land.

Victory for Judah (1:4–21). This section glorifies Judah by relating an attack climaxing in the burning of Jerusalem. The defeated enemy, Adoni-bezek (1:7), identifies Judah as the arm of divine justice and characterizes his own defeat and dismemberment as just retribution for his own cruelty. The burning of Jerusalem (1:8) confirms Yahweh's promise of Judean victory, but contrasts with Joshua 15:63 where Judah fails to control Jerusalem. Judges 1:21 quotes Joshua 15:63 but substitutes Benjamin

for Judah, suggesting a Judean capture of the city (1:8) followed by Benjaminite forfeiture (1:21). David later recaptured the city as his capital (2 Sam 6). (See notes on 1:8 and 1:21.)

Verses 9-15 follow the victorious Judeans down to the foothills and Negev. Othniel personifies victorious Judah. His genealogy (1:13) epitomizes his exemplary role. A three-generation pattern spans the period from the Exodus to the judges. The exodus generation rebelled and died in the wilderness, leaving only Caleb and Joshua to see the Promised Land. The second generation, bred in the wilderness, was faithful and inherited the land. Judges 2:10 brands the third apostate. Othniel, as Caleb's young nephew, represents the faithful conquest generation in the unfaithful postconquest period (see note on 1:13). Rising to Caleb's challenge, he shows he has the "righteous stuff." The story about Acsah (1:14-15) further stresses the role of Othniel, linking him with the courage and determination of Caleb.

Verses 16-21 list further triumphs bracketed by references to cooperation among the tribes—the realization of the theme announced in 1:3. Cooperation entailed no loss of independence, and Judah kept faith with those who assisted: The Kenites (1:16) cooperate with Judah, yet retain their autonomy; Judah keeps its promise and assists Simeon in conquering its own inheritance (1:17; cf. 1:3) and keeps faith with Moses's command, awarding Hebron to Caleb (1:20). Judean victories (1:18-19) extend even to Philistine cities. This success is remarkable, since the rest of the Old Testament shows a Philistine monopoly on power broken only by David. Judah's activity thus foreshadows David's triumphs.

Only two failures appear. First, failure to capture the plains (1:19) possibly involves an area beyond Judah's allotment, since the only "valley" mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament in connection with "iron chariots" is Jezreel in the north. Joshua 17:16-18 treats "iron chariots" as a licit explanation for failing to defeat the Canaanites. The Hebrew text of 1:19 is better translated "they were not to drive the people from the plains" (see note). Where the Judeans were not successful, they were exonerated. The second failure involves Jerusalem, which was captured by Judah in 1:8, but forfeited by Benjamin in 1:21.

Four literary features embody the section's emphasis. (1) Judah's victories evoke comparison with Joshua's exploits, and follow a geographical pattern comparable to Joshua's: Victories in central Canaan lead to a southern campaign and possibly to northern efforts. Judah is Joshua *redivivus*! (2) Two references to Moses (1:16, 20) assert Judah's continuity with the founder of the Hebrew faith. (3) The focus on Hebron (1:9-10, 20) and Jerusalem (1:7-8, 21), key cities in David's reign, and the Judean foreshadowing of David's achievements, link a pro-Davidic orientation to the pro-Judean tone noted above. (4) Benjamin's forfeiture of Jerusalem (1:21) could censure Saul's tribe, also a pro-Davidic sentiment. Thus, 1:1-21 identifies Judah with Joshua, Moses, and David. Judah and David's line are the true heirs of the Promised Land.

Achievements of the House of Joseph (1:22–36). The next section narrates the achievements of the "descendants [lit., house] of Joseph" (1:22, 35), a general expression here embracing the non-Judean tribes. The section begins with Bethel (1:22-26) and ends with Dan (1:34), the two sacred cities of the northern kingdom (cf. 1 Kgs

12:25-33), in contrast to the focus on Hebron and Jerusalem in 1:1-21. Verses 22-36 display progressive military failure. Victory at Bethel (1:22-26) gives way to a victory qualified by the continuing presence of Canaanites (1:27-28). Quoting Joshua 17:11-13, Judges 1:27-28 emphasizes Manasseh's failure by rearranging the Joshua passages to place failure notices at the beginning and end of the report, and suggest the blameworthiness of that failure by removing the "could not" of Joshua 17:12. With Ephraim and Zebulun (1:29-30, with 1:29 quoting Josh 16:10), the Canaanites remain in enclaves among the Hebrews. Asher and Naphtali, however, live in enclaves surrounded by the Canaanites (1:31-33). The tide had clearly turned against the northern tribes. Finally, the Danites (1:34-35) are forced out of most of the land assigned to them, their destiny left hanging until chapter 18. This progressive failure corresponds to a geographical movement; the gradually deepening failure plots a steady northern movement, associating northern tribes with failure. Additionally, in contrast to the cooperation evident in 1:1b-21, the staccato catalogue of isolated northern tribes gives no hint of cooperation. Judges 1:22-36, therefore, contrasts starkly with 1:4-21, reinforcing the claim that Judah was the rightful bearer of the divine promise.

It should be noted that 1:27-36 continues the pattern of quoting from Joshua, with less restructuring. In Joshua, these cities constitute a residuum, a margin that establishes the task and challenge of the next generation (cf. Josh 23:5-13). Judges 1, by identifying the events as "after the death of Joshua" and by citing these passages, serves as a report card, documenting the degree to which the post-Joshua generation fulfilled its mission. Thus Judges 1:27-28 cites Joshua 17:11-13, and Judges 1:29 adapts Joshua 16:10. Judges 1:30-35 does not directly quote Joshua, but the order of the tribes—Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan—is found in no list of the tribes except that found in Joshua 19:10-51. Even there, Issachar intervenes between the first two tribes. Judges 1:34-36 also bears close comparison with Joshua 19:40-48. The second half of chapter 1 thus extends in detail the chapter's geographical orientation, moving steadily north. Intentional geographical ordering of material is well known from Assyrian display inscriptions.[1]

This northward movement embraces the entire chapter. It begins with Judah and Simeon. Simeon, according to Joshua 19:9, had its territory within Judah. Judges 1:21 then moves to Benjamin, who occupied the diamond-shaped plateau immediately north of Judah. Next the writer speaks in 1:22-26 of the "descendants of Joseph," which traditionally refers to Ephraim and Manasseh. He appears here, however, to consider all the northern tribes as the "descendants of Joseph," judging from the framing reference in 1:35b. Manasseh's mention before Ephraim in 1:27-29 is the only point in the sequence that does not strictly move northward, since Ephraim was south of Manasseh. Although Dan had been assigned land in the south, they migrated to the far north (ch 18), thus appearing last in the list. In a skilled literary move, 1:34-35a leaves Dan's fate uncertain as the tribe is still without an inheritance, creating an arc of tension resolved only by the resumption of this issue in chapter 18. Throughout, the passages cited from Joshua are altered, sometimes slightly, other times significantly, to focus the success or failure of the tribes, stressing the specifics of the failure of the tribe noted, followed by a statement of the results.

The Lord's Messenger Comes to Bokim (2:1–5). This section brings the first part of the prologue to a conclusion by depicting the angel of the Lord moving against Israel. The term "went up" (Heb., *'alah* [TH5927, ZH6590]) appears repeatedly in 1:1-36 denoting military assault; here, it also implies hostile intent. The angel's speech in 2:1b-3 bristles with hostility, branding the failures of 1:1-36 as breaches of the covenant. This condemnation comes as a surprise, since neither idolatry nor any clear charge of sin appear in 1:1-36. Judges 2:1-5 unmasks the "failure" of chapter 1 as sin by omission. If the identification of Bokim with the "other" Gilgal near Shechem is correct (see note on 2:1), then the angel's path from Gilgal to Bokim embraces the full movement of the sanctuary in Joshua from Gilgal (Josh 4:18-19) to Shechem (Josh 24), adding to the poignancy of this unit's main point: The era of Joshua is long gone. The despair and weeping with which the first section of the prologue concludes augurs ill for the story to come. The sacrifices closing the paragraph are thus vacant gestures.

This chapter provides a paradigm of compromise and failure. It explores the degrees by which Israel's mission was eroded and the inexorable process inaugurated by compromise. Most chilling is the fact that, though no explicit intention to compromise the covenant is ever expressed by Israel in chapter 1, the angelic indictment of 2:1-5 clearly brands their failure as grievous sin. Compromise, by its very nature, never announces itself as sin; but in its subtle degrees and shades, it undercuts the entire mission and life of the community of faith.

ENDNOTE

1. For specific information, see A. K. Grayson, "Histories and Historians of the Ancient Near East: Assyria and Babylonia," *Orientale* 49 (1980):152; H. Tadmor, "The Historical Inscriptions of Adad-Nirari III," *Iraq* 35 (1973):141.

◆ B. Fractured Covenant (2:6–3:6)

6After Joshua sent the people away, each of the tribes left to take possession of the land allotted to them. 7And the Israelites served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the leaders who outlived him—those who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel.

8Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110. 9They buried him in the land he had been allocated, at Timnath-serah* in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

10After that generation died, another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the LORD or remember the mighty things he had done for Israel.

11The Israelites did evil in the LORD's sight and served the images of Baal. 12They abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They went after other gods, worshiping the gods of the people around them. And they angered the LORD. 13They abandoned the LORD to serve Baal and the images of Ashtoreth. 14This made the LORD burn with anger against Israel, so he handed them over to raiders who stole their possessions. He turned them over to their enemies all around, and they were no longer able to resist them. 15Every time Israel went out to battle, the LORD fought against them, causing them to be defeated, just as he had warned. And the people were in great distress.

Ruth

JASON DRIESBACH

INTRODUCTION TO *Ruth*

THE MOTTO "pay it forward" espouses an unselfish, others-oriented virtue that resonates with the biblical teachings that we are to love God, neighbor, and foreigner (Lev 19:18, 33-34; Deut 6:5), and that in serving those in need, we serve the Lord Jesus himself (Matt 25:40, 45). The book of Ruth presents an illustration of such virtue that also offers a window into the synergy between human and divine purposes. It further constitutes an inspirational reminder that the Lord often has greater plans for our actions than what we will see in our earthly lifetimes—after all, neither Ruth nor Naomi nor Boaz lived to see the reign of their descendant David.

In the book of Ruth, the plot revolves around one major problem, namely that of Naomi's empty and bitter life (cf. 1:5 and 4:14-16). Everything else that happens in the book is tied to the development and resolution of this problem. Naomi's life is stricken by tragedy at the outset of the story; the loss of her husband and sons while living in a foreign land resulted not only in personal anguish, but in poverty and hardship in her old age. The characters that appear and events that follow lead to a reversal of that tragedy. In the course of those events, the character of Ruth stands out, and for this reason the book is quite appropriately named for her (4:15). In highlighting the qualities of certain characters and recounting few direct actions by the Lord, the narrative also communicates a healthy perspective of the cooperation of the divine and human: There is a beautiful relationship between our human responsibility to live God-honoring lives, doing good for one another, and God's transcendent plans being worked out—whether we're conscious of it or not. Sometimes it is only in hindsight that we are able to gain a perspective like that of the apostle Paul, "I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God who was working through me by his grace" (1 Cor 15:10b).

AUTHOR, DATE, AND PURPOSE

Like most literature of the ancient Near East, the book of Ruth gives no hint as to the name of its author. Rabbinic tradition (*b. Bava Batra* 14b-15a) suggested Samuel was the author, but it is difficult to reconcile the timing of Samuel's death (1 Sam 28:3), before David's ascent to the throne, with the perspective of the book's author, which views the days of the judges as an already completed period (1:1), assumes the fame of David (4:17-22), and finds it necessary to comment on ancient practices for its readers (4:7). Other theories have been ventured, but in fact, the author of this biblical book is best left unnamed. From the book, it seems clear that the author was a skilled literary artist (see discussion of literary style below), which

implies a relatively high level of education. This and the idea that the purpose of the book is connected to defending David's lineage has led many to suggest that a preexilic author of Ruth must have been a member of the royal court, a distinct possibility. Hubbard's (1988:24) suggestion that the author may have been a woman is best regarded as "a possible inference" since men, too, write stories with female protagonists and vice versa.

The inclusion of David in the genealogy (4:17, 22) points to the fact that the book of Ruth was not written until after David was king. But how long after David was king? Some have suggested the early days of the monarchy in Israel, or near the time when the monarchy divided (Nielsen 1997:28). Others have suggested that Ruth was written after the Exile, in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (cf. Weiser 1961:304), or even as late as around 200–100 BC (cf. Zenger 1986).

The mostly subjective arguments put forth in attempting to date the book form a veritable rats' nest. Many of them can be turned on their heads by one's opponents, and others admittedly rest on particular assumptions. As an example: In my opinion, the peaceful imagery of the book of Ruth does not seem to reflect the upheaval or the reconstruction efforts of the postexilic period. Its tone rather seems to reflect a peaceful time of consolidation of the Davidic dynasty—something I would associate with the reign of Solomon. But there were naturally peaceful times within both the postexilic and preexilic periods, and other Davidic kings besides Solomon enjoyed periods of peace; so the assumption of a Solomonic date would be unfounded. Other arguments are more complex but no less subjective.

Bush (1996:18-30) argues that diachronic changes in biblical Hebrew can be used objectively to arrive at a time frame for this book's composition, and he offers an excellent presentation of what criteria he bases his analysis on. But in contrast to this, Nielsen (1997:29) remarks, "Attempts to prove a later date, based on certain Aramaisms or an archaic style or current legal usage, have slowly crumbled, and recent research generally agrees on a preexilic date." The result of Bush's analysis (1996:30) places the book anywhere from the late preexilic period to the early postexilic period, leaving open perhaps the most pressing question of the date (namely, pre- vs. postexilic). Bush (cf. Matthews 2004:209) opts for an early postexilic date based on his assessment that 4:7 (a single verse with three notable late features) is the author's writing, and not an explanatory comment by a later editor or scribe, but he concedes that "any attempt to narrow the possible range [for the book's date] can only be very tentative" (1996:30). Thus, even the most objective methods available at present leave the date of the book somewhat debatable, with a mixture of features that can be variously explained (see Hornkohl, forthcoming).

Entwined with the question of date is the question of the book's purpose—the conceived purpose may be either used to argue for a particular date or derived from one's assumptions about the book's date. For many years, critical scholars agreed that Ruth had been written in the postexilic period, in the time of Ezra. They suggest that Ruth was intended as a response to the issue of mixed marriages at that time (Ezra 10; Neh 13:23-27; cf. Deut 23:3-4) and that it either contradicted Ezra's ruling or advocated a softer stance toward mixed marriages than what Ezra or Nehemiah put forth (e.g., Weiser 1961:304; cf., more recently, Matthews 2004:212). Ruth cer-

tainly does involve a mixed marriage, and a notable one at that! But the book is not marked by polemical comments or application to the marriages of other Israelites or Jews; it, instead, concludes with a focus on David and his family line. For this reason a number of scholars see the origin of the book as a defense of David's non-Israelite heritage (which could possibly have been used to argue he was unfit for the throne, or that his descendants were unfit; cf. *Ruth Rabbah* to 4:18). Thus, the book would have been written sometime late in David's reign or in the reign of another king in his line. It is not impossible, however, that even in the postexilic era the purpose of defending David's ancestry would have seemed relevant—in light of the events of Ezra 10, it might have seemed useful to show that David's Moabite ancestor, Ruth, had been an exceptional case. (It is similarly notable that the Targum to Ruth and *Ruth Rabbah* elaborate on Ruth as a righteous proselyte.) The book of Ruth, however, is a subtle and artistic literary work, and as a result, the precise force of the proposed, implicit argument in favor of David is open to interpretation. And the book's favor for David certainly does not take on a polemic tone. This difficulty in assessing the exact purpose of the book again makes it difficult to draw conclusions as to the book's date.

Additional suggestions as to the purpose of the book are catalogued by Trible, whose comments I quote at length (ABD 5.846):

> *Attempts to specify a single purpose falter in light of the book's richness and complexity. Many levels of meaning intertwine—social, political, religious, and aesthetic. A representative list includes: to maintain Israelite customs, inculcate legal duties, integrate law and daily life, legitimate David and his monarchy, tell a good story, encourage proselytes, promote universalism over against nationalism, elevate the virtues of friendship and loyalty, glorify family ties, preserve women's traditions, and witness to God at work. Two approaches, however are best avoided: to interpret the book as protest literature and to relate its purpose to one specific historical setting. Neither in tone nor in content is it polemical, and the date is uncertain.*

Taking Trible's comments to heart, it seems best to do no more than briefly highlight two concepts of purpose that I find most useful in understanding and applying the book as a whole. The first is a modification of various views that emphasize the book's message about David (particularly derived from Hubbard's expression of this view), and the second is related to the combination of human and divine activity in all spheres of life, which is reminiscent of the patriarchal narratives. Other important elements in the story will be highlighted in the discussion of Major Themes below and throughout the commentary.

In his description of the purpose of the book of Ruth, Hubbard points out many shared motifs with the patriarchal narratives and says that Ruth's purpose is to show that "the same divine guidance which led Israel's ancestors has brought David on the scene. His kingdom is their successor in God's divine plan" (Hubbard 1988:41). His statement is accurate; the various themes in the story, however balanced, ultimately seem to feed into this idea when faced with the question "so what?" From the perspective of the Torah, the monarchy is hinted at (Gen 17:6, 16; 35:11; cf. Gen 49:8-12), but the perspective of Ruth and the direct connection to David are important in elucidating this element of Israel's identity as God's people.

Hubbard (1988:42) later goes on to say that the book's purpose was political, aimed at winning popular acceptance of David's rule (ostensibly in David or Solomon's time). While this is quite possible, it is probably more useful to limit the conception of this purpose in Ruth to the idea of showing the Davidic dynasty's theological and historical continuity with the patriarchs. As mentioned above, while many commentators connect the book's purpose to David, not all are agreed on its exact import or date—and as Trible emphasizes, this is best avoided. For while the connection between David and the patriarchs could well have gained David popular acceptance in his rule, there are other circumstances in which this might be a goal. For example, if one conjectures an exilic or postexilic setting, the validity of the monarchy might be questioned since it no longer existed. Some might wonder if it had all been a big mistake. In such a scenario, the book of Ruth would have reaffirmed the Lord's provision and plan for David's rule—perhaps even reaffirming messianic expectations. Its message would have been that the postexilic Jewish community should look to David as an example of the Lord's provision for them and as a sign of his intent to fulfill his promises.

In addition to forging a theological connection between the patriarchs and the Davidic dynasty, the book of Ruth also invites readers to compare their lives—their tragedies and their blessings, their faith, and their actions—to those of its characters. In this way, it would seem that an additional purpose of the book is to inspire its readers to virtuous actions based on faith in Yahweh, the God of Israel. This purpose plays off of the ideas of custom and law but also transcends them. Even as readers reflect on actions they may find questionable or wrong, they are driven to reassess their own virtue and their own concepts of virtue. Like the patriarchal narratives, no moral judgments are made by the narrator, and human doings are left a bit messy as the story rolls along. (Though unlike the patriarchal narratives, the qualities of the main characters do not change, and the extent of the ambiguity of their actions is more limited.) But the reader is invited to consider God's hand in the results and to reflect on his grace as well as his justice.

SETTING

The events recounted in Ruth happened "in the days when the judges ruled in Israel." Based on the genealogy at the end of the book (4:21-22), one might be tempted to conclude that these events happened toward the end of the judges period. With Solomon's completion of the Temple in Jerusalem in 967 BC (putting his accession around 970 BC) and the genealogy suggesting that Boaz and Ruth lived perhaps only two generations before David (cf. 2 Sam 5:4), it might be estimated that the events of the book would have occurred around 1100 BC. But we cannot be sure since no mention is made of specific events or characters from the judges period, such as the civil war with Benjamin (Judg 19–21), Samson (Judg 13–16), Eli and Samuel (1 Sam 1–4), and so forth. Moreover, the genealogical tradition in Matthew 1:5 could be taken to suggest that Boaz may have lived quite early in the judges period since he is the "son" of Rahab, from the time of Joshua (cf. Josh 2). In fact, the small number of names given for the generations from Rahab's era to David's indicate that the genealogy must have gaps (as is known from other

genealogies in the Bible), and it is unclear where these gaps are. In sum, then, it is difficult to assert any more specific date for the events of Ruth than "the days when the judges ruled." A more specific correlation was evidently not of great importance to the author's work.

The "days of the judges" refers to a period after Israel had settled in the Promised Land and before they had a king, a period noted in sacred history as a time when "all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes" (Judg 17:6; 21:25). Naomi, Ruth, Boaz, Obed, and Jesse lived in the period of the judges. The period of the judges was politically turbulent, at one point devolving into civil war. The leaders of the time were often hamstrung by their own lack of character and integrity (e.g., Samson), and the people again and again fell into idolatry (e.g., Judg 2:11; 3:7, 12). In contrast to this, the only crisis in the events of Ruth is a famine, and little attention is given to it except as it pertains to the movement of the characters from Israel to Moab and back. Against this backdrop, the characters and tone of Ruth stand out as calm, orderly, and upright. A simple, rural dignity seems to pervade the little town of Bethlehem—life is demanding and rustic, and there is danger, but society is unified in common values, and people look out for each other. This is unexpected for readers familiar with the stories of Judges and causes the virtues of Ruth's main characters, as well as the evidence of God's ongoing, purposeful providence, to stand out against the images of moral and religious chaos and accompanying judgment that dominate the book of Judges.

CANONICITY AND TEXTUAL HISTORY

The canonicity of the book of Ruth has long been established and is rarely, if ever, questioned (cf. *b. Meggilah* 7a). In Jewish tradition, Ruth is one of the five Megilloth (five "scrolls" read annually on certain holidays) and is always read at the Festival of Weeks (Pentecost). Ruth's scenes of harvesters and gleaners correspond nicely to this joyous harvest festival. In the Hebrew Bible, Ruth is always included in the Writings, usually as the first of the Megilloth, though other traditions have suggested that it should stand at the beginning of the Writings, ahead of Psalms (probably for a chronological arrangement of the Writings; cf. *b. Bava Batra 14b*), or as the second of the Megilloth, after the Song of Songs. The Septuagint, however, places Ruth chronologically: It is after Judges (the time in which the events are set) and before 1 Samuel (where we read further about the last judges, Eli and Samuel, and about David, whom Ruth introduces in 4:17, 22). This is the order followed by English translations. It is interesting to note that in the most common order found in the Hebrew Bible, Ruth follows Proverbs, which ends with extended imagery of a wise woman (Prov 31), and precedes Song of Songs, a collection of overtly romantic poems. This is quite apropos since the character of Ruth is generally portrayed as an admirable blend of wisdom and romance.

The earliest Hebrew text of Ruth we have is from the discoveries near the Dead Sea at Qumran. The texts are incomplete, and what remains of them contains only very minor discrepancies with the Masoretic Text. It is assumed that the text largely agreed with MT, but we cannot be sure, since in the extant passages, there is little opposition between the MT and the Septuagint. In fact, the Septuagint text of Ruth

is rather literal overall and generally agrees with the Masoretic Text. Some of its notable differences will be mentioned in the notes on various verses. The Syriac translation of Ruth is freer than the Septuagint, and it is therefore difficult to use it to assert the existence of another version of Ruth. In sum, the witness to the text of the book is generally unified.

LITERARY STYLE

Ruth recounts historical events in a stylized way that is brief and neatly packaged. It has been called a "novella" by some and a "historical short story" by others. In my opinion, the best characterization of the genre is that of Bush (1996:46), who calls it an "edifying short story." In short, this label suggests that Ruth is a short but somewhat complex story that revolves around the resolution of a main problem. Further, it is a story in which the characters' essential traits are revealed through few events, and they are not greatly changed or developed in the course of the story's events (cf. Bush 1996:41-42; Humphreys 1985:84-85). The result is a story where each character manifests a signature quality, which essentially functions as a theme (see Major Themes), and these qualities play out in the resolution of the main problem. In the case of Ruth, that main problem can be called Naomi's emptiness, or the impending cessation of Elimelech's family line (1:3-5, 19-22).

One element in the style of the book of Ruth is its use of various motifs found in the patriarchal narratives. As suggested above, this subtly contributes to the reader's sense that the events involving David's ancestors are an important continuation of the story of the patriarchs. Hubbard (1988:40) lists these motifs as follows:

1. Migration because of famine, which advances God's plan (1:1; cf. Gen 12; 26)
2. A family's survival is endangered by a mother's childlessness (1:5; cf. Gen 16–17; 25:21; 29:31; 30)
3. A foreigner's voluntary, permanent immigration to a new land (Ruth, 1:17; 2:11; Abram, Gen 12:1-5)
4. Protection of the woman elected to bear the son of destiny (Ruth, 2:8-9, 22; Sarah, Gen 12:17; 20:3, 6; Rebekah, Gen 26:7-11; cf. Dinah, Gen 34:1-31)
5. The betrothal-type scene of the chosen wife (for Ruth, see 2:20; cf. Rebekah, Gen 24)
6. Female sexual initiative overcoming male inaction to provide an heir (Boaz and Ruth, 3:7-15; cf. Judah and Tamar, Gen 38)
7. The purchase of property as a result of a death (4:3, 9; cf. Gen 23; 33:19)
8. The integration of the foreign immigrants into their new homeland (2:10-12; 3:11; 4:10-11, 13; cf. Gen 14; 20; 21:22-34; 23; 26; 34)
9. Marriage to a foreigner later leading to a ruling family (David, 4:13, 17-22; cf. Perez, Gen 38; Ephraim and Manasseh, Gen 41:45, 50-52; 48)
10. The divine gift of conception providing the son(s) of destiny (4:12-13; cf. Sarah, Gen 21:1-2; Rebekah, Gen 25:21; Leah, Gen 29:31; 30:17; Rachel, Gen 30:22-23; cf. Hannah 1 Sam 1:19-20; Samson's mother, Judg 13)
11. The conquest of obstacles impeding emergence of an important family [essentially, a sum of many of the other points]

tions about how a certain system will play out in reality. Even a patriarchal system remains equally dependent on both men and women to function as it should, and even God's all-powerful sovereignty is not routinely expressed apart from human activity. One cannot press such an analogy too far, but it should at least highlight the fact that a desirable harmony can exist in these two spheres in a more mysterious and fluid sense than might be expected.

OUTLINE

I. Tragedy Strikes (1:1-22)
   A. Naomi's Bereavement (1:1-6)
   B. Naomi's Bitter Prospects and Ruth's Risk (1:7-19a)
   C. Naomi's Emptiness in Bethlehem (1:19b-22)
II. Ruth Provides for Naomi (2:1-23)
   A. Ruth Happens upon the Field of Boaz (2:1-3)
   B. Boaz Blesses Ruth in the Name of the Lord (2:4-17)
   C. Naomi Begins to See the Lord's Provision (2:18-23)
III. Naomi Seeks to Provide for Ruth (3:1-18)
   A. Naomi Counts on Boaz's Integrity and Kindness (3:1-5)
   B. Ruth Enacts the Plan and Boaz Responds Favorably and Immediately (3:6-15)
   C. Ruth Reports the Outcome to Naomi (3:16-18)
IV. Boaz Provides for Elimelech's Family (4:1-22)
   A. Boaz Successfully Gains Ruth and Pledges to Provide for Elimelech's Family (4:1-12)
   B. The Lord Fulfills Naomi by Providing an Heir for Elimelech's Family (4:13-17)
   C. Elimelech's Family Is Part of the Line of David (4:18-22)

COMMENTARY ON

Ruth

I. Tragedy Strikes (1:1–22)

A. Naomi's Bereavement (1:1–6)

In the days when the judges ruled in Israel, a severe famine came upon the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah left his home and went to live in the country of Moab, taking his wife and two sons with him. 2The man's name was Elimelech, and his wife was Naomi. Their two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in the land of Judah. And when they reached Moab, they settled there.

3Then Elimelech died, and Naomi was left with her two sons. 4The two sons married Moabite women. One married a woman named Orpah, and the other a woman named Ruth. But about ten years later, 5both Mahlon and Kilion died. This left Naomi alone, without her two sons or her husband.

6Then Naomi heard in Moab that the LORD had blessed his people in Judah by giving them good crops again. So Naomi and her daughters-in-law got ready to leave Moab to return to her homeland.

NOTES

1:1 ***In the days when the judges ruled.*** Some see in this setting, coupled with the return of a small portion of an Israelite family to the land and the virtue of the main characters of Ruth, the idea of a faithful remnant for Israel (cf. Gen 45:7; 1 Kgs 19:14, 18; 2 Kgs 19:30-31; Isa 10:20-21; Rom 11:3-4). But the concept of God's faithful remnant amid the turbulent Judges period is not a theme emphasized by the narrative of Ruth—it is not the message of the book. Ruth's story does, however, illustrate this lesson seen elsewhere in Scripture. Like Elijah's despairing challenge to God (1 Kgs 19), many faithful Israelites may have wondered during the period of the judges whether they were alone and whether there was any hope for Israel as a covenant people. Like God's response to Elijah, the testimony of the book of Ruth reminds us that even in a chaotic and ungodly society, the Lord is perfectly capable of accomplishing his will and of preserving faithful people for himself.

Bethlehem. The town name *beth lekhem* [TH1035, ZH1107] is literally "house of bread" and probably means something like "storehouse." Bethlehem in Judah is located about five miles south of Jerusalem. Joshua 19:15 lists another town of the same name in Zebulun. The town name provides not only a link to David (cf. 1 Sam 17:12), but also a little irony because famine has struck the town. It will eventually be the rural farming setting for the later scenes of harvest (chs 2–3).

went to live in the country of Moab. Moab was located north of the wadi Zered (or, wadi el-Hesa), which empties into the south end of the Dead Sea, and extended north of the wadi Arnon (or, wadi el-Mujib), at times as far as Heshbon (cf. Num 21:12; Deut 2:13-14). Its capital was in Kir-Moab (or Kir-hareseth, modern-day Kerak in Jordan). Sakenfeld

(1999:19-20) finds Moab an odd choice for seeking food because Israel's past history with Moab would seem to paint it as inhospitable (see Deut 23:3-4). Indeed, the Qumran literature has portrayals of the Moabites as enemies of Israel (4QMMT 40-53; 4QFlor 1:4). Sakenfeld therefore suggests that this peculiarity could have functioned as a hook to draw readers into the story.

The verb "live" (*gur* [TH1481, ZH1591]) may indicate a temporary stay (e.g., Gen 21:34; 2 Kgs 8:1-2; Jer 44:14), as a "sojourn" (cf. NASB) or a permanent residence (cf. Exod 6:4; Num 15:14; Deut 26:5; 2 Sam 4:3; Jer 49:18, 33; Ezek 47:22-23). It is unclear what Elimelech's intent was in migrating, but the decreased rights belonging to people of immigrant status, along with the reason given as a famine, suggest that this measure was originally intended as temporary. Some have viewed Elimelech's move to Moab as a disobedient act because it involved leaving the Promised Land; in this case, his death (1:3) is viewed as a divine judgment. (*Ruth Rabbah* 2:10 suggests that God similarly judged Elimelech's two sons, but after patiently waiting for their repentance.) But the text says so little about Elimelech or his sons that it is difficult to argue that this is its emphasis. Further, there is precedent for the Lord's watching over those who seek food in foreign lands during famine (cf. Gen 12:10; 42:1-2; 46:1-4; 47:4). On the other hand, Abraham and Jacob's sojourns in foreign lands are sometimes interpreted as a sign of lacking faith. The narrator is not so concerned with the question of whether the move was good or bad, aiming rather to establish Naomi's unfortunate situation.

1:2 ***Ephrathites.*** Ephratha was an alternate name for Bethlehem (4:11; Gen 35:16, 19; 48:7) and, at one time, may have indicated a small village nearby Bethlehem. "Ephrathites" could therefore indicate that Elimelech's family were residents of Bethlehem or its territory. Rachel, wife of Jacob the patriarch, was buried near Ephratha (Gen 35:19). But the term "Ephrathites" may also indicate that the family was from the clan of Ephrath (1 Chr 4:4). This second meaning is more likely, but in either case, the importance of the term is its link to David, who was also an Ephrathite (1 Sam 17:12; Mic 5:2). Without giving away the outcome of the story, the narrator hints at what will be revealed in the genealogy of ch 4.

they settled. Lit., "they were there," or perhaps, "they stayed there." The idea of a permanent settlement is not required by the verb.

1:3 ***Elimelech died.*** Lit., "Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died." Naomi was introduced as "his wife" (1:2), but after his death, Elimelech is reduced to "Naomi's husband." In ancient literature, it is rare to find a man named in terms of his relationship to a woman. With this phrase, the narrator subtly signals that Naomi will be the main character—not Elimelech or his sons as one might have otherwise supposed. Throughout the text of Ruth, the LXX gives the name Abimelech rather than Elimelech. The name Elimelech (like Mahlon, Kilion, Ruth, Orpah, and Naomi) occurs only in Ruth in the Bible, though it is also found in the Amarna letters and in Ugaritic. Abimelech differs in only one letter from Elimelech in a Hebrew consonantal text, and it is far more common in the Bible (cf. Gen 20–21; Judg 9). Perhaps this influenced the LXX's translation.

Linafelt (1999:3; cf. Berger 2009a:270; Fischer 2001:125) suggests that Elimelech and his death represent the transition from God as exclusive king (as in the judges period) to the time of the monarchy, and Ruth and Boaz therefore show the qualities of a monarchy that can maintain the balance with theocracy. Berger (2009a:271) adds that Elimelech fits this role precisely because in leaving for Moab, he abandoned dependency on God and responsibility to his countrymen—a parallel to all of Israel. Ruth was the antithesis of her father-in-law in a certain way, a non-Israelite who came to the land and showed dependency on God and assumed responsibility for Naomi. Others (e.g., Matthews 2004:212) suggest that

the travels represent an exile and return, or an exodus. In my view, all the above symbolisms are hard to prove conclusively from the text, but are worthy of reflection in view of their connection to Ruth's character as an ancestor of David and his line.

1:4 ***married.*** Heb., *nasa'* [TH5375, ZH5951] (to take up). Another Hebrew idiom for marriage is *laqakh* [TH3947, ZH4374] (to take). The presence of the word *nasa'* here need not be understood as implying anything derogatory about the marriages (as Block 1999:629). More likely, any shift in the use of one verb or the other reflects the change of the language with time, or perhaps with locale.

about ten years later. Lit., "they lived there ten years." The Hebrew is somewhat ambiguous, using a mas. pl. verb in the *wayyiqtol* stem. Some commentators take this in an epexegetical fashion, referring to the total time of the sons' stay in Moab, that is, they got married and they *had* stayed there ten years (cf. Bush 1996:65). But others see it in a sequential sense: They got married and then stayed there ten years (e.g., Campbell 1975:58). I prefer the second because I see no compelling reason to take the *wayyiqtol* form as other than sequential here. It has been suggested (e.g., Hubbard 1988:95) that "ten years later" draws a parallel with Gen 16:3, but as Bush suggests (1996:65), the Hebrew construction is not similar enough to warrant this conclusion.

1:5 ***her two sons.*** Lit., "her two boys." As has been suggested (cf. Bush 1996:66; Campbell 1975:56), the use of *yeled* [TH3206, ZH3529] (boy, child) here rather than *ben* [TH1121, ZH1201] (son) is strange in a context regarding grown men and is intended as a link to highlight the reversal evident in 4:16, in which Naomi brings a new *yeled* into her bosom.

1:6 ***the LORD had blessed his people.*** Lit., "the LORD visited his people." The Heb. *paqad* [TH6485, ZH7212] (visit) is used of God's evident presence among his people both to judge (Exod 32:34; Isa 10:12; 23:17) and to bless (e.g., Gen 21:1; 50:24-25).

in Judah. The NLT adds this to clarify the general location of "his people."

Naomi and her daughters-in-law got ready. It is difficult to represent in English the fact that all the verbs in 1:6 are fem. sg. Although Naomi's daughters-in-law are mentioned, they are not the proper subject of any verb. The focus rests heavily on Naomi. Consequently, there is also not a strong emphasis on the preparations of the daughters-in-law to leave Moab or on Orpah's decision not to move to Judah (1:14) as a significant change of heart (cf. Bush 1996:85).

COMMENTARY

This first scene in Ruth introduces over ten years of background information in only a few lines. The reader quickly gets a picture of Elimelech's family life going through ups and downs—famine and finding food, the father's death and the marriage of the two sons—and then a seemingly ultimate disaster strikes, and Naomi is left alone on center stage, as it were (1:5). This raises the problem that drives the plot of the story, which is Naomi's emptiness, her ruined life.

The text does not address it, but it is most likely that the famine (1:1) was because of drought. Weather systems carrying moisture blow in to Israel from the Mediterranean Sea and continue on into Jordan. As these systems move inland, the elevation of the land generally increases (with the obvious exception of the Jordan Valley) until the Jordan plateau is reached. At times clouds carrying significant moisture pass over the hills of Israel, where Bethlehem is located, and are not forced to release their rain until reaching the higher elevations of the Jordan plateau, where Moab was located.

Once they arrived in Moab, the family evidently found a decent way to get the food they needed and continue with a normal life. Therefore, they did not leave Moab for some time, and eventually Elimelech died. After their father's death, Naomi's two sons married women from Moab (whom the rabbis held to be sisters, *Ruth Rabbah* 2:9). Although Moabites were not permitted into the Lord's assembly (Deut 23:3; cf. Neh 13:1-3), there was no direct command against marrying them as there was against other people groups (Deut 7:1-3). In this period after the initial settlement of the land and before the monarchy, Israel and Moab appear to have had a more open relationship than in later or earlier years (1 Sam 22:3-5; cf. Deut 2:8-9, 28-29). In 4:10 Ruth is specified as Mahlon's wife. Why, after ten years of marriage, neither Mahlon and Ruth nor Kilion and Orpah had any children is not stated.

As mentioned (see notes on 1:1) some have suggested this was because of God's judgment, but it is difficult to know since our reticent narrator, like so many of the Bible's narrators, does not break into the text with an evaluation as one finds, for example, in 2 Kings 14:24. Perhaps the narrator hints at the cause for this somewhat surprising circumstance in the names of these two sons: Mahlon (from *khalah* [TH2470, ZH2703], "to be sick, weak") and Kilion (from *kalah* [TH3615, ZH3983], "to vanish, fade") are perhaps to be seen as lacking vitality. This, however, is far from conclusive; numerous derivations and meanings have been offered for these names, and none has really won consensus—since the narrator makes no clear play on the name of any character besides Naomi (cf. 1:20). If, as Sakenfeld (1999:14, 20) suggests, Ruth is implicitly marked as barren by this mention of ten years without a child, there is a parallel with the matriarchs Sarah and Rachel. This is an appealing possibility, but I find the evidence for her barrenness inconclusive.

Naomi's new situation without a husband or children was difficult. Not only was she depressed as a result of these losses, she was in distress economically in a society that offered women no real independent professions apart from prostitution. As a mother of grown children, her age made both remarriage and the possibility of bearing any more children in her husband's name impossibilities (cf. 1:11-12). Widows were often taken advantage of (Isa 10:2) or ignored and neglected (Isa 1:23), even though the Lord gave special commands regarding them and other vulnerable members of society (e.g., Deut 14:28-29; 24:19-21; 26:12-13). Naomi's bleak future appeared to be only begging and poverty in her increasing age. Further, she was isolated from family, lacking any blood relatives in Moab.

The famine in Judah did not likely extend over the whole ten or so years that had passed. What is indicated in 1:6 is not merely the end of the famine, but the presence of "good crops"; the people recognized the fertility of the land as a visitation (*paqad* [TH6485, ZH7212]) of the Lord to provide for them. The news about this complete reversal of the dire situation recounted in 1:1 reached Naomi in Moab. Perhaps this raised Naomi's hopes of survival in Judah sufficiently to encourage her to return even in her desperate state.

At the close of this scene, the focus is on Naomi's preparation and intent to return to Judah. Her daughters-in-law are still present with her, but it is not absolutely clear whether they will accompany her (see note on 1:6). The question of what lies ahead for Naomi looms in the reader's mind.