

The Danite Invasion of Laish and the Purpose of the Book of Judges

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ABSTRACT

Past scholarship has explained the structure of the Book of Judges as a cycle of apostasy, foreign domination, deliverance and apostasy and has treated the final four chapters of the book as appendices. As if this were an adequate pronouncement on the literary structure of the book, many commentators then shifted their attention to the historical and geographical information said to underlie the stories of the book. More recent scholarship has tended to view almost every book of the Old Testament as an eventual product of Deuteronomistic redaction, with the Book of Judges forming part of the so-called Deuteronomistic history. In this framework, the appendices are said to be significantly marked by an editorial observation that is actually an expression of optimism in kingship. We, however, argue that the intention of the author is traceable in his use of syntax throughout the book of Judges. By a more careful examination of his use of syntax and details of the reports concerning the military successes of the tribes of Judah at the beginning of the book and of Dan at the end of the book, the author may be more correctly heard as he responds to questions raised concerning the reason for the exile and future of the tribes. Not only does this approach to Judges demonstrate that the account of the tribe of Dan is not a mere “appendix”, but it also places Judges more realistically among the various voices clamouring to be heard during the exile.

A THE TREATMENT OF JUDGES IN PAST SCHOLARSHIP

Past scholarship has outlined a cycle of events that is said to characterise the Book of Judges. This cycle is said to comprise descriptions of Israel’s apostasy, her punishment by means of oppression by a powerful neighbour, the appearance of a hero who rescues her, and finally a period of peace, after which the whole cycle begins again.

The reporting of these cycles is said to be structured on the activities of major tribal heroes.¹ Scholars frequently deny the historical status of the stories about these heroes, in their present form, and argue rather that historical fact must be sought behind the theological interpretations of the book.² Yet the con-

¹ M. Z. Segal, *מבוא המקרא, פתיחה כללית: תורה, נביאים ראשונים* (מהדורה רביעית) כרך א. (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1955), 165-66.

² James D. Martin, *The Book of Judges* (London: CUP, 1975), 1-3.

centration on historical and geographical detail in many commentaries continues to create the impression that the Book of Judges was intended by its author as a contribution to the history of the Settlement, a record of that period rather than any other type of literature.³ The historical use to which the information in Judges is put is especially evident in Bible atlases, in which details of military conflicts between the Israelite tribes and either occupants or invaders of Canaan are graphically outlined.⁴ The argument by commentators that the narratives in the Book of Judges are now set in a so-called “Deuteronomistic framework” appears to do little to place the stories in a different light from that of the historical and archaeological. Indeed the fact that the book is viewed as a product of “the Deuteronomist” or of a “Deuteronomistic school or movement” seems to subtly encourage the inclination to treat the Book of Judges as a historical source, by treating this book as part of the so-called “Deuteronomistic history”.⁵ When viewed as part of the “Deuteronomistic history”, Judges is actually grouped with books that are more expressly historiographical.

Not only are the stories of the heroes in the Book of Judges thereby treated rather myopically, but the literary structures of the book, particularly the relationship of chapters 17-21 to the rest of Judges is also misconstrued. These chapters are commonly labelled “appendices”. Explanation for the tagging on of these appendices at the end of the Book of Judges is based on the state of lawlessness that characterises the reported circumstances, coupled with the implicit plea for a king that recurs in Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1 and at the very end of the final verse of the book (Judg 21:25):

בְּיָמִים הָהֵם אֵין מֶלֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ הִנָּשָׂר בְּעֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה

³ For example, Soggin provides a wealth of historical and geographical information concerning the content of the first chapter of Judges (J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges* [London: SCM, 1987], 20-33). In his explanation of the “divisions and characteristics” of the book, Soggin (*Judges*, 4) merely refers to his partial treatment of Judges 1:1-25 in his commentary on Joshua! It remains unclear as to what significance Soggin attaches to this chapter vis-à-vis the rest of the Book of Judges.

⁴ See, for example, the maps, diagrams and historical comment of Yohanan Aharoni & Michael Avijonah (*The Macmillan Bible atlas* [New York: Macmillan, 1968], 45-58) and more recently in John J. Bimson & J. P. Kane (*New Bible Atlas* [London: IVP 1985], 36-37).

⁵ It is very instructive to compare the brevity of Soggin’s literary comments (*Judges*, 1-6) under the headings, “The Title”, “Divisions and Characteristics” and “Redaction of the ‘Main Body’”, with the expansiveness of his historical and geographical explanations in the commentary itself. Linked to this is his readiness to assign material in Judges to a Deuteronomistic redactor (H/N/P), even to the point of interpreting extensive linguistic evidence of single authorship as evidence of “how thoroughly Dtr (sic) not only collected, but also reworked his sources” (*Judges*, 6, n. 8).

Undoubtedly this phrase provides a convenient conceptual bridge between the stories concerning pre-monarchic and monarchic Israel and therefore between the books of Judges and Samuel. It is with fair certainty that these statements may be treated as signs of careful structuring of a framework for these stories, in order to give a specific bent to the events outlined in the stories. But has the recognition of this literary structuring, whether we assign it to a Deuteronomist or to some other party, perhaps hindered our understanding of the unity of the Book of Judges? Recognition of the statement concerning the absence of a king seems rather to have given impetus to the subtle historical bias in the treatment of Judges referred to above and to obscure the message of the individual books comprising the grander scheme of a “Deuteronomistic history”, including the message of the Book of Judges. Under the influence of this combined historical and literary approach, it is not difficult to view the last two stories recounted in the Book of Judges as mere “appendices” that are distinguishable from the rest of the book by the fact that no judge is identified in either story. Rather than report the (historical) activities of judges, these “appendices” report on two Levites who play leading roles in sordid tribal affairs.

Certainly historical facts may and, in specific instances, must be sought behind a text. For example, some historical orientation is necessary for a sensible understanding of caricatures in political cartoons, or satires such as Orwell’s “Animal Farm”, or Swift’s “Gulliver’s Travels”. But the relevance of an extensive historical focus in commentaries on the Book of Judges is questionable: Is it correct to focus on the history and geography of Israel’s settlement in Canaan in order to understand the Book of Judges?

A second and equally necessary question is whether the term “appendices” is appropriate with reference to the last two stories of the book? The term suggests that these were mere bits of material that were tagged on as an afterthought to a finished work. Presumably then, having repeated the cycle of apostasy, punishment, deliverance, peace and apostasy, several times, the author (or the presumed “Deuteronomist” editor) decided to use two additional bits of material to forge a link with the next phase in Israel’s history, namely the period of the monarchy.⁶ Indeed, there is no reference to the role of a judge in the last two stories of the Book of Judges. But to suggest that these last few chapters therefore lack the elements that characterise the rest of the Book of Judges is to beg the question: What does characterise the rest of the Book of Judges? This question is not answered by fragmenting the Book of Judges into a variety of materials such as the “major judges”, lists of “minor judges”, the “deuteronomistic theological framework” and the two “appendices”. What did the author intend when he composed the book as a unit from these various ma-

⁶ Martin, *Judges*, 32 and Soggin, *Judges*, 4-5.

terials?⁷ A possible answer to this question lies in a comparison of the details of the content and the syntax of the introductory chapter of Judges and of the details of the content and the syntax of the story of the Danite invasion of a town just south of Mount Hermon, Laish.

B THE DELIBERATE SKEWING OF INFORMATION IN JUDGES 17 AND 18

The departure of the tribe of Dan from central Canaan to an area north of the Sea of Galilee does not appear to be celebrated in the Book of Judges, but appears rather to be reported in very negative terms. From first to last details of the account appear to be deliberately skewed so as to ultimately present the tribe of Dan in the poorest possible light.

According to the information of Judges 18, the tribe of Dan had not yet received its allotted territory, but was searching for a suitable location (Judg 18:1):

בְּיָמִים הָהֵם אֵין מֶלֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְיָמִים הָהֵם שָׁבַט הַדָּנִי מִבְּקִישׁ-לוֹ נִחְלָה לְשָׁבֶת

כִּי ל'א-נִפְלָה לוֹ עַד-הַיּוֹם הַהוּא בְּתוֹךְ-שְׁבַטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּנִחְלָה

This statement is not readily aligned with the report in Joshua 19:40 - 48, in which Dan is assigned a territory. The area specified in the Book of Joshua appears to be the same as that alluded to in Judges 13:25 - 14:1 (cf. 13:2, 18:11) since several place names are the same in the texts of Joshua and Judges:

וְתַמְנָתָה...צָרְעָה וְאַשְׁתָּאוֹל

The account of the search for new territory by five scouts appointed by the tribe, begins in Judges 18, yet it is evident that, for our story teller, the stage setting for the movement of the tribe of Dan actually began long before the scouts were sent out from central Canaan. The stage setting began with the wanderings of a young Levite who left Bethlehem and eventually settled in the hill country of Ephraim. There he became the family priest of a certain Mikhayehu (מִיכָיְהוּ) in place of one of Mikhayehu's sons. (The son had initially been installed as priest at the family shrine.) That this Levite enjoyed the appropriate Aaronic descent in order to function as a priest is not explained in Judges 17:10-12, nor does the assertion in Judges 18:30 that he was, in fact, "a descendant of Gershom, son of Moses" bring any clarity to the situation

⁷ This question has been posed previously. John P. U. Lilley ("A literary appreciation of the book of Judges," *Tyndale Bulletin* 18 [1967]: 94-102) was dissatisfied with the fragmentation of the book in the commentaries available at the time. His literary analysis of the structure of the book is discussed in Barry G. Webb *The book of the Judges: An integrated reading* (Sheffield. Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 30-31.

(שָׁהַ) (נִ) מִגֵּרְשׁוֹ ׀ בֶּן-וִיְהוֹנָתָן בֶּן).⁸ Was either priest at this shrine legitimate? Certain scholars (e.g. Jenson, 1997:774) simply treat the report of the installation of Mikhayehu's son as implicit "evidence that ordinary Israelites could serve as priests" and they cite Deuteronomy 33:8-11 as evidence of the eligibility of all members of the tribe of Levi for the priesthood:⁹

יְשִׁימוּ קַטֹּרֶה בְּאַפְךָ וְכָלִיל עַל-מִזְבְּחֶךָ

But Exodus 28:1 explicitly states that only Aaron and his descendants were to be anointed to the priesthood and evidence from the Book of Numbers (3:9; 8:19; 16-17) declares the descendants of Aaron to be priests, while describing the Levites as simply their divinely appointed assistants. In the light of this evidence, the installation of both son and Levite by Mikhayehu becomes highly questionable, despite the technical terminology used to describe the procedure (הִיָּד-לְמִלָּא אֶת) (Ex 28:41, cf. Nm 3:3)). The assertion that this Jonathan was a descendant of Moses then begins to appear – at least from one point of view - as another deliberate skewing of information, a cultic red herring.¹⁰

The family shrine where the young Levite functioned as priest, housed an idol that had been cast from silver, the very silver that Mikhayehu had earlier stolen from his mother. Mikhayehu had returned the silver to his mother in fear, when he overheard her pronouncing a curse on the thief who had taken her pieces of silver. In response to her son's new found honesty, the mother first blessed the thieving son in the name of the LORD of Israel and then handed certain of the silver over to a craftsman. Thus it was that from this stolen-and-recovered silver that the family gods were made. Not only are the background details to the family gods ludicrously unholy, but strong objection is raised to this idolatry in the change of the name of the owner of the family shrine, Mikhayehu. From the time that the פְּסָלִים וּמִסְכָּה are installed in the

⁸ The later scribal insertion of the suspended nun is well known. The text-critical comments of scholars on this detail do not include any suggestion concerning the failure of the later scribe to recognize the author's intention to deliberately skew this bit of information, in his (the scribe's) haste to protect the reputation of Moses.

⁹ Peter Jensen, לוי (4290/4291) in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (ed. Willem A. Van Gemeren. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 772-778. George F. Moore (*A critical and exegetical commentary on Judges* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958]:383) explains that the term "Levite" here (Judg 17:7) denotes a calling and that this calling was "ordinarily, though not exclusively, hereditary; and in later times all Levites were supposed to be descended from an eponymous ancestor, Levi." Moore (*Judges*, 400) also considers Deut 33:8 to be evidence of a Mosaic priesthood, of which the priesthood at Dan was but one manifestation.

¹⁰ Although Tammi J. Schneider (*Judges* [Collegeville: Liturgical press, 2000], 235-36) raises the issue of the Levite's possible illegitimacy to function as a priest, she fails to discuss the details and simply concludes, "There are many strange elements to the story."

family shrine, the name “Mikhah” rather than “Mikhayehu” is used of the owner of the idol (Judg 17:4, 5). Thus any suggestion of an association of this individual with the God of Israel is denied.¹¹ This was the stage setting for the arrival of Danite scouts and for the later arrival of the tribe of Dan itself en route to Laish.

It was from this same unholy god and its apparently illegitimate priest that the five scouts, sent out by the tribe of Dan, sought and received a blessing while on their mission to find a tribal homeland (Judg 18:5,6). It was this unholy god and its apparently illegitimate priest that the tribe of Dan wrenched from their owner, Mikhah, and later installed in Laish (Judg 18:27).

The implicit criticism of the tribe of Dan does not end with the deliberately skewed bits of information outlined above, however. The criticism of the tribe of Dan rather continues in the description of the community whom the Danites dispossessed. The author appears to have deliberately left the ethnicity of this community undefined and although it is described as following Sidonian custom, the reader cannot state dogmatically that this community was Canaanite. The community of Laish is rather described as removed from Sidon, isolated, quiet and unsuspecting (Judg 18:7):¹²

וַיֵּלְכוּ חֲמִשָּׁת הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיִּבְּאוּ לַיִּשָּׁה וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת-הָעֵם אֲשֶׁר-בְּקִרְבָּהּ יוֹשְׁבֵי-לָבֶטַח
כַּמְשֹׁפֵט צִדְנִים שׁ־קִטּוּב וַיִּטְחוּ וַיֹּאמְרוּ-מִכְלִים דְּבַר בְּאֶרֶץ יוֹרֵשׁ עֶצֶר וּרְחֵק קִיּוֹם הַמָּה
מִצִּדְנִים וְדַבַּר אֵין-לָהֶם עִם-אָדָם:

The description of the community of Laish as “quiet and unsuspecting” is repeated when it is eventually attacked by the tribe of Dan (Judg 18:27):

וַיִּבְּאוּ עַל-לַיִשׁ עַל-עַם שׁ־קִטּוּב וַיִּטְחוּ וַיִּכּוּ אוֹתָם לְפִי-הָרֶבֶב

¹¹ Schneider (*Judges*, 231) treats the change of name not as an implicit criticism, but as irony “...since the person whose name glorifies the deity, by suggesting the deity’s incomparability, was a thief who helped establish what was in the eyes of the later cult, illegitimate worship of the Israelite deity.” Irony is present in the story, but Robert G. Boling (*Judges* [New York: Doubleday, 1975], 254-55) might be more correct in detecting it in 17:4, the relevant sentence of which verse he has translated, “And there it was, in the house of Yahweh-the-Incomparable!”

¹² Several emendations to this verse in B19A are proposed in BHS, but none is convincing, especially the suggestion that אָדָם be read instead of אָדָם. Charles F. Burney (*The Book of Judges* [New York: Ktav, 1970], 434, cf. 428) and Martin (*Judges*, 190) recommend the emendation on the grounds that this and the following verse state that Laish had no allies – neither Sidonian nor Aramaean. Whilst the dalet and resh are well known problematic characters in textual transmission, it can be argued that the language of the received text conveys a sense of physical isolation rather than a lack of political allies.

The Danites are thus portrayed not as victorious, but as barbaric. They annihilated an ethnically unknown, isolated and peaceful community that did no one any harm.¹³

This portrayal of the Danites and their shrine cannot be explained simply as an attempt by the author to demonstrate how completely lawless the region had become - despite the observation with which the story is introduced (Judg 18:1):

בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם אֵין מֶלֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל

Such an explanation hardly does justice to the author's carefully crafted criticisms that can be traced in his reporting on the origin of the idol and his subtle skewing of important details concerning tribal location, significant personal names and priestly illegitimacy. Nor does appeal to a lawless situation explain the illogicality of commending Judah for her military successes in southern Canaan, but condemning Dan for the same sort of success in the far north. Furthermore, the explanation of lawlessness facilely avoids explaining the specific syntax used in this passage and elsewhere in the Book of Judges.

C AUTHORIAL INTENT AND THE USE OF VSO AND NON-VSO SYNTAX

In Judges 1, the military activities of the various tribes are reported. Each tribe is mentioned by means of a special rather than the common form of syntax. The word order in Biblical Hebrew narrative is commonly VSO (verb + subject + object). By means of the *waw* consecutive plus the imperfect form of the verb, the storyline of a narrative is pursued. For various reasons this word order is sometimes deliberately changed. Non-VSO word orders are special. They represent a conscious decision by the author to indicate something different in a story. Non-VSO sentences are used by the author of Judges to indicate the conclusion of a section of the narrative, or the introduction of a new section or a new narrative, or they are used to highlight information. This means of highlighting is evident in various contexts in the Book of Judges.¹⁴ Non-VSO sentences have been used in Judges 1.¹⁵ First the divine response to the enquiry

¹³ It should be noted that if the readings are correct in the fragmentary execration texts from Sakkarah (James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament* [3rd ed. Princeton: PUP, 1969], 329, f-n. 8), Laish may not always have been perceived to be quite as innocent as it is portrayed in Judges 18:27 (cf. Avraham Negev, *Archaeological encyclopedia of the Holy Land* [New York: GP Putnam's Sons 1972], 184). The name also occurs in the list of conquests attributed to Thut-mose III (ANET: 242).

¹⁴ Non-VSO sentences occur elsewhere in prose sections of the Old Testament and their occurrence can be similarly explained.

¹⁵ Marvin A. Sweeney ("David polemics in the Book of Judges." *VT* XLVII, 4 (1997), 521) strangely describes Judg. 1:1-2:23 as "governed by a *waw*-consecutive

about tribal leadership in the conquest of Canaan is stated in non-VSO word order (Judg 1:1,2):

וַיִּשְׁאַלּוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּיהוּהָ לְאָמֹר מִי יַעֲלֶה-לָנוּ אֶל-הַכְּנָעַנִי בְּתַחֲלָה לְהִלָּחֵם בּוֹ:
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה יְהוּדָה יַעֲלֶה

By this syntactic device the affirmation of Judah's leadership is not simply declared but underlined, highlighted. The failures of the other tribes to secure their inheritances are also highlighted in this manner.¹⁶ Thus what Judah succeeded in doing is boldly contrasted with what the other tribes failed to do. An important detail in the reports of Judah's success and the failures of the other tribes is the specific report that Judah captured Jerusalem! In this report it is stated in highlighted word order that the attackers set the city alight (Judg 1:8):

וַיִּלְחַמוּ בְנֵי-יְהוּדָה בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם וַיִּלְכְּדוּ אוֹתָהּ וַיְכַוְּנוּ לְפִי-חָרֶב וְאֶת-הָעִיר שָׁלְחוּ
בָאֵשׁ

This report is contradicted quite glaringly by the report in Joshua 15:63 (also in non-VSO word order) to the effect that Judah failed to dislodge the Jebusite occupants:

וְאֶת-הַיְבוּסִי יוֹשְׁבֵי יְרוּשָׁלַיִם לֹא-יָכְלוּ בְנֵי-יְהוּדָה לְהוֹרִישָׁם וַיֵּשְׁבּוּ הַיְבוּסִי אֶת-
בְּנֵי יְהוּדָה בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה

An almost identical report is found in Judges 1:21 again in non-VSO word order, but in this duplicate report the failure to capture Jerusalem is attributed to Benjamin:

וְאֶת-הַיְבוּסִי יוֹשְׁבֵי יְרוּשָׁלַיִם לֹא הוֹרִישׁוּ בְנֵי בִנְיָמִן וַיֵּשְׁבּוּ הַיְבוּסִי אֶת-בְּנֵי בִנְיָמִן
בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה

The tribal location of Jerusalem is unclear in the allotted territories listed in Joshua 15:6-11 and 18:21-28. Was Jerusalem part of the territory of Judah or Benjamin? Scholars whose attention might be devoted to the possible historical details of Judges would perhaps suggest that it lay on the border and that there is no conflict between the two reports in Judges, that is, of Judah's success and

imperfect narrative form that introduces the narratives concerning the attempts by the tribes...It is only with Judg. 3:1-6...that the *waw*-consecutive form is disrupted." This is clearly incorrect.

¹⁶ See Judges 1:2 (Judah), 21 (Benjamin), 29 (Ephraim), 30 (Zebulun), 31 (Asher), 33 (Naphtali). Non-VSO sentences also occur in 1:15, 16 and 25, but these occurrences do not affect the argument and space does not permit an exhaustive treatment of all the syntactical details of this chapter.

Benjamin's failure. It is, in fact, argued that in an attempt to curb the Jebusite domination of the north-south route between the two tribes, Judah sacked but did not occupy Jerusalem and the Benjamites reached an agreement that allowed the Jebusites to continue in the city.¹⁷ But this explanation then implies that the report in the Book of Joshua is incorrect. No matter the details of the actual situation, the author of Judges deliberately reports Judah as succeeding at Jerusalem and Benjamin as failing. The reason for the differences between the reports in Joshua and Judges is clear, namely the intention of the writer of Judges to highlight the primacy of Judah among the tribes.

This same syntactical device that is used to highlight the successful role of Judah is also used to highlight details in the Danite attack upon the family shrine of Mikhah and thereafter upon the peaceful and secure inhabitants of Laish. At least eight such non-VSO sentences can be identified in Judges 18.¹⁸

D JUDAH AND DAN: CONTRASTING PARALLELS

Of great significance to the Book of Judges as a unit, are the broad and specific parallels that both link and distinguish between the tribes of Judah and Dan. The stories of the two tribes are similar, yet also significantly different. These two tribes parallel each other in their military success, the one in the south, the other in the north. This parallel is reflected even in the syntax of the two stories. Just as Judah captured Jerusalem and set it alight, so Dan captured Laish and put it to the torch. Both reports conclude with this detail, stated in non-VSO word order (Judg 1:8, cf. 18:27):

וְאֶת-הָעִיר שָׂלְחוּ בְאֵשׁ

וְאֶת-הָעִיר שָׂרְפוּ בְאֵשׁ

Thus a comparison of the two tribes appears to be intended by the author. But the two tribes are also sharply distinguished one from the other. Judah overwhelms and burns a Jebusite (Canaanite) stronghold. Dan annihilates an unidentified, peace-loving community.¹⁹ The contrast between these

¹⁷ John W. Rogerson, *The new atlas of the Bible* (London. Macdonald, 1985), 165. The continued existence of a Jebusite enclave between the two tribes is evident from the report of the purchase of high ground by David from its Jebusite owner (2 Sam 24:18-25) and from the Book of Judges itself (Judg 19:10-12). For a fuller discussion of the pre-Israelite occupation of Jerusalem, see Negev, *Arcaeological Encyclopedia*, 166-67.

¹⁸ Non-VSO sentences occur in 18:3, 6, 17, 18, 22, 24, 26, 27, and 30.

¹⁹ Schneider (*Judges*, 240-41) is again undecided as to the significance of various details of this story: "It is not clear how the Danites' action should be interpreted. It could be a legitimate action because the Danites needed and deserved territory of their own. On the other hand the Danites had just done what was right in their own eyes regarding Michah."

two tribes is also apparently intentional, especially in the light of the somewhat confusing dates attached to the story of the shrine of Dan. Two dates are reported. The first refers more specifically to the termination of the priesthood that functioned at the shrine of Dan (Judg 18:30):

...וַיְהִי וַיָּנֶחַ בֶּן-גֵּרָשׁׁם בֶּן-מְנַחֵם הַיְדֵּי וַיָּבֵן הָיָה כִּי הָנִים לְשֹׁבֵט הַדָּנִי עַד-יוֹם גְּלוֹת הָאָרֶץ:

The second states the period during which the idol and its shrine were apparently functional (Judg 18:31):

וַיִּשְׂמוּ לָהֶם אֶת-פֶּסֶל מִיָּדָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה כָּל-יְמֵי הַיּוֹת בַּיִת-הָאֵל הַיָּמִּים בְּשֵׁלֶה:

The difficulties surrounding this second date remain unresolved. It has long been supposed that the shrine in Shiloh was destroyed at the end of the eleventh century B.C.E. by the Philistines, following the battle reported in 1 Samuel 4. Although there is archaeological evidence that the town suffered destruction at the end of that century, the evidence does not include a temple.²⁰ It has therefore been suggested that the reference in Judges 18:31 is to the possible destruction of the shrine during the life-time of Jeremiah (Jer 7:12-15; 26:6), rather than the destruction supposedly inflicted by the Philistines.²¹ If the allusions of Jeremiah to the destruction of the shrine at Shiloh are correctly understood to refer to a recent destruction, then the allusion in Judges 18:31 would be to the period shortly before the Babylonian exile. Explicit reference to the exile occurs in the preceding verse (18:30):

יוֹם גְּלוֹת הָאָרֶץ-עַד

This then is the terminus a quo for the dating of the Book of Judges.

E CONCLUSION

In our comments regarding past scholarship we have rejected those approaches that, despite the literary comments that may be offered, essentially treat the Book of Judges as a historical record. Given the details of the content of the

²⁰ “Shiloh” in the *New Bible Dictionary* 1996 (Leibrox Digital Library). For more complete reports on what was unearthed at Shiloh by the Danish expeditions of 1926 and 1932, as well as the Bar Ilan expeditions of 1981-84, see Ephraim Stern, *The new encyclopedia of archaeological excavations in the Holy Land*. Vol. 4. (Jerusalem: IES & Carta, 1993), 1364-1370.

²¹ Martin (*Judges*, 196) and Soggin (*Judges*, 276) – the latter refers to reports published in 1969, according to which no destruction of whatever sort dating to the eleventh century B.C.E. was found at the site! Chronologically closer to the exile is the reported appearance of Ahijah, a prophet from Shiloh (1 Kgs 11:29; 14:2-4), which indicates the continued occupation of that location, an occupation that might have extended even to the period immediately after the Babylonian invasion (Jer 41:5).

book discussed thus far, we rather argue that Judges would be more sensibly viewed as a politico-religious document that was composed during the exile, with a view to responding to questions current among the exiles in Babylon. Again, drawing from the contents of the book, it seems that among the questions that the author of Judges addressed were the reason for the exile and the future of the nation: Why had the exile taken place and will the nation be restored?

The author begins to answer these two questions by first distinguishing Judah from the other tribes in general in Judges 1 and then from the northern kingdom specifically in Judges 17-18. The supremacy of Judah as leader of the tribes and, by implication, leader of the nation is asserted in Judges 1. This divinely appointed leader (expressed in non-VSO syntax) did the LORD's will and conquered the land, including the important conquest of Jerusalem. The failure of the other tribes (also expressed in non-VSO syntax) simply highlights the success of Judah. Herein lies the reason for the scattering of the northern tribes, namely their failure to possess the land and their consequent cohabitation with the earlier occupants of Canaan.

According to the author of Judges, the answer to the issue of Israel's future as the chosen nation lies in the fortunes of Judah. By means of rival shrines at Bethel and Dan, Jeroboam I had attempted to duplicate the religious leadership that Judah enjoyed - given the location of the temple in Jerusalem (1Kg 12:25-30). The folly of Jeroboam's plan is reflected in the unholy stupidity of the Danite invasion of Laish. This was no divinely ordained conquest of promised territory, but the brutal slaughter of an unknown, peaceful people. This was never part of God's instruction to conquer and possess the land. The shrine that was established there was illegitimate, as was its priesthood. By depicting Jeroboam's religious changes thus, the author leaves no doubt that the northern kingdom became illegitimate, as was its cultus and the nation's future does not lie there.

The Book of Judges in its present form therefore cannot be adequately described in terms of editorial processes, in which the final chapters are mere appendages. The state in which this book has been admitted to the canon is more important to the meaning of the book than attempts to explain earlier stages of its composition and to identify its underlying sources. Nor should its stories be exploited simply for their possible historical and geographical information. The details of its stories are important to its meaning, perhaps most especially those details that seem to conflict with traditions that are known from other sources, since such points of disagreement more clearly indicate the author's intentions. That insufficient attention has been paid to the author's intentions is most evident in the failure to recognize and explain the syntax employed, especially the non-VSO sentences in contrast to the VSO sentences. The author's intention to highlight the role of Judah and the failure of the other

tribes is effected not simply by means of details in the general content, but also by means of syntax. The author's carefully crafted portrayal of Dan in contrasting parallel with Judah is also effected thus - by means of syntax.

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