EXPOSITION OF JUDGES

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by

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Canonical Context

All 66 inspired books of the Protestant canon relate to the progressively revealed Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative of the Bible, but not in the same way. Each book either *carries* the metanarrative,[1] *contributes* to it but does not carry it,[2] or *contemplates* the metanarrative.[3] A book's placement into one of these three categories does not necessarily depend on genre, even though a correlation frequently exists. Rather, a book's categorization depends on its contents and its relationship to other books.[4]

In the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative of Scripture, the following compose the major elements of the story:

Table 1: Elements of the Metanarrative of Scripture

Setting:	Heaven and earth	Gen 1–2
Hero:	God the Father	Gen 1–2
Hero's desire:	Image bearers to rule the earth	Gen 1:26–28
Problem:	Image bearers gave their rule to the serpent	Gen 3
Solution (the plot):	Promise seed will strike the serpent and restore rule to image bearers	Gen 3:15–Rev 19
Turning point:	The Cross	Gospels
Climax:	The Great Tribulation	Rev 6–19
Resolution / denouement:	Image bearers again rule the earth	Rev 20–22

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[1] The carrier category refers to biblical books that carry the primary plotline of the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative of the Bible. Many books of historical narrative and certain parts of prophetic books fall into this category because they carry the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative. Such books describe the outworking of the promise in Genesis 3:15–16.

[2] The contributor category refers to biblical books that contribute to, but do not carry, the plot of the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative of the Bible. Most prophetic books and certain parts of the NT epistles fall into this category because while they do not carry the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative, they contribute important (often prophetic) information about that metanarrative. Additionally, certain historical narratives run in parallel to one another (e.g., Kings and Chronicles, the four Gospels). In these cases, 1–2 Kings function as the carrier and 1–2 Chronicles as the contributor. Among the Gospels, Matthew functions as the carrier and the other three as contributors.

[3] The contemplator category refers to biblical books that neither carry nor contribute to the plot of the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative of the Bible. Rather, these books reflect upon (contemplate) the realities of that narrative. Books of wisdom, poetry, and most NT epistles fall into this category, because in light of the Genesis 3:15 promised seed having come, they address how the people of God should live until he returns to establish his kingdom.

[4] For this reason, certain biblical books fit into more than one of these three categories.

As shown in Table 1, the Bible as a whole presents God as the hero of the story who desires his image bearers to rule the world on his behalf. This metanarrative begins in the book of Genesis and concludes in the book of Revelation. Genesis presents the setting,[5] the characters,[6] the plot problem,[7] and the beginning of the rising action. The problem identified in Genesis 3 did not change God's desire for his image bearers to rule the world. The prophecy of Genesis 3:15–16 indicates a war between the serpent's seed and the woman's seed. This battle is the central conflict in the entire biblical narrative; a conflict not resolved until Revelation 20. In this prophecy, God promised the seed of the woman—a man—would defeat the serpent, restore humanity to the garden, and restore rule of the earth to God's image bearers. The anticipation of this promised seed drives the plot of the biblical narrative. The entire plot of the metanarrative thus revolves around how Genesis 3:15–16 comes to fruition. This prophecy reaches the first phase of its fulfillment in Revelation 20 in the thousand-year kingdom of Christ on earth, and its final phase of fulfillment in Revelation 21–22 in the new heaven and earth.

In narrative (or a metanarrative such as the whole Bible), "The story is the meaning."[8] Every book must be interpreted in light of the plot problem, rising action, and resolution. Recent decades have seen advances in narrative criticism applied to biblical texts which have brought to light the complexity and skillful crafting of biblical narratives. Such complexity is not merely limited to individual biblical books. As one scholar noted, "Narrative structure, usually interconnected to plot or characterization, may extend across several books, supporting the evangelical concept that the divine author provides unity and continuity in the biblical story."[9] This paper, then, recognizes the place of Judges in light of the divine author's total metanarrative. Indeed, "The Bible's total story sketches in narrative form the meaning of all reality."[10]

The entire Pentateuch forms a serial narrative in five parts which are all geared toward preparing the second generation of Israelites to possess the land of promise and live there in covenant faithfulness. Just as humanity was banished east of the garden (Gen 3), by the close of the Pentateuch the nation of promise camped on the eastern shore of the Jordan ready to head west into the Promised Land. Deuteronomy concludes with the death of Moses, and Joshua begins, "After the death of Moses" (Josh 1:1) and recounts Israel's failed attempt to dispossess the Canaanites of that Promised Land. Joshua closes with Joshua's death, and Judges opens with, "After the death of Joshua" (Judg 1:1). Whereas Deuteronomy 16–18 delineates the roles of judges, kings, priests, and prophets, so-called "Deuteronomic history" plays out in Joshua–2 Kings as the judges, kings, priests, and prophets fail to produce covenant faithfulness in the "holy nation" of "royal priests." Just as post-flood humanity had descended into rebellion at the

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[5] Heaven and earth, Genesis 1–2.

[6] God, the hero of the story; mankind, the object of God's desire; and the antagonist, the serpent.

[7] Despite God's desire for mankind to rule the earth on his behalf, the man and woman gave their rule over to the serpent (Gen 3).

[8] Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 88.

[9] J. Daniel Hays, "An Evangelical Approach to Old Testament Narrative Criticism," *BSac* 166 (2009): 8.

[10] Richard Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 64.

tower of Babylon (Gen 11), the failure of these offices results in the chosen nation's exile east into the new Babylon, echoing the exile east of the garden.[11]

The anticipation built up in the Pentateuch for possession of Canaan is quite anti-climactic in the book of Joshua as Israel fails to dispossess the Canaanites and acquire all of the Promised Land. The failure of Joshua and the Israelites in the book of Joshua is in line with Yahweh's words (Deut 31:16–18), Moses' words (Deut 31:26–29), Moses' song (Deut 32), and the angel of Yahweh's evaluation of the Israelites' unfaithfulness after Joshua's death (2:1–5). Although the Pentateuch had set up Joshua as successor of Moses, he would not be the expected prophet like Moses (Deut 18:18; 34:10–12). Instead, the book of Joshua (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ = Ἰησοῦς) and the first Exodus prophetically foreshadows the last Joshua (i.e., the Promised Seed) who will fulfill the Passover[12] / Exodus with the remnant of Israel in the eschaton.[13] The book of Judges then describes the failure of the judges (chs. 3–16) and the Levites (chs. 17–21), two of the four offices in Deuteronomy 16–18, and sets the stage for the failure of the levitical high priest (1 Sam 1–7) and the kings (1 Sam 9–2 Kgs 25).[14] These failures ultimately point to the need for the Judahite king who would restore covenant fidelity to the nation. As will be described in this paper, the book of Judges reveals for its audience how the solution to Israel's covenant infidelity is not another judge, nor a king from Benjamin or Ephraim. Rather, righteousness can only be restored through the legitimate Judahite king in the line of David. Judges is placed, then, in the serial narrative from Genesis through Kings and *carries* the plot of the Messiah-redeemer-rule metanarrative as the nation waits for the ultimate prophet-king-priest-judge.

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[11] Gary E. Schnittjer, *Torah Story: An Apprenticeship on the Pentateuch*, second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2023), 38.

[12] "And he [Jesus] said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you that I will not eat it [the Passover] until it [the Passover] is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:15–16).

[13] The prophets describe a vast regathering of all Israelites in the eschaton; a "New Exodus." Yahweh brings them back to the promised land of Israel from all over the world. This company includes the resurrected Israelites. Many apparently come out of situations of captivity and distress. The Israelites weep as they return to the land and seek their way to Zion. So great and miraculous is this regathering, that this event replaces the Exodus under Moses and Joshua as the topic of discussion during the kingdom age. See Isa 11:11–12; 14:1–2; 27:13; 41:9; 43:5–7; 66:20; Jer 16:14–15; 23:3, 8; 29:14; 31:8–9; 32:37, 41; 39:27; 50:4, 19; Ezek 11:17; 20:34, 41; 34:12, 13, 16; 37:14, 26; Zeph 3:20; Zech 10:8–10.

[14] David Klingler, "Validity in the Identification and Interpretation of a Literary Allusion in the Hebrew Bible" (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2010), 210.

Glossary of Literary Terms and Devices[15]

Acrostic: A poem in which the successive units begin with the consecutive letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Allegory: A work of literature in which some or all of the details have a corresponding other meaning and refer to either a concept or historical particular.

Alliteration: involves the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words in close proximity, used to create rhythm or emphasis.

Allusion: a reference to another work of literature, person, or event, often used to enhance meaning or provide deeper insight.

Ambiguity: the use of language that allows for multiple interpretations or meanings, adding complexity and depth to the narrative.

Anti-hero: a literary protagonist who exhibits an absence of the character traits that are conventionally associated with literary heroes.

Anti-romance: a work of literature, or part of a work of literature, that presents unideal experience; a literary world of total bondage and the absence of the ideal.

Anthropomorphism: the attribution of human characteristics, emotions, or behaviors to animals, inanimate objects, or deities.

Antagonist: the character or force that opposes the protagonist, thus creating conflict in the narrative.

Antithetic parallelism: a two-line poetic unit in which the second line states the truth of the first in the opposite way or introduces a contrast.

Aphorism: a short, memorable statement of truth.

Archetype: an image, plot motif, or character type that recurs throughout literature and is part of a reader's total literary experience.

Blazon: a love poem that praises the attractive features and / or virtues of the beloved by means of a catalogue or listing technique.

Calling stories: in the Gospels, stories in which Jesus calls a person to follow him or to respond to a command. Also called vocation stories.

Canonical form: the present or final form of the text as it appears within the canon of Scripture, as opposed to a hypothetical form the text may have had before it was placed in its present location in the canon of Scripture.

Characterization: the process by which the author reveals the personality, traits, and attributes of a character or group of characters in a narrative.

Climax: the moment of peak tension / plot conflict in the story.

Climactic parallelism: a form of parallelism in which the first line is left incomplete until the second line repeats part of it and then makes it a whole statement by adding to it.

Comedy: a story with a U-shaped plot in which the action begins in prosperity, descends into potentially tragic events, and rises to a happy ending.

Conflict / plot tension: the central struggle or problem between opposing forces that drives the plot forward. This can be internal (within a character) or external (between characters or between

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[15] This list is a composite of terms from four sources: (1) Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 513–17, (2) Schnittjer, *Torah Story*, 8–19, (3) Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Interpreting the Historical Books: An Exegetical Handbook,* edited by David M. Howard, Jr., Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2006), 227–31, and (4) David R. Klingler, "Bible Exposition Template and Instructions," unpublished manuscript, 2023.

a character and an external force). The plot tension generally revolves around the protagonist's desire and the antagonistic elements (see "antagonist") working against that desire.

Conflict stories: Gospel stories that narrate Jesus' controversies with an opposing person or group. Also called controversy stories.

Denouement: the last phase of a story, following the climax; literally the "tying up of loose ends."

Didactic: having the intention or impulse to teach.

Discourse: an address to an audience.

Dramatic monologue: a literary work in which a single speaker addresses an implied but silent listener and in which various details keep this dramatic situation alive in the reader's consciousness.

Dramatic structure: the arrangement of a story's scenes and episodes, sometimes distinguished in the story's discourse structure.

Emblem: a symbolic and sometimes pictorial image to which a person or thing is compared.

Emblematic blazon: a love poem that lists the features of the beloved and compares them to objects or emblems in nature or human experience.

Encomium: a work of literature that praises an abstract quality or a generalized character type.

Encounter stories: gospel stories in which a person is confronted with the claims of Jesus, which that person must either accept or reject.

Epic: a long narrative having a number of conventional characteristics.

Epiphany: a moment of heightened insight in a literary work.

Episode: An incident or a series of incidents that forms a distinct literary subunit in a narrative or story; an episode can include two or more scenes.

Epistle: a letter that attains literary status by virtue of the literary techniques used in it.

Epithalamion: a lyric poem that celebrates a wedding.

Epithet: an exalted title for a person or thing; a feature of the high style, especially as found in epic.

Explication: the literary term for close reading of a text. It implies not only careful analysis of a text but also putting one's analysis into organized form for written or oral presentation to an audience.

Exposition: the opening phase of a story in which the writer presents the background information that the reader needs in order to understand the plot that will subsequently unfold.

Expository writing: writing whose main purpose is to convey information.

Ellipsis: the author may drop an element of what is expected in the story in order to draw attention to it.

Extended Echo Effect: the repetition of parallel ordering, elements, or features in multiple narrative units (A-B-C, A-B-C). Similar to "typological pattern," but without the inclusion of prophetic expectation.

Flashback: a scene that interrupts the narrative to show events that happened at an earlier time, providing background or context.

Foil: a character who stands in contrast to another, thereby highlighting one or more of the latter's characteristics or traits.

Foreshadowing: involves hints or indications of what is to come later in the story, creating anticipation or suspense.

Folk literature: literature couched in the language of everyday speech and appealing to the common person. Also called popular literature.

Genre: a literary type or kind.
Hero: a protagonist who is exemplary and representative of a whole community.
Hero story, heroic narrative: a story built around the character and exploits of a protagonist who is exemplary and representative of a whole community.
Hybrid forms: narratives that combine elements of one or more genres.
Hyperbole: a figure of speech in which a writer uses conscious exaggeration for the sake of effect, usually emotional effect.
Imagery: descriptive language that appeals to the senses, helping to create a vivid mental picture for the reader.
Image: any concrete picture of reality or human experience, including any sensory experience, a setting, a character, or an event.
Inclusio: the bracketing of a unit of text identified by the repetition of features or elements at the beginning and end of the unit.
Interchange: an alternation of elements in the story which can cause heightened literary irony or develop comparative imaging.
Irony: a contrast between expectation and reality which can take various forms:
> **Verbal Irony:** occurs when a speaker says one thing but means another.
> **Situational Irony:** occurs when there is a discrepancy between what is expected to happen and what actually occurs.
> **Dramatic Irony:** a situation where the reader knows something which some or all the characters in a story are ignorant.

Janus: a bidirectional turning point looking both backward and forward.
Juxtaposition: placing two contrasting elements side by side to highlight their differences or create a particular effect.
> **Comparison:** the juxtaposition of similar elements such as words, imagery, or events.
> **Contrast:** the juxtaposition of dissimilar elements such as words, imagery, or events.

Lyric: a short poem containing the thoughts or feelings of a speaker. The emotional quality, even more than the reflective, is usually considered the differentia of lyric.
Metaphor: a figure of speech in which the writer makes an implied comparison between two phenomena.
Miracle stories: gospel narratives that focus on miracles that Jesus performed.
Motif: a recurring element, theme, or idea in a narrative that has symbolic significance and helps to develop the story's themes.
Narrative Perspective (Point of View): the lens through which the story is told, affecting the reader's perception. Common perspectives include:
> **First-Person:** the narrator is a character in the story, using "I" or "we."
> **Second-Person:** the narrator addresses the reader directly using "you."
> **Third-Person Limited:** the narrator is outside the story but knows the thoughts and feelings of one character.
> **Third-Person Omniscient:** the narrator knows all the thoughts and feelings of all characters.

Narrative space: narrators may employ physical space / locations as part of the setting, but may also assign symbolic meaning to certain physical spaces.
Narrative sequence: narrators may employ dischronological narrative in the form of previews or flashbacks in an advantageous way to the story.

Narrative time: in real history, time is a constant. But in narrative literature, the narrator may speed up (pass many years briefly) or slow down (focus an extended portion of text in a brief window of time) according to his discretion.

Narrative typology: a case in which, by design of the narrator, an earlier character or event supplies the pattern for a later character or event in the story.

Normative character: a character in a story who expresses or embodies what the storyteller wishes us to understand is correct.

Occasional literature: a work of literature that takes its origin from a particular historical event or a particular situation in the writer's life.

Ode: an exalted lyric poem that celebrates a dignified subject in a lofty style.

Paneled sequence: a literary structural technique where repeated elements appear in successive movements, yielding a structure of ABC // ABC.

Parable: a brief narrative that explicitly embodies one or more themes.

Paradox: an apparent contradiction that upon reflection is seen to express a genuine truth; the contradiction must be resolved or explained before we see its truth.

Parallelism: the verse form in which all biblical poetry is written. The general definition that will cover the various types of parallelism is as follows: two or more lines that form a pattern based on repetition or balance of thought or grammar. The phrase thought couplet is a good working synonym.

> **Stairstep parallelism:** a type of parallelism in which the last key word of a line becomes the first main word in the next line.
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> **Synonymous parallelism:** a type of parallelism in which two or more lines state the same idea in different words but in similar grammatical form; the second line repeats the content of all or part of the first line.
>
> **Synthetic parallelism:** a type of parallelism in which the second line completes the thought of the first line, but without repeating anything from the first line. also called growing parallelism.

Parody: a work of literature that parallels but inverts the usual meaning of a literary genre or a specific earlier work of literature.

Passion stories: gospel stories that narrate the events surrounding the trial, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Pastoral: literature in which the setting, characters, and events are those of the shepherd's world.

Personification: a figure of speech in which human attributes are given to something nonhuman, such as animals, objects, or abstract qualities.

Plot: the sequence of events in a story, usually based on a central conflict and having a beginning, middle, and end.

Plot Twist: an unexpected or surprising turn of events in a narrative that alters the direction of the story or changes the reader's understanding of the plot.

Poetic justice: the feature of stories by which good characters are rewarded and evil characters are punished.

Poetic license: figurative language that is not literally true or factual.

Prolepsis (opposite of flashback): interrupts the chronological flow of a story by jumping ahead in time to reveal something that will happen later. Prolepsis can take several forms, such as a direct flashforward showing future events, or more subtly, through hints or statements that suggest what will happen.

Proportion: highlighting a work's emphasis by the quantitative amount it occupies in the narrative.

Protagonist: the leading character in a story, whether sympathetic or unsympathetic.

Proverb: a concise, memorable expression of truth.

Pun: a play on words, often using a word that sounds like another word but that has a different meaning.

Repetition: the recurrence of similar or identical elements (words, actions, concepts).

Resolution: following the climax, the part of the story where the conflict is resolved and the narrative comes to a conclusion. It ties up loose ends and provides closure for the characters and the plot.

Rhetorical question: a figure of speech in which the writer asks a question whose answer is so obvious that it is left unstated; a question asked, not to elicit information, but for the sake of effect, usually an emotional effect.

Rising Action: rising action is the building of tension as the plot conflict escalates towards the climax.

Sarcasm: the use of irony to mock or convey contempt, often through exaggerated statements that are not meant to be taken literally.

Satire: the exposure, through ridicule or rebuke, of human vice or folly.

Satiric norm: the standard by which the object of attack is criticized in a satire.

Scene: a subunit of an episode; it records an incident that takes place in a different place and/or at a different time than the incidents that precede and follow it.

Setting: the time and place in which a story occurs.

Simile: a figure of speech in which the writer compares two phenomena, using the explicit formula "like" or "as."

Suspense: the feeling of anticipation or anxiety about what will happen next in the story, often created through uncertainty or danger.

Symbol: any detail in a work of literature that in addition to its literal meaning stands for something else.

Symbolism: involves the use of symbols to represent ideas or concepts beyond their literal meaning, often conveying deeper significance.

Temporal overlay: a literary technique where the narrator juxtaposes episodes or scenes that overlap chronologically, rather than presenting events in strictly chronological succession.

Theme: a generalization about life that a work of literature as a whole embodies or implies.

Tone: the attitude or emotional stance of the narrator or author towards the subject matter, conveyed through word choice and style.

Tragedy: a narrative form built around an exceptional calamity stemming from the protagonist's wrong choice.

Turning point (character): the place in a narrative where a character's characterization changes significantly due to events in the plot.

Turning point (plot): the point from which, at least in retrospect, the reader can begin to see how the plot conflict will be resolved.

Typological pattern: the prophetic expectation of similarities in character or events. Similar to "extended echo effect," but with the inclusion of prophetic expectation.

Voice: the distinct personality and style of the narrator or author, influencing how the story is perceived.

Well-made plot: a plot that unfolds according to the following pattern: exposition (background information), inciting moment (or inciting force), rising action, turning point (the point from which, at least in retrospect, the reader can begin to see how the plot conflict will be resolved), further complication, climax, and denouement.

Witness stories: gospel stories in which either Jesus or another character testifies about Jesus or his works. Also called testimony stories.

Occasion

Who?

The text does not identify its author. Jewish tradition supposed the authorship of Samuel,[16] although this cannot be validated. For the purposes of this paper, the author remains mysterious. Whoever and whenever the author, this paper will present the case for a single writer who strategically composed the entire book of Judges.

To Whom?

The text does not identify its audience. Given the book's polemic against Benjamin and against the Northern Kingdom's idolatrous and illegitimate regency through its anti-Ephraimite stance, it seems reasonable that the author wrote to all Israelites in order to persuade them to follow the legitimate Judahite king while awaiting *the* Davidic king.

When?

Scholarship remains divided over the date of composition of Judges. Numerous explanatory notes in the text suggest a date of composition somewhat removed from the events themselves (1:11, 21, 23, 26; 3:1–2; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12; 19:10, 30; 20:27–28). In favor of an earlier date: (1) the narrator's note of Jebusites living in Jerusalem "to this day" (1:21) suggests a pre-Davidic time (2 Sam 5:6–8), (2) that Sidon rather than Tyre is identified as the primary Phoenician city (3:3) suggests a date earlier than 1140 BC, (3) the song of Deborah relative to the rebuilding of Megiddo is dated to around 1100 BC, and (4) Talmudic tradition identified Samuel as the author / compiler, suggesting an 11th century composition.[17] On the other hand, several factors favor a later date in at least Israel's united kingdom period, if not later: (1) the book's elevation of Judah in contrast to its negative portrayal of Benjamin and the northern tribes suggests a point in time after the conflict between Saul (of Benjamin) and David (of Judah), (2) the negative portrayal of the tribe of Ephraim suggests a time after the divided monarchy,[18] (3) the mention of the "captivity of the land" (18:30) may refer to the Babylonian exile (587 BC), the Assyrian exile of the northern kingdom (722 BC), the Philistine invasion when the ark was at Shiloh (1 Sam 4:1–11), or shortly after Saul's death when his descendants reigned the Transjordan area.[19] While the term גְּלוֹת הָאָרֶץ, "captivity of the land" remains ambiguous, strong rhetorical arguments exist for suggesting an original גְּלוֹת הָאָרוֹן, "captivity of the ark."[20] In this case, the text does not demand an exilic date—of either northern or southern

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[16] R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 689.

[17] For further detailed explanation of reasons supporting an early monarchical date of composition, see Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 687–90.

[18] Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *A Commentary on Judges and Ruth: Commentary*, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2013), 54–55.

[19] Longman, III and Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 135.

[20] Robert H. O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 481–82.

kingdoms—nor a post-exilic date. This paper will assume a pre-exilic date based on the apparent rhetorical purposes of the text. Thus, the likely date range for the composition of the book is approximately a five-hundred year window from ~1100–600 BC. In the end, however, this paper cannot assert a more precise date of composition than this.

Where?

The text itself does not indicate the location of the author at the time of composition. However, given the apparent polemic against the northern tribes, it seems reasonable that the text originated in Judah, possibly Jerusalem itself. Nevertheless, this inference cannot be validated with certainty.

Why?

By identifying the failure of the judges to produce righteousness in Israel, the narrative in Judges anticipates a coming king. However, by pointing to the unsuccessful, idolatrous, and troublesome northern tribes, the author apparently sought to persuade his Israelite audience to recognize the illegitimacy of the Saulide dynasty and the northern regency. Instead, he contended his Israelite audience should pledge their loyalty to the legitimate Judahite king while awaiting the final son of David.

Genre

The book of Judges was written as an historical narrative.

Proposed Message Statement

In order to address the reality of Israel's divided monarchy and the lack of covenant fidelity in Israel, an unknown author wrote an historical narrative from Judah[21] for all Israelites in order explain the illegitimacy of the Saulide dynasty and the regency of the Northern (Ephraimite) Kingdom, so that all Israel would devote their allegiance to the Judahite king in the line of David and live in covenant fidelity while awaiting the ultimate Davidic king.

Proposed Outline

Commentaries and other studies of the book of Judges have made the tri-fold structure in Judges a virtually universal convention (prologue [1:1–3:6], the judges cycle [3:7–16:31], and epilogue [17:1–21:25]). For the sake of clear communication, this paper will follow the same structure.

I.   Prologue (1:1–3:6)
II.   Judges cycle (3:7–16:31)
III. Epilogue (17:1–21:25)

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[21] Possibly Jerusalem.

Use of Rhetoric in Judges

Classical rhetoric employs three modes and three species of rhetoric. The three modes of rhetoric include *logos*,[22] *pathos*,[23] and *ethos*.[24] The three species include judicial,[25] epideictic,[26] and deliberative[27] rhetoric.[28] As will be demonstrated in the proposed argument exposition below, the author of Judges employed a mixture of judicial and epideictic rhetoric for an overall deliberative purpose. He cast the acts of the judges and Levites in the third-generation Israelites[29] in a negative light (epideictic rhetoric of blame) and sought his audience's agreement regarding their guilt (judicial). Using the rhetoric of entrapment (having agreed at the evil acts and the need for a [righteous] king in Israel), the audience would then be forced to recognize the blameworthiness of the judges and Levites and hence their own guilt in similar matters. The author also especially portrayed the northern tribes, and Benjamin and Ephraim in particular (literally picturing Saul and the Northern Kingdom's king), as blameworthy (epideictic rhetoric of blame). These elements all contribute to the author's overall deliberative purpose that his audience live in covenant fidelity while supporting the Judahite king in the line of David and awaiting the ultimate Davidic king who would restore righteousness to Israel.

Chronology in Judges

The chronology presented in Judges raises questions of historical accuracy. If the time from the Exodus to Solomon's fourth year and the establishment of the temple in Jerusalem was 480 years (1 Kgs 6:1), the sum of the wilderness wanderings, settling in Canaan under

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[22] The rhetoric of *logos* employs logical arguments intended to appeal to rational principles found within the author's discourse.

[23] The rhetoric of *pathos* employs arguments intended to arouse an emotional reaction and play upon the audience's feelings.

[24] The rhetoric of *ethos* makes ethical appeals on the basis of credibility: good character or authority.

[25] With judicial rhetoric, the author seeks to persuade the audience to make a judgment about events that occurred in the past. This judgment often deals with questions of truth or justice, and can be positive (a defense or "apology" of correctness / innocence) or negative (a prosecution, emphasizing guilt).

[26] With epideictic rhetoric, the author seeks to persuade his audience to hold or reaffirm a certain point of view in the present time. The author wants to increase (or decrease / undermine) his audience's asset to a certain value or belief. To this end, epideictic rhetoric will frequently use examples of *praise* and *blame*.

[27] With deliberative rhetoric, the author seeks to persuade the audience to take (or not take) some action in the (often near) future. Deliberative rhetoric deals with questions of self-interest and future benefits for the audience, and appears in the form of exhortation (positive) or warning (negative).

[28] For a complete discussion of classical rhetoric in biblical studies, see George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*, Studies in Religion (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

[29] The first generation includes those who departed Egypt but died in the wilderness. The second generation includes those born in the wilderness and entered the Promised Land under Joshua. The third generation means the Israelites after the time of Joshua's death, "another generation grew up … who did not know Yahweh or the work he had done for Israel" (2:10) who "did evil in the eyes of Yahweh" (2:11).

Joshua, and the length of the various judges' rules exceeds 600 years. Most likely, some of the judges ruled contemporaneously over various areas of Israel and the narrator did not provide the information necessary to reconstruct the exact history.[30] In crafting the book of Judges, the author arranged the various episodes to show a continual degrading of faithfulness and descent into chaos. This served his rhetorical purposes in showing the need for a faithful Judahite king. In doing so, he did not follow a strict chronological outline. For example, Phineas the grandson of Aaron appears in Judges 20. The events narrated there happened very early in the period of the judges, making it impossible for that event to occur following the reigns of the various judges if one simply sums up the lengths of their rule. Instead, the narrator employed the technique of narrative sequence, whereby he arranged dischronological elements in the form of previews or flashbacks in an advantageous way to the story. Thus, the goal of the reader should not be to reconstruct the historical sequence and dates of the judges. Rather, the reader should attempt to discern the author's intended meaning given the structure of the narrative in its final form.

Single Author

Scholarship has traditionally viewed the book of Judges as being composed of at least three independently written accounts (prologue, judges cycle, epilogue) that were then artificially connected, but somewhat unrelated. However, typical diachronic approaches to the composition of Judges ignore the intricate connections in structure, plot, and theology. Demonstrable literary and rhetorical connections between (1) the prologue and judges cycle, (2) the prologue and the epilogue, and (3) the judges cycle and the epilogue, argue for a single master storyteller who took various historical sources from the judges period and composed a unified narrative for a specific purpose (see section above on "Why?").[31] These intricate connections will be detailed in the exposition below.

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[30] For a fuller discussion of chronological issues and proposals, see Chisholm, *Judges*, 35–53.

[31] Gregory T. K. Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges: An Inductive, Rhetorical Study* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

Proposed Argument Exposition

Figures 1 and 2 are maps depicting the approximate allocations of land to the tribes at the end of Joshua's life / beginning of the judges period. The allotment to Dan along the coastal plain represents the land they did not conquer prior to their migration north to Laish (ch. 18). Figure 2 presents a more detailed depiction of the cities.

Figure 1: Allotment of land to the twelve tribes (Josh 13–19)[32]
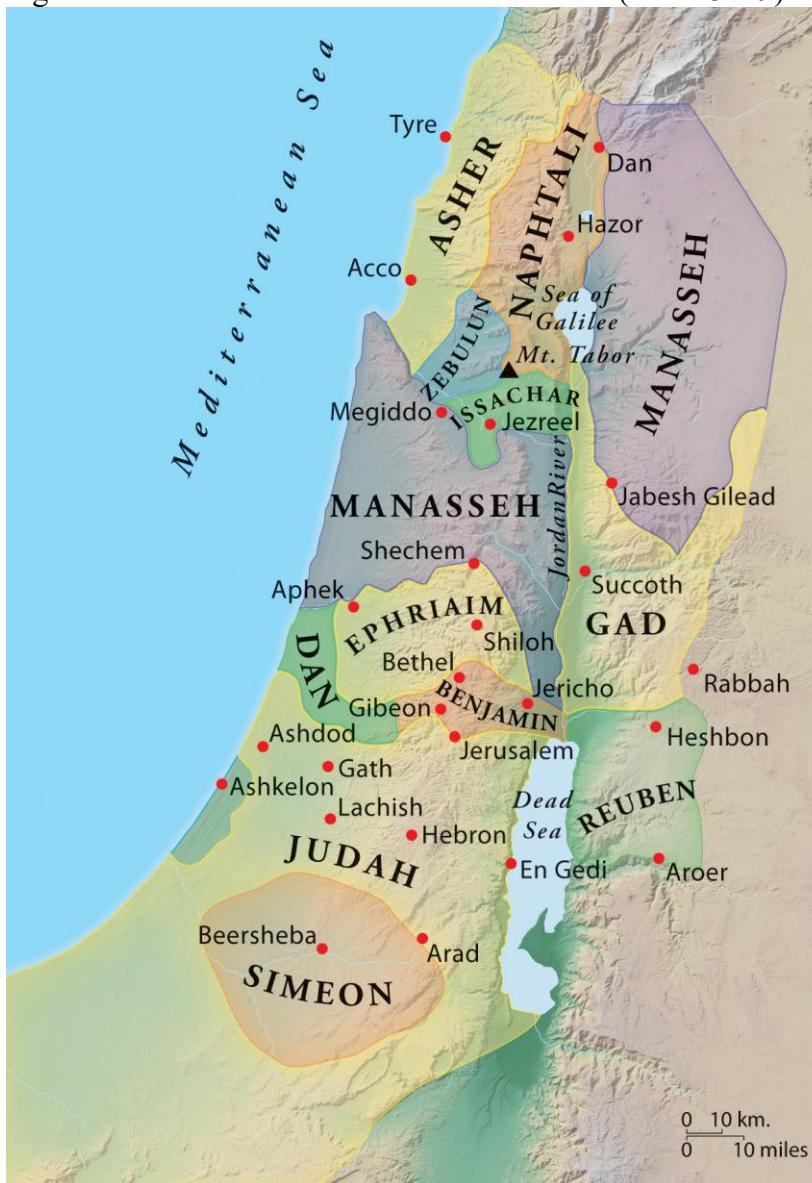
[32] John H. Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 95.

Figure 2: Allotment of land and cities to the twelve tribes (Josh 13–19)[33]
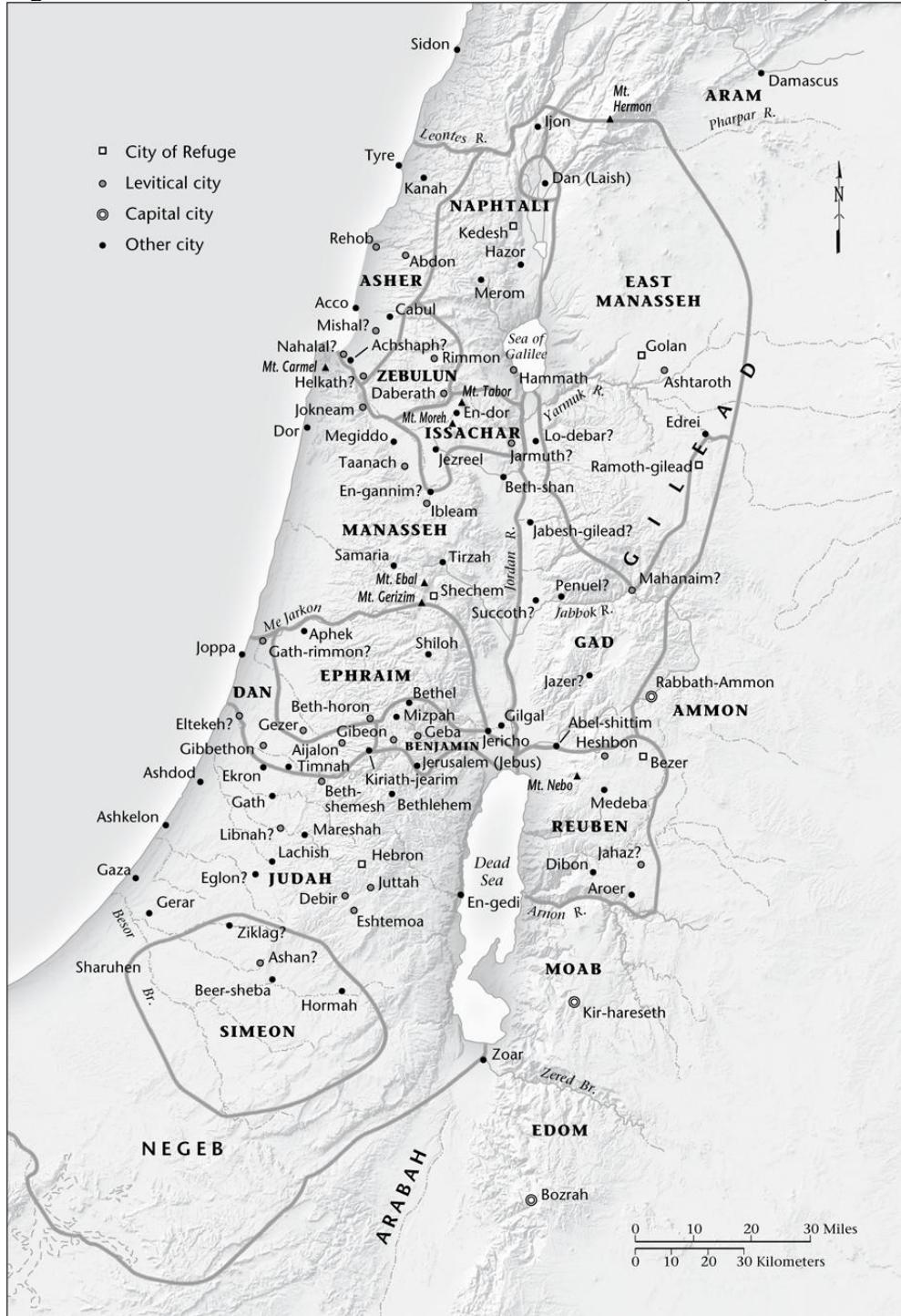
In his **prologue (1:1–3:6)**, the narrator established the book's setting and rhetorical purposes. The setting includes the twelve tribes in the Promised Land amidst the Canaanites following Joshua's unsuccessful conquest (book of Joshua).[34] Rhetorically, the narrator opened the book of Judges with a pro-Judah, anti-northern tribes stance, and this established his purpose in eliciting his audience's support for the Davidic king over against Benjamite leaders (like Saul) and Ephraimite leaders of the Northern Kingdom (like Jeroboam I) while awaiting the ultimate judge-priest-prophet-king.

The opening words, "After the death of Joshua" (1:1) literally connect the book of Judges to the conclusion of the book of Joshua when Joshua died (Josh 24:29). Grammatically, the opening vav-consecutive וַיְהִי also connects Judges to Joshua and supports the serial narrative begun in Genesis. Judges must be read in light of the entire Pentateuch and the book of Joshua. The bulk of Exodus through Deuteronomy was written to impress the importance of living in covenant fidelity in the Promised Land to the Law delivered by Moses. The book of Joshua continued in that same tradition of exhortation to covenant fidelity. That Yahweh was giving land (Josh 1:2, 6, 11, 12, 14, 15) and rest (נוח, Josh 1:13, 15) connected life in the Promised Land back to the hope for rest from sorrow (Gen 5:29) by means of the promised seed and suggests the Promised Land as a type of Eden. However, success in conquering the Canaanites and possessing the land was connected to obedience to the Law (Josh 1:6–8). The repetition of "be strong and courageous" (Josh 1:6, 7, 9, 18) reinforced the importance of faithful adherence to the Law. That Israel had failed to possess the land and drive out its inhabitants in the book of Joshua reveals the covenant infidelity of the nation.[35] The same will be true in the book of Judges.

Rhetorically, the narrator contrasted the tribe of Judah with the northern tribes in order to establish the rightful place of Judah as leader of the tribes and source of the monarchy. Table 2 identifies the contrasts between the successes of Judah and the failures of the northern tribes.

Table 2: Contrasts between Judah and the Northern Tribes

Judah	Northern Tribes
Conquered Jerusalem (1:8)	Benjamin unable to conquer Jerusalem (1:21)
Put the Canaanites under the ban (total destruction) (1:17)	Allowed Canaanite survivors (1:25–26)
Victorious in battle (1:4–20)	Joseph partially successful (1:22–26) Benjamin unsuccessful (1:21) Manasseh unsuccessful (1:27) Ephraim unsuccessful (1:29) Zebulun unsuccessful (1:30) Asher unsuccessful (1:31–32) Naphtali unsuccessful (1:33) Dan unsuccessful (1:34)

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[34] Refer to this author's exposition of the book of Joshua for an explanation of how Joshua had a mixture of successes and failures. Due to his halfhearted obedience to the Law, he and the Israelites only received a fraction of the Promised Land.

[35] This failure by Joshua and the Israelites in the book of Joshua is validated by what comes before and after the book of Joshua. At the end of Deuteronomy, Yahweh's words (Deut 31:16–18), Moses' words (Deut 31:26–29), Moses' song (Deut 32) all foretold Israel's failure. Early in the book of Judges and following Joshua's death, the angel of Yahweh revealed the Israelites' unfaithfulness (Judg 2:1–5).

Yahweh was with Judah (1:19)	Yahweh was only with Joseph (1:22); no other tribes receive this mention.

These contrasts between Judah and the northern tribes contribute to the narrator's overall purpose of eliciting support from his audience for the Judahite king and condemning the Saulide dynasty (Benjamin) and the Northern Kingdom (Ephraim). The narrator further portrayed the preeminence of Judah among the tribes by various means:

- Judah was Yahweh's choice as the first tribe (1:1–2).
- Judah's partnership with Simeon showed their influence and ability to unite and lead (1:3).
- The narrator portrayed Judah as victorious in their various battles and in possessing the land (1:4–20). Their victory over Adoni-Bezek reflected poetic justice.
- The narrator juxtaposed by contrast Judah's success—even in conquering Jerusalem (1:8)—with Benjamin's inability to drive out the Jebusites from Jerusalem (1:21).[36] Judah's renaming of Zephath as Hormah, from the root חֵרֶם, meaning "ban," shows Judah being faithful to place the inhabitants of Canaan under the ban (see Deut 7:1–2). By contrast, the other tribes all failed to dispossess the land from the current inhabitants (1:22–36).
- The narrator emphasized Yahweh's presence with the men of Judah (1:19). This phrase was repeated with the tribes of Joseph (1:22), but then those tribes (Ephraim and Manasseh) acted unfaithfully (1:24–25).
- Judah's inheritance of the city of Hebron (1:10, 20) held great prestige because of its association with the patriarchs.

These elements all serve to characterize Judah as a good and faithful tribe in comparison to the other tribes. The account of Caleb (of Judah), Othniel, and Aksah (1:9–15) is a repetition of the same events in Joshua 15:13–19. Othniel's capture of Kiriath Sepher (1:12–13) characterizes him as a man of faithfulness to the Law, since the book of Joshua had identified strength and courage as equivalent to obeying the Law (Josh 1:6–8). This characterization sets up the audience to expect good things of Othniel in the narrative. Caleb had been the most faithful man in the book of Joshua, even serving as a character foil to unfaithful Joshua, and now Othniel is the faithful man to whom Caleb entrusted his daughter. Caleb's blessing of his daughter Aksah with springs of water (1:14–15) serves as an example of an Israelite man blessing an Israelite woman as a result of covenant fidelity, which will be contrasted by juxtaposition as the narrative advances: later in the story, Israelite men will bring cursing to Israelite women because of their unfaithfulness to the Law (chs. 17–21). Indeed, Caleb (and later Othniel) of Judah serve as character foils to the remaining judges who all originate from other tribes.

Despite Judah's faithful characterization, their inability to drive out the Canaanites ostensibly because of iron chariots (1:19) and their failure to execute Adoni-Bezek (1:6–7)

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[36] The disjunctive clause in 1:21 reveals the contrast. The apparent contradiction between 1:8 (Judah conquering Jerusalem) and 1:21 (Benjamin unable to conquer Jerusalem, and the ongoing Jebusite presence) may be resolved by understanding the narrator's use of narrative sequence. The Judahites who conquered Jerusalem may be a reference to David and his men (2 Sam 5:6–8). The author thus uses a prolepsis to the time of David for his rhetorical purpose of advancing David of Judah against Saul of Benjamin.

indicates a less than ideal faithfulness. Yahweh had already demonstrated his ability to defeat enemies with chariots (Exod 14; Josh 11:4–9), and he also commanded in the Law not to fear enemies with chariots (Deut 20:1). Furthermore, Judah demonstrated the Canaanite style of brutality in their treatment of Adoni-Bezek (1:6–7). Later in Judges, the tribe was absent from the song of Deborah (ch. 5) and dealt treacherously with Samson by handing over their brother to the Philistines (15:9–13). Even this leading tribe that would produce the Israelite king showed weakness and unfaithfulness, a fact which highlighted the need for the ultimate Davidic king.

The narrator's statement that when "Israel" (here probably referring to the northern tribes) "grew strong" (1:28) but then put the inhabitants of Canaan to forced labor (1:28) is verbal irony "spoken" by the narrator because real strength is obedience to the Law and it results in unqualified victory (Josh 1:6–8; Judg 1:10–13). In reality, the result of forced labor meant the Israelites were decidedly *not* strong. The narrator of Joshua had noted the same ironic situation of the Manassites (Josh 17:13).

The so-called "mini-narratives" in the prologue (such as the account of Adoni-Bezek, 1:5–7) seemingly intrude awkwardly upon the flow of the narrative by producing unnecessary details. However, these "mini-narratives" serve a literary and rhetorical function by connecting the prologue to the judges cycle. For example, the narrator's mention of the Canaanite king Adoni-Bezek and his brutality toward seventy kings (1:5–7) is present in the prologue so that Abimelech's murder of his seventy half-brothers (9:5) can be portrayed as a Canaanite act. The narrator would therefore depict how a leader in Israel (Abimelech) had become thoroughly Canaanized.[37] This connection suggests unified authorship between the prologue and the judges cycle.

The message of Yahweh's angel at Bochim (2:1–5) matches Yahweh's and Moses' foretelling of failure (Deut 31:16–18, 26–29; 32:1–52) and provides theological commentary on the failure of the tribes to maintain covenant fidelity. It sets the audience up to expect idolatry and Canaanization of the Israelites.[38] The real reason for Israel's failure was not the strength of the Canaanites and their chariots, but the disobedience of the Israelites (2:2). The remainder of the book of Judges, and especially the epilogue, will exhibit the continued deterioration of Israel. While the people wept (2:4), the announcement did not lead to repentance.

According to the book of Joshua, the failure of the tribes to conquer the land resulted from covenant infidelity. Failure in the prologue of Judges is for the same reason. Indeed, in the preview of the Judges (2:10–3:6), the narrator emphasized the major plot problem in his narrative: "The Israelites did evil in the eyes of Yahweh" (2:11). This directly contradicted the Law, where Yahweh had commanded the Israelites to do what was good and right in his eyes (Deut 6:18; 12:28). The narrator established the cycle of Israel committing evil, oppression, crying out, deliverance through a human judge, the death of that judge, and the resulting fall back into evil. The notes of idolatry (2:11, 12, 13, 17, 19; 3:6), living among the Canaanite nations (2:21, 23; 3:1–5), and intermarriage with the Canaanites (3:6) summarize Israel's violations of the Law. These three major sins were prohibited in Deuteronomy 7 (and

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[37] Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges*, 148.

[38] Chisholm, *Judges*, 19.

elsewhere).[39] These reprehensible violations of the Law also foreshadow the actions of the judges in the judges cycle, thus pointing to the need for a righteous king in Israel. Indeed, Ehud turned back to slay Eglon when he saw the idolatrous carved imaged at Gilgal (3:19) which had replaced the memorial stones of Yahweh (Josh 4:20), but he did not remove them (3:26).

In the prologue, the narrator employed both third-person omniscient perspective (e.g., 2:15–3:3) to present the divine theological interpretation of events, as well as third-person limited (human) perspective (e.g., 1:19, 27, 35). This difference in perspective highlights for the audience the Israelites' lack of faith. If the audience were tempted to accept the excuses for the Israelites' failures, the narrator corrects them by portraying Yahweh's perspective. The Israelites failed on account of their disobedience.

The prologue also established a literary-geographic pattern as the narrator lists the order of tribes (1) from south to north, and (2) from most successful to least successful. The geographic order is self-evident (see Figures 1 and 2 above showing the tribal allotments, and Figure 3 below with the locations of the judges). The relative levels of success are apparent from the language used in the text. While Judah was largely successful (1:3–18), the Jebusites / Canaanites "lived in the midst of" Benjamin, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Zebulun. But the Asherites and Naphtalites "lived in the midst of the Canaanites," and lastly, the Amorites "confined" the Danites to the hill country. Table 3 demonstrates the progressive literary-geographic deterioration in the prologue as matched to the judges in the judges cycle.

Table 3: Progressive literary-geographical decline[40]

Tribe	Prologue	Judges cycle
Judah	Largely successful (1:3–18)	Othniel of Judah
Benjamin	Jebusites live in the midst of Benjamin (1:21)	Ehud of Benjamin
Manasseh	Canaanites determined to live in this land (1:27)	Gideon of Manasseh Jephthah the Gileadite of Manasseh
Ephraim	Canaanites lived in the midst of Ephraim (1:29)	
Zebulun	Canaanites lived in the midst of Zebulun (1:30)	
Asher	Asherites lived in the midst of the Canaanites (1:32)	
Naphtali	Naphtali lived in the midst of the Canaanites (1:33)	Barak of Naphtali
Dan	Amorites confined Danites to the hill country (1:34)	Samson of Dan

That this literary-geographical (and even "tribal") decline in ch. 1 corresponds to the judges cycle is another evidence pointing to authorial unity between the prologue and the judges cycle.

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[39] Yahweh had expressly commanded the Israelites to destroy the Canaanite idols and images (Deut 7:5, 25) and not create or worship them (Exod 20:2–3; Lev 26:1; Deut 4:16, 23; 5:8; 27:15). Instead of living among the Canaanites, they were to place them under the ban and utterly destroy them (Deut 7:1–2). Yahweh further commanded the Israelites not to intermarry with the Canaanites (Deut 7:3).

[40] Information populating this table is drawn from Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges*, 144–56.

Figure 3: Geographic placement of the judges[41]
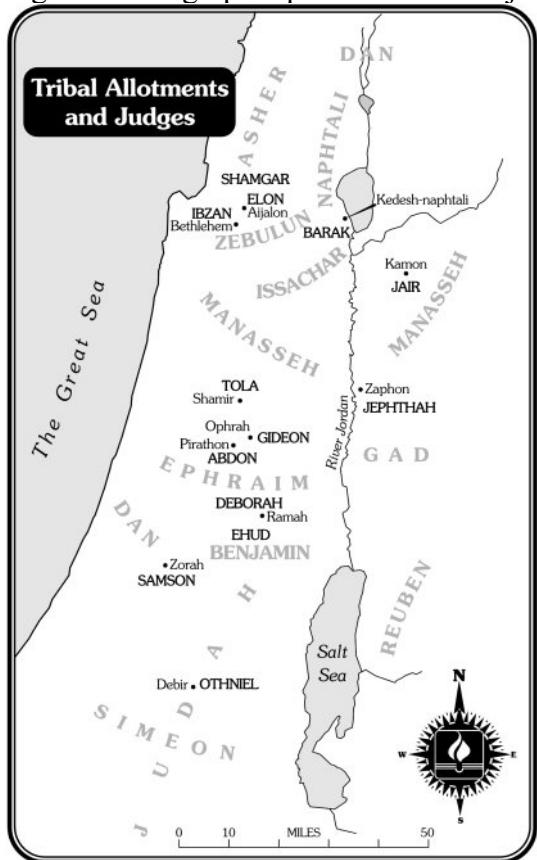
In the prologue, the narrator presented the decreasing success in possessing land as the tribes are listed from south to north (movement from Judah to Dan). This deterioration from south to north foreshadows and parallels the decline in the quality of the judges: in the judges cycle, the narrator portrayed the progressively deteriorating quality of the judges through lack of faith, motivation of self-interest, and harshness toward fellow Israelites (see judges cycle). The judges' tribe of origin in the order presented by the narrator also moves from south to north (Judah to Dan), with decreasing quality as the scenes of the judges moves further north. Thus, the author's portrayal of the literary-geographic decline from south to north serves a rhetorical purpose in both the prologue and the judges cycle to elevate Judah and to denounce the northern tribes.[42]

With his prologue (1:1–3:6), the narrator thus accomplished several things. First, he established the setting and pattern the audience can expect in the rest of the book. Second, he portrayed Judah as the leader of the tribes, despite its failures. Third, he portrayed the other tribes, especially Benjamin and the northern tribes, as worse than Judah. In doing so, he set the stage for the same pattern in the upcoming judges cycle (3:7–16:31). The author expected his audience to reject Saul and the Northern Kingdom in favor of the Judahite king from the line of

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[41] Terry L. Brensinger, *Judges*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1999), 239.

[42] It also suggests authorial unity between the prologue and the judges cycle.

David (his overall deliberative purpose). Fourth, he expected the audience to agree on the sinfulness of the third generation Israelites in light of their covenant infidelity (judicial rhetoric) and view them as censurable examples to avoid (epideictic rhetoric of praise and blame), and thus adhere to the Law themselves. Fifth, the failures point to the need for righteousness in Israel. Yahweh intended the nation to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests (Exod 19:5–6), but by the time of the judges, Israel dramatically failed. Finally, the author asked an unspoken question of the audience: their ancestors (the characters in the book of Judges) had disobeyed the Law and suffered for it; would *they* obey? Or would they suffer the same fate? In these ways, the prologue contributed to the author's overall deliberative purpose that all Israel would devote their allegiance to the Judahite king in the line of David and live in covenant fidelity while awaiting the ultimate Davidic king.

In the **judges cycle (3:7–16:31)**, the narrator revealed the judges' descent through their decreasing lack of faith, the diminished participation of the tribes in military exploits, increasingly self-interested motives, harshness toward fellow Israelites, and Yahweh's increasing frustration with the tribes.[43] Thus, the judges cycle is not merely cyclical, but also progressive in nature as Israel becomes more and more like the Canaanites Yahweh intended them to wipe out. Through this deterioration, the author continued to appeal for his audience's loyalty to the Judahite king through two primary means. First, the geographic / tribal arrangement of the judges follows the literary-geographic pattern established in the prologue (see Table 3) to demonstrate the deterioration in the quality of the judges as the reader is taken geographically from judges in the south (Othniel of Judah) to the north (Samson of Dan). Only the account of the Judahite judge Othniel lacks castigatory features.[44] The point here is the superiority of a Judahite ruler. Second, through narrative analogies in the judges to the reigns of Saul and David, the author cast the monarchy of Saul of negative light as a foil against the Davidic monarchy. Othniel, the good Judahite judge corresponds to David while the other bad judges correspond to Saul. This pattern of narrative analogies also suits the author's purpose in eliciting support for a Judahite king over against any Saulide / Ephraimite challengers. Table 4 summarizes the narrative analogies between the judges and the reigns of David and Saul.

Table 4: Narrative analogies between the judges and the reigns of David and Saul[45]

Judge / King	Analogy / Correspondence
Othniel / David	• Faithful to Yahweh
Ehud / Saul	• Both from Benjamin • Both fought the Moabites and Amalekites (3:12–30; 1 Sam 11:1–11; 14:48) • Ehud permitted the idols to remain at Gilgal (3:19, 26); Saul made burnt offerings at Gilgal (1 Sam 13:7–14) and spared the Amalekite king at Gilgal (1 Sam 15)
Barak / Saul	• Both received a prophetic summons for battle (4:6–7; 1 Sam 15:1–3)

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[43] Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges*, 158–84. Wong demonstrates how the narrator presents progressive deterioration in each of these areas in the movement from one judge to the next.

[44] O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 83.

[45] This table is adapted from O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 284–96.

	• Barak failed to slay Sisera (4:15–17); Saul failed to slay Agag (1 Sam 15:9) • Jael—a substitute for Barak—slew Sisera (4:21); Samuel—a substitute for Saul—slew Agag (1 Sam 15:33) • A Kenite (Jael) is near the battle (4:11, 17, 21); Kenites are near Saul's battle with the Amalekites (1 Sam 15:6) • Sisera's mother lost her son (5:28); Agag's mother lost her son (1 Sam 15:33)
Gideon / Saul	• Both called גִּבּוֹר חָיִל, mighty warriors (6:12; 1 Sam 9:1) • Both minimize their own importance (6:15; 1 Sam 9:21) • Both were empowered by Yahweh's Spirit (6:34; 1 Sam 10:6) • Both were offered the kingship (8:22–23; 1 Sam 11:15) • Both separated their army into three companies (7:16; 1 Sam 11:11) • Israelites hid in caves (6:2; 1 Sam 13:6) • Both summoned their armies with trumpets (6:34; 1 Sam 13:3) • Both faced enemies numbered like the sand of the seashore (7:12; 1 Sam 13:5) • Both had trembling (חרד) troops (7:3; 1 Sam 13:7) • Both faced tests of self-control (7:4–8; 1 Sam 13:6–14) • Both had enemies in panic and confusion (7:22; 1 Sam 14:15–20) • Both caused Ephraimites to pursue the enemy (7:24; 1 Sam 14:22) • Gideon requested food for his men (8:5); Saul forbade food (1 Sam 14:24) • Gideon made an ephod (8:27); Saul made an altar (1 Sam 14:35) • Both slaughtered Israelites (8:17–21; 1 Sam 22:18–19)[46] • Both had their military forces encamped at Gilboa (7:1; 1 Sam 28:4) • Both had enemy forces on the slope of Mount Moreh (7:1, 8; 1 Sam 28:4)[47] • Both were afraid of the enemy (7:10; 1 Sam 28:5) • Gideon encouraged by a dream at Endor (7:13–15); Saul discouraged by lack of a dream and sought a medium at Endor instead (1 Sam 28:6–7) • Gideon's son afraid to kill a king (8:20); Saul's armor bearer afraid to kill Saul (1 Sam 31:4)
Abimelech / Saul	• Both had rivals to the throne—Abimelech's 70 half-brothers (9:2) and David (1 Sam 20:30–31 • Abimelech slaughtered his 70 half-brothers (9:5); Saul slaughtered 85 priests (1 Sam 22:18) • Abimelech slaughtered the citizens of Shechem (9:40–45); Saul slaughtered the citizens of Nob (1 Sam 22:19) • Jotham the sole escapee of Abimelech (9:5); Abiathar the sole escapee of Saul (1 Sam 23:20)

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[46] Gideon killed because of refusal to feed his troops. Saul killed priests for their willingness to feed David and his troops. Thus, in a movement from lesser to greater, the author casts Saul in even worse light than Gideon.

[47] Shunem (1 Sam 28:4) is on the western slope of Mount Moreh.

	• Jotham's rebuke cursed Abimelech and his subjects (9:7–21); Samuel's rebuke cursed Saul and his subjects (1 Sam 8:4–22; 12:1–25) • Both gave a suicidal command to their armor bearers (9:54; 1 Sam 31:4)
Jephthah / Saul	• Both called גִּבּוֹר חַיִל, mighty warriors (11:1; 1 Sam 9:1) • Both made a self-centered vow (11:30–31; 1 Sam 14:24) • Both made vows motivated by vengeance on their enemies (11:36; 1 Sam 14:24) • Both made an unwitting offer of their offspring (11:34; 1 Sam 14:27–28) • Jephthah claimed his daughter had "brought disaster" on him (11:35);[48] Jonathan claimed his father had "brought trouble" on the nation (1 Sam 14:29) • Jephthah's daughter complied with the vow to die (11:36, 39); Jonathan complied with the vow to die (1 Sam 14:43) • Jephthah had a remorseful attitude to his vow (11:35); Saul had a callous attitude to his (1 Sam 14:44)
Samson / Saul	• Both fought the Philistines • Samson empowered by Yahweh's Spirit (13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14), as was Saul (1 Sam 10:6, 10; 11:6; 19:23) • Both experienced the departure of Yahweh's Spirit (16:20; 1 Sam 16:14) • Samson committed suicide in great victory (16:30); Saul committed suicide in great defeat (1 Sam 31:4)

The author of Judges employed the analogies between David and Saul and the various judges to make a significant point. Othniel, the Judahite judge who alone served faithfully, runs parallel to David, the faithful Judahite king. Later in Judges, the epilogue will function to cast the judges in negative light (see section on the epilogue, below). The analogies of the judges (other than Othniel) to Saul show how Saul is *worse* than the judges and thus deserves even more condemnation. As just two examples, (1) Jephthah demonstrated remorse that his daughter must die, while Saul was callous in calling for Jonathan's death, and (2) Samson's suicide occurred in the context of victory, and Saul's, in defeat. The strategy of the judges cycle, then, "entails an anti-Benjaminite but pro-Judahite rhetoric of entrapment, [and] implicitly spurns the monarchy of Saul but idealizes the monarchy of David."[49]

At the close of the judges cycle, through the progressive deterioration of judges, the audience realizes that having another judge from Benjamin or the northern tribes would not resolve the problem of Israel's covenant infidelity.[50] This set the stage for the epilogue's refrain regarding a king, and ultimately pointed to the need for *the* Davidic king. In these ways, the judges cycle (3:7–16:31) contributed to the author's overall deliberative purpose that all Israel

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[48] The Hiphil form of כרע is understood in the metaphorical sense of "bringing disaster" (*HALOT*, s.v. כרע).

[49] O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 342.

[50] J. Paul Tanner, "The Gideon Narrative as the Focal Point of Judges," *BSac* 149 (1992):161.

would devote their allegiance to the Judahite king in the line of David and live in covenant fidelity while awaiting the ultimate Davidic king.

The author used the **epilogue (17:1–21:25)** to (1) unify the narrative of the book of Judges by characterizing the judges as no better than the renegade characters of the epilogue, (2) identify the failure of the Levites in their Deuteronomy 17 leadership office, and (3) seal the argument against a leader from Benjamin and the northern tribes, and especially Ephraim.

Scholars have typically questioned the narrative unity in Judges because of the differences between the judges cycle and the epilogue. For example, the epilogue:

- has no judges,
- introduces the previously unmentioned Levites,
- lacks the cyclical framework of the judges,
- introduces the refrain, "In those days, Israel had no king,"
- and focuses on internal threats to Israel rather than external.[51]

However, numerous literary connections exist between the judges in the judges cycle (3:7–16:31) and the epilogue (17:1–21:25). Table 5 below identifies these literary connections.

Table 5: Literary connections between the judges cycle and the epilogue[52]

Judges Cycle	Epilogue
Gideon made an illicit ephod (8:27)[53]	Micah made an illicit ephod along with teraphim (17:5)
Gideon verbally professed Yahweh's rule (8:23) but creates an illicit cultic object (8:24–27)	Micah and his mother verbally professed Yahweh (17:2, 3, 13) but create illicit cultic objects (17:4–5)
Samson's violation of Nazirite regulations[54]	The Levite's violation of levitical regulations[55]
Samson seeing what is good in his own eyes (14:1–2)	Danites seeing what is good in their own eyes (18:7, 9)
Samson courts and abandons his wife (ch. 14)	The Levite courts and abandons his concubine (ch. 19)

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[51] See Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges*, 79.

[52] The details of the allusions are somewhat more complex than can be presented in this chart. See Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges*, 79–142, for an extensive analysis of these allusions. Stated briefly, the author of Judges employed "key-word associations, puns, and plot parallels" to connect the unprincipled actions in the epilogue back to the judges (Wong, 141).

[53] Only Aaron and his sons (the priests) were to wear the ephod (Exod 28:4).

[54] Nazirites were prescribed three regulations: (1) abstaining from wine and fermented drink, (2) not shaving the hair of their head, and (3) avoiding contact with the dead (Num 6:1–8). Samson explicitly violated the second, and most likely the first and third as well.

[55] For example, Levites were to live in levitical cities (Num 35:1–8). This Levite, however, was inexplicably dwelling as a sojourner in Bethlehem in Judah (17:7), not listed as a levitical city (Josh 21:9–16), and now he sought to dwell as a sojourner wherever he could find a place (17:9). Furthermore, his willingness to serve as a household priest is a damning indictment because the Levites were to serve in Yahweh's sanctuary (Num 4:1–33). Lastly, the presence of a household shrine violated Yahweh's Law to worship only in the place where Yahweh chose (Deut 12:5). See Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges*, 89–90.

Gideon and Jephthah's harshness with the Israelites (8:5–17)	Israel's harshness with Benjamin (chs. 20–21)
Jephthah's rash oath doomed his virgin daughter (11:30–40)	Israel's rash oath doomed some of their virgin daughters (ch. 21)

The literary connections from the epilogue back to the judges cycle demonstrate that the chaotic and unlawful behavior in the epilogue is not unique to a certain period of time or certain individuals or tribes. Rather, the acts perpetrated in the epilogue were also committed by the various judges. As stated by Wong, "The allusions to the major judges scattered throughout the epilogue are not really there to shed further light on the events found in the epilogue; they are there primarily to shed light on the prior acts of the judges."[56] The epilogue, then, functions to characterize the judges as no better than the corrupt characters in the epilogue. At work is "A master storyteller … so skilful [sic] in his art that he managed to find a way to convey his assessment of the events he was narrating without actually having to resort to a single direct evaluative comment."[57] These seven literary connections (see Table 5 above) demonstrate narrative unity both within the epilogue (a single author for the epilogue) and between the judges cycle and the epilogue (unified narrative). As the section on the prologue identified the attendant literary connections between the prologue and the judges cycle, an unbroken connective chain thus exists between prologue, judges cycle, and epilogue. This strongly supports the reasonableness of a single author for the entire book of Judges.

If the epilogue served to demonstrate the failure of the judges in bringing about covenant fidelity in Israel, it likewise highlighted the failure of the Levites to do the same. Moses had identified in Deuteronomy 16–18 the four offices of judge, priest, king, and prophet which Yahweh would use to promote covenant fidelity in Israel. The judges cycle (and the epilogue, via literary connections) shows the failure of the judges in judging righteously (Deut 16:18). According to the Law, if a local judge found a case too difficulty to judge, they should escalate the case to a levitical priest (Deut 17:9). But the epilogue of Judges demonstrates the failure of the Levites and sets the stage in the metanarrative for the failure of the levitical high priest (1 Sam 1–7) and the kings (1 Sam 9–2 Kgs 25).[58] All of these failures ultimately point the audience to the need for the righteous Judahite king—hence the epilogue's monarchical refrain, "In those days there was no king in Israel" (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

The failure of the Levites is presented in two ways in the epilogue. First, Micah's Levite perpetuated an idolatrous cult in the north and contributed to the Danite idolatry (chs. 17–18). Second, with the extended echo effect (see Table 6) between the accounts in Sodom and Gibeah, the Levite with the concubine was cast in the role of the angels who visited Sodom (chs. 19–21). But in the case of Sodom, the angels functioned as deliverer of the righteous and judge of the wicked. This Levite, however, failed to protect the innocent. And while this Levite's actions resulted in the destruction of Gibeah (justice), the extended brutality led to the near extinction of the entire tribe of Benjamin. With situational irony, the solution for finding wives for the surviving men of Benjamin resulted in similar sordid treatment of Israelite women as the

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[56] Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges*, 139.

[57] Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges*, 140.

[58] David Klingler, "Validity in the Identification and Interpretation of a Literary Allusion in the Hebrew Bible" (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2010), 210.

cause of the entire event. Thus, these two examples show the failure of the Levites to execute their role in judging righteously in Israel.[59]

Table 6: Extended echo effect between Sodom and Gibeah

Sodom (Gen 19)	Gibeah (Judg 19)
Angels arrived in the evening (Gen 19:1)	Levite arrived in the evening (19:14)
Lot was a sojourner in Sodom	The old man in Gibeah was a sojourning Ephraimite (19:16)
Lot insisted the angels not spend the night in the city square (Gen 19:2–3)	The Ephraimite cautioned against spending the night in the city square (19:20)
Lot took them to his house (Gen 19:3)	The Ephraimite took them to his house (19:21)
Lot fed them a meal (Gen 19:3)	The Ephraimite fed them a meal (19:21)
Men of Sodom surrounded the house (Gen 19:4)	Men of Gibeah surrounded the house (19:22)
Men of Sodom demand to have sex with the visitors (Gen 19:5)	Men of Gibeah demand to have sex with the visitor (19:22)
Lot objected to their demand (Gen 19:7)	The Ephraimite objected to their demand (19:23)
Lot offered his virgin daughters instead (Gen 19:8)	The Ephraimite offered his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine instead (19:24)
Lot again insisted they not touch his guests (Gen 19:8)	The Ephraimite again insisted they not touch his guest (19:24)
Angels brought destruction against Sodom	The Levite's actions culminate in the attack and destruction of Gibeah

Saul's hometown was Gibeah (1 Sam 10:26), and the city became known as "Gibeah of Saul" (1 Sam 11:4). By literarily connecting Gibeah to Sodom, the author forced the reader to ask, "Can anything good come out of Gibeah / Benjamin?" The account functioned as a polemic against the Saulide dynasty. It also sets the stage for Saul's downfall in the book of 1 Samuel. Gibeah's destruction literarily connects to the destruction of Ai[60] as a juxtaposition by contrast to the city of Jebus.[61] Whereas Yahweh had intended for the Canaanites to be destroyed, Jebus remained unscathed while Gibeah of Benjamin experienced the same destruction as Ai did under Joshua. This represents situational irony: an Israelite city (Gibeah) destroyed from internal conflict in the same manner as a Canaanite city (Ai), while the Canaanite city in Israel's midst (Jebus) remained untouched.

The epilogue thus continues the entire book's strong anti-Ephraimite, anti-Benjamite stance with its polemic against Saul and Israel's Northern Kingdom (Ephraim) and their illegitimate Yahwism: "Ephraim and Bethel became the center of northern Israelite worship and political power. Dan and Bethel became the center of northern Israel's cult. And Benjamin [and

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[59] Klingler, "Validity in the Identification and Interpretation of a Literary Allusion in the Hebrew Bible," 221.

[60] With Sodom, the destruction from Abraham's viewpoint is: "And behold, smoke of the land went up …" וְהִנֵּה עָלָה קִיטֹר הָאָרֶץ" (Gen 19:28). But with Gibeah, "And the smoke began to go up from the city; a column of smoke" (20:40) וְהַמַּשְׂאֵת הֵחֵלָּה לַעֲלוֹת מִן־הָעִיר עַמּוּד עָשָׁן. This is similar to the wording regarding the destruction of Ai: "And behold, the smoke of the city went up to the heavens" (Josh 8:20) וְהִנֵּה עָלָה עֲשַׁן הָעִיר הַשָּׁמָיְמָה.

[61] Klingler, "Validity in the Identification and Interpretation of a Literary Allusion in the Hebrew Bible," 212.

Gibeah specifically] was the home of Saul, the first king of Israel."[62] This negative portrayal of Ephraim occurs throughout the book of Judges. Ephraim failed to drive out the Canaanites (1:29), challenged Gideon and Jephthah (8:1; 12:1), wouldn't help Jephthah fight (12:3), caused great internal dissent (12:4), and were punished greatly under the Gileadite (12:5–6). Support from the Ephraimite city of Shechem allowed the renegade leader Abimelech to gain power (9:1–6). None of the judges came from Ephraim. And now in the epilogue, Micah the Ephraimite corrupted a Levite and established his own private cultic center (ch. 17) while unwittingly abetting the idolatry of the Danites (ch. 18),[63] which ties back to the polemic against the cult of the Northern Kingdom. The actions of the Ephraimite man in Gibeah ultimately resulted in the civil war with the Benjamites. The narrator thus characterized the tribe of Ephraim negatively throughout the book of Judges because they caused idolatry and internal strife. This negative characterization foreshadows Jeroboam I—an Ephraimite—and his idolatry and rebellion against Solomon, the legitimate Judahite king in the line of David (1 Kgs 11:26).

The epilogue thus presented situational irony: with the Israelites doing what was right in their own eyes, (1) Israel, the covenanted nation of Yahweh intended to be a holy nation and kingdom of priests, had become Sodom, and (2) regardless of external threats, the nation was destroying itself from within while the Canaanite cities—the intended target of their holy war— were left standing. The continual monarchical refrain in the epilogue (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) resounds as the solution to the chaotic situation. Thus, in the narrative of Judges, the problem is a failure of the judges (Deut 16:18–17:8) and the Levites (Deut 17:9–13) to produce covenant fidelity in Israel. The final sentence of the book (21:25) repeats the monarchical refrain and points to the audience's need for the promised Judahite king to restore covenant fidelity to the Law and heal the internal rifts between the tribes. In these ways, the epilogue (17:1–21:25) contributed to the author's overall deliberative purpose that all Israel would devote their allegiance to the Judahite king in the line of David and live in covenant fidelity while awaiting the ultimate Davidic king.

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[62] Trent C. Butler, *Judges*, vol. 8, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), lxxx.

[63] That the Levite was willing to serve in the presence of a מַסֵּכָה (17:3–4), a "cast metal image," is situational irony because under Aaron, the Levites had been willing to kill those who worshiped a מַסֵּכָה (Exod 32:4, 27–28).

Figure 4: Danite migration from the coastal plain to Laish[64]
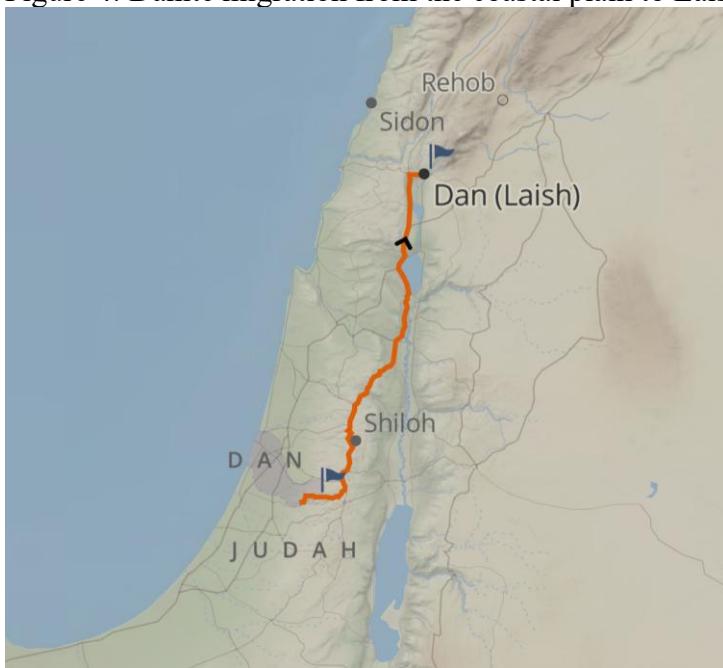

Figure 5: The civil war against the Benjamites[65]
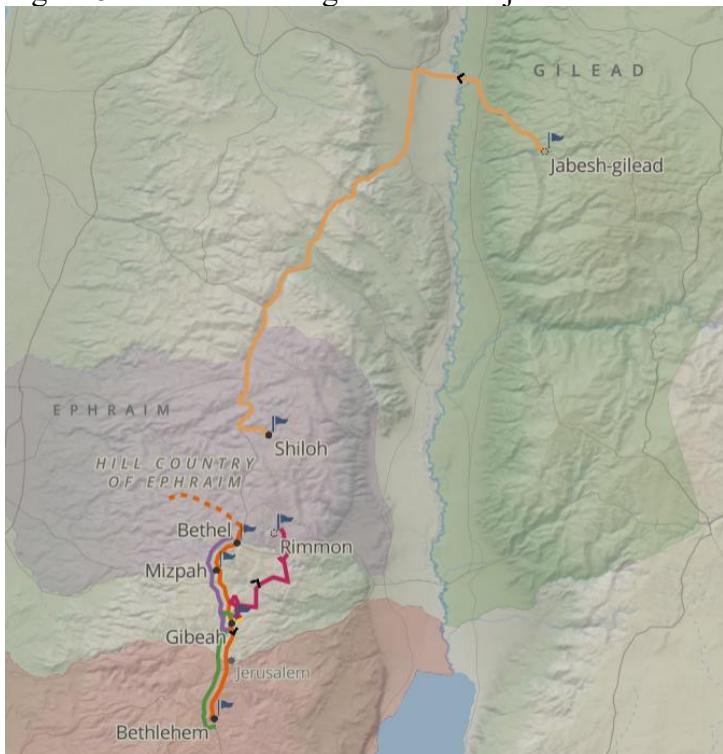
Figure 6: The attack on Gibeah[66]
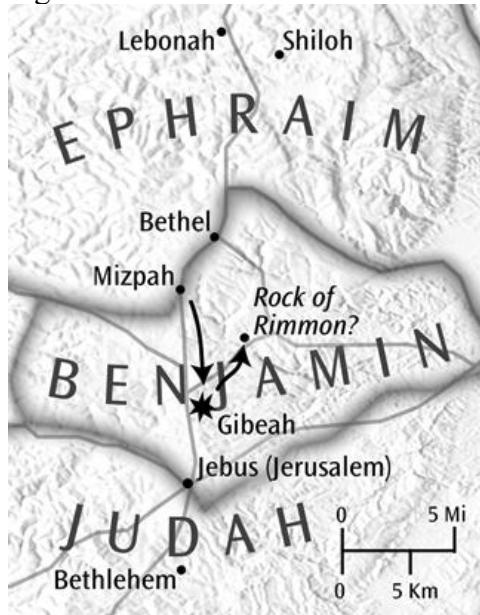
Excursus: Treatment of women in Judges as a measure of deterioration

Throughout the book of Judges, the narrator also portrayed how lack of a righteous king led to a decreased value for women. The first female character, Aksah, was blessed by her faithful father Caleb with life-giving springs of water (1:14–15). Through the course of the narrative, the Israelite female characters become increasingly brutalized at the hands of Israelite men. Table 6 below reveals the progressive deterioration of the treatment of women in Judges.

Table 6: The progressive deterioration of the treatment of women in Judges[67]

Character	Treatment
Aksah	Blessed by Caleb with life-giving springs of water (1:14–15)
Deborah	Judged Israel because of weak male leadership (4:1–24); her participation led to military victory (5:7, 12)
Jael	Executed Sisera with a tent peg (4:21–22), echoing the actions of Ehud (3:19–22)
Thebezite woman	Threw an upper millstone at Abimelech's head, leading to his death (9:53)[68]
Jephthah's daughter	Innocent victim killed because of an Israelite man (11:30–39)
Samson's wife	Innocent victim killed because of an Israelite man (15:6)

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[66] Lawson G. Stone, "Judges," in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, edited by Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2012), 461.

[67] Data for this table gleaned from Chisholm, *Judges*, 69–79.

[68] Whereas Aksah had inspired courageous warrior acts of Israelite men, the decline in male leadership resulted in women taking a warrior-like role to deliver Israel from foreign and domestic oppressors (Chisholm, *Judges*, 73).

Delilah	Echoing Jael and Sisera, but now reversed: a foreign woman led an Israelite man to his demise (16:4–21)
Levite's concubine	Cursed by assault and death at the hands of Israelite men (19:24–29)
Daughters of Israelites	Cursed by Israelite men through marriage-by-kidnapping (21:23)[69]

Righteous Caleb of Judah thus blessed his daughter. Through all the other judges, women are forced to assume men's roles (weakness of male leadership) and then ultimately suffer as innocent victims because of the actions of Israelite men. Even this deterioration in the treatment of women functions as a polemic against the northern tribes and points to the need for a Judahite king who will restore social order and protect and bless Israelite women.

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[69] With situational irony, the Israelites attempted to resolve the Benjamite conundrum by having the 400 Benjamite men commit the same kind of atrocities which led to the civil war in the first place. Additionally, the imagination of Sisera's mother about his delay on account of taking "a girl or two" (5:30) which did *not* occur at the hands of the Canaanites, now occurred at the hands of Israelite men.

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