

## THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF JUDGES: A LINGUISTIC CLUE TO SOLVING A PESKY PROBLEM

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Scholars have long recognized that the numbers given in the chronological notations of Judges, when added up, do not conform to the information presented in 1 Kgs 6:1, which indicates that Solomon began building the temple 480 years after the Israelites left Egypt. Proposed solutions to the problem usually involve overlapping dates and events to one degree or another, but these proposals often seem arbitrary and unduly complex. Indeed, no consensus has arisen with regard to a solution to the chronological problem.

This article addresses this problem and proposes a new solution that takes its cue from linguistic evidence, particularly the precise wording of the various statements used to describe Israel's continuing or repeated sin. The author argues that the book's central section is arranged in two parallel panels (3:12–5:31 and 6:1–16:31), both of which cover the period from 1336 (or 1334 in the case of panel two) to 1130 BC. This scheme allows one to fit the events of Judges, as well as events both immediately before and after the Judges period, into the 480 years designated by 1 Kgs 6:1.

### II. THE PROBLEM

The book of Judges contains the following chronological notations:

3:8	Cushan-Rishathaim oppresses Israel	8 years
3:11	Land rests after deliverance	40 years
3:14	Moab oppresses Israel	18 years
3:30	Land rests after deliverance	80 years
4:3	Sisera oppresses Israel	20 years
5:31	Land rests after deliverance	40 years
6:1	Midian oppresses Israel	7 years
8:28	Land rests after deliverance	40 years
9:22	Abimelech rules after Jotham's curse	3 years
10:2	Tola leads Israel	23 years
10:3	Jair leads Israel	22 years
10:7–8	Philistines and Ammon oppress Israel	18 years
12:7	Jephthah leads Israel	6 years
12:9	Ibzan leads Israel	7 years
12:11	Elon leads Israel	10 years
12:14	Abdon leads Israel	8 years
13:1	Philistines oppress Israel	40 years
15:20	Samson leads Israel	20 years
	Total years	410 years

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Since 1 Kgs 6:1 states that the period between the exodus from Egypt and Solomon's fourth regnal year (966 BC) lasted 480 years, the chronological scheme presented by Judges is problematic. In addition to the 410 years of Judges, we must also take into account the wilderness wanderings, the conquest, the remaining years of Joshua and his contemporaries prior to the oppression of Cushan-Rishathaim, the judgeships of Eli and Samuel, the career of Saul, and the reign of David. When all the figures are tallied up, the total number of years, which probably exceeds 600, is beyond what 1 Kgs 6:1 allows.<sup>1</sup> There may even be additional gaps in the chronological scheme. It is not clear if the periods of apostasy were concurrent with the periods of peace. If they were not, then we must make room for them between the periods of peace and subsequent periods of oppression.<sup>2</sup>

### III. THREE RECENT PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

To alleviate the tension, many argue that the periods in Judges are not necessarily in chronological sequence and that some of the judgeships may have overlapped. Due to space limitations, an evaluation of three recent proposals will have to suffice.

Galil suggests that the reference to 480 years in 1 Kgs 6:1 reflects the chronology of the Deuteronomistic history and that the chronological notations related to the minor judges were not originally part of this chronological scheme.<sup>3</sup> By overlapping Eli's judgeship and the period of the Ark's exile with the events recorded in Judges 9–16, he is able to compress the Judges period to 314 years. He then assigns Moses, Joshua, Samuel, and David each forty years, Saul two years (admittedly artificial, but the figure that the Deuteronomist found in his sources; cf. 1 Sam 13:1), and Solomon four years. This scheme yields a period of 480 years, corresponding to the figure given in 1 Kgs 6:1 (2004, 713–21). Galil's proposal is creative, but dependent upon rather arbitrary assumptions regarding the development of the Deuteronomistic History and the chronological relationship between events described in Judges and 1 Samuel.

<sup>1</sup> See the helpful charts provided by Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999) 59–61. Block gives the total number of years as 593, but does not incorporate the period between the end of the conquest and the beginning of the Judges chronology. The text indicates that the falling away described in Judg 3:7, which initiates the book's chronological scheme, occurred after Joshua and his contemporaries had passed off the scene (Judg 2:7, 11). This would have taken place some time after the conquest (cf. Josh 23:1); Merrill suggests a date of 1366 BC for Joshua's death, 33 years after the conquest. See Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 147. Combining the biblical data with estimates regarding Saul's reign, Samuel's tenure as leader, and the period between the conquest and the death of Joshua and the elders, James K. Hoffmeier computes the total number of years to be 633. See his "What is the Biblical Date of the Exodus? A Response to Bryant Wood," *JETS* 50 (2007) 227–28. Kitchen gives the "minimal" figure as 591/596 years. See his *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 203.

<sup>2</sup> See David L. Washburn, "The Chronology of Judges: Another Look," *BSac* 147 (1990) 416.

<sup>3</sup> Gershon Galil, "The Chronological Framework of the Deuteronomistic History," *Bib* 85 (2004) 713–21.

Washburn argues that the recurring statement “Once again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord” (וַיִּסְפוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲשׂוֹת הָרָע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה) see 3:12; 4:1; 10:6; 13:1), is an “episode-initial clause” that “does not generally designate consecutive events.” Consequently, he is able to make Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson contemporaries. He takes “after him” in 10:3 to refer to Abimelech (not Tola), allowing Tola and Jair to be contemporaries. Furthermore he takes “after him” in 12:8, 11, 13 to refer to Jephthah, making Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon contemporaries. In this scheme all of the “minor” judges follow Gideon/Jephthah/Samson. By this ingenious proposal he is able to compress the Judges period into the framework suggested by 1 Kgs 6:1.<sup>4</sup>

However, linguistic evidence militates against Washburn’s proposal. Elsewhere, when used in narrative texts, the *hiphil wayyiqtol* of וַיִּסְפוּ almost always describes an action that repeats another action reported in the preceding context (though not necessarily the preceding sentence). Often the adverb עוד, “again,” follows the construction, but even when it does not, the construction indicates sequence.<sup>5</sup> In Gen 25:1 the episode-initial statement may involve a flashback in the overall chronology of the story, but it still describes an action subsequent to the marriages mentioned previously. In 1 Kgs 16:33 and 2 Chr 28:22 the construction indicates intensification of action rather than repetition. In Judg 3:12; 4:1; 10:6; 13:1, the formula is best understood as describing a sinful action that in essence repeats and is subsequent to the previously mentioned sinful action. So 3:12 must be understood in relation to 3:7; 4:1 in relation to 3:12; 10:6 in relation to 6:1 (where וַיִּסְפוּ is not used in the formula); and 13:1 in relation to 10:6.

As for Washburn’s interpretation of אַחֲרָיו, “after him,” in the “minor” judges lists, in each case the most natural place to seek the referent of the pronoun is in the immediately preceding pericope, not in a pericope two or three places removed. In both 10:1–5 and 12:8–15, the phrase “after him” follows a notation of the preceding judge’s death and burial, suggesting *chronological* succession. Furthermore, in 2 Sam 23:9–11 אַחֲרָיו appears in a list of David’s warriors and in each case the pronominal suffix refers to the nearer antecedent. In verse 9a (which begins a pericope about Eleazar) the suffix refers to Josheb-Basshebeth (v. 8), the subject of the preceding pericope. In verse 11a (which begins a pericope about Shammah) the suffix most naturally refers to Eleazar (vv. 9–10), not Josheb-Basshebeth. This same pattern is apparent in Neh 3:16–31.

One senses Washburn’s approach eliminates chronological problems at the expense of the book’s rhetorical strategy. The pan-Israelite flavor of the chronological notations, as well as the cyclical literary structure they reinforce, strongly suggest that the notations are intended to be taken as indicating successive periods.

<sup>4</sup> Washburn, “Chronology of Judges” 414–25.

<sup>5</sup> See Gen 4:2; 8:10; 25:1; Exod 9:34; Num 22:25–26; Judg 20:22; 1 Sam 3:8, 21; 9:8; 18:29; 19:8, 21; 20:17; 2 Sam 3:34; 24:1 (cf. vv. 1–14); 1 Chr 14:13; Esth 8:3; Job 27:1; 29:1; 42:10; Isa 7:10; 8:5.

Steinmann has offered a different way of harmonizing the chronological scheme in Judges with 1 Kgs 6:1.<sup>6</sup> He proposes that the 18-year Ammonite oppression (10:8) overlapped with the 40-year Philistine oppression (13:1; cf. 10:7).<sup>7</sup> In this view 10:6–7 and 13:1 are parallel and refer to the same apostasy and divine response. He places the judgeships of Jephthah and his three successors (31 years total) within this period of oppression, while “Samson’s judgeship happened sometime during the forty years of the Philistine oppression.” He adds: “This means that his judgeship may have overlapped with any of the judges in the fifth cycle, but at the very least must have overlapped with the judgeships of Elon and Abdon.”<sup>8</sup> In this way he is able to reduce the length of the Judges period from 410 years to 330. By overlapping Eli’s judgeship with earlier judges, he is then able to fit the Judges period into the chronological scheme reflected in 1 Kgs 6:1.

Steinmann’s proposal is attractive in some respects, but encounters at least three problems: (1) It seems unlikely that the Ammonite oppression continued after Jephthah’s great victory over them (cf. 11:32–33). If the six years of leadership mentioned in 12:7 were concurrent with the oppression, then they have to be placed at the end of the period of oppression, not at the beginning, as Steinmann suggests.<sup>9</sup> However, it seems just as likely that the six years of Jephthah’s judgeship followed his victory over the Ammonites. (2) Samson’s 20 years of leadership (15:20; 16:31) may have overlapped with the 40 years of Philistine oppression mentioned in 13:1, but this need not be the case. His victory over the Philistines at Lehi (15:14–19) may have alleviated the Philistine threat temporarily and ended the forty-year period of oppression. His 20-year period of leadership could have then followed (cf. 15:20). It came to a tragic end after the Delilah affair (cf. 16:31). In other words, 20 years or so passed between the events recorded in chapter 15 and those recounted in chapter 16. We are told in 15:20 that Samson led Israel for 20 years “during the days of the Philistines.” However, this need not refer to the period of oppression *per se*. The Philistines remained a constant threat to Israel until the time of David and “the days of the Philistines” may refer more generally to the rather extended time period in which the Philistines were a major player in the experience of Israel. (3) Finally, and most importantly, the formulaic statement “the Israelites again did evil” (cf. 13:1),

<sup>6</sup> Andrew E. Steinmann, “The Mysterious Numbers of the Book of Judges,” *JETS* 48 (2005) 491–500.

<sup>7</sup> See as well Robert H. O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* (VTSup; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 318–19.

<sup>8</sup> Steinmann, “Mysterious Numbers” 496. However, table 4 (p. 499) does not seem to reflect this assertion, for the table shows the dates of the judges as follows: Jephthah (1088–1083), Ibzan (1083–1077), Elon (1077–1068), Abdon (1068–1061), and Samson (with a question mark after the name) (1049–1030). The table also speaks of an oppression of the Midianites (dated 1088–1071) as concurrent with the Philistine oppression, but surely the Ammonites are meant (see table 3 on p. 497).

<sup>9</sup> See his table 4 (p. 499), where he dates the Midianite (*sic!*) oppression to 1088–1071 and Jephthah’s reign to 1088–1083.

when used elsewhere in Judges, marks the beginning of an era that chronologically follows the era that immediately precedes it (see 3:12; 4:1; 10:6). Steinmann's view requires that 13:1 be parallel to 10:6–7 (with both then being chronologically subsequent to 10:5).

#### IV. A NEW PROPOSED SOLUTION

The author would like to offer a new solution. Picking up on a linguistic clue in Judg 6:1, this proposal understands the book's central section to be arranged in two parallel panels (3:7–5:31 and 6:1–16:31), both of which cover the period from 1336 (or 1334 in the case of panel two) to 1130 BC. It allows one to fit the events of Judges, as well as events both immediately before and after the Judges period, into the 480 years designated by 1 Kgs 6:1. It also takes the chronological indicators discussed above (namely, the statement in the narrative framework, "Once again the Israelites did evil," and the phrase "after him" in the minor judges lists) in a straightforward manner as indicating succession.

The first main literary unit of the book's central section is introduced with the statement, "the Israelites did evil before the Lord" (3:7). In the introduction to the next two units this statement is repeated, but the verb *וַיִּסְפוּ*, literally, "and they added" appears as well, indicating that the earlier pattern of sin has been repeated (cf. 3:12; 4:1). However, in 6:1, the introduction to the Gideon story, the statement used in 3:7 is repeated almost verbatim and the verb *וַיִּסְף* is omitted. However, 10:6 and 13:1 include *וַיִּסְף*. The pattern is as follows:

- A 3:7    *וַיַּעַשׂוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה*  
The Israelites did evil in the Lord's sight. (*NET*)
- B 3:12    *וַיִּסְפוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲשׂוֹת הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה*  
The Israelites *again* did evil in the Lord's sight.
- B 4:1    *וַיִּסְפוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲשׂוֹת הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה*  
The Israelites *again* did evil in the Lord's sight.
- A 6:1    *וַיַּעַשׂוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה*  
The Israelites did evil in the Lord's sight.
- B 10:6    *וַיִּסְפוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲשׂוֹת הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה*  
The Israelites *again* did evil in the Lord's sight.
- B 13:1    *וַיִּסְפוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲשׂוֹת הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה*  
The Israelites *again* did evil in the Lord's sight.

Given the striking absence of *וַיִּסְף*, it is possible that Judg 6:1 is not to be understood as chronologically successive to 4:1. Perhaps the stories of the central section are arranged in two panels that are chronologically concurrent. The Othniel (3:7) and Gideon (6:1) stories are parallel, with Ehud (3:12) and Deborah (4:1) following Othniel in succession, and Jephthah (10:6), and Samson (13:1) following Gideon-Abimelech in succession, with two lists of minor judges being placed after the Gideon-Abimelech and Jephthah

accounts, respectively.<sup>10</sup> If so, then the following chronological scheme emerges (if, on the basis of chronological notations in 1 Samuel, we treat 1130 BC as a terminal date for the judges):

Panel One

3:8	Cushan-Rishathaim oppresses Israel	1336–1328
3:11	Land rests after deliverance	1328–1288
3:14	Moab oppresses Israel	1288–1270
3:30	Land rests after deliverance	1270–1190
4:3	Sisera oppresses Israel	1190–1170
5:31	Land rests after deliverance	1170–1130

Panel Two

6:1	Midian oppresses Israel	1334–1327
8:28	Land rests after deliverance	1327–1287
9:22	Abimelech rules after Jotham's curse	1287–1284
10:2	Tola leads Israel	1284–1261
10:3	Jair leads Israel	1261–1239
10:7–8	Philistines and Ammon oppress Israel	1239–1221
12:7	Jephthah leads Israel	1221–1215
12:9	Ibzan leads Israel	1215–1208
12:11	Elon leads Israel	1208–1198
12:14	Abdon leads Israel	1198–1190
13:1	Philistines oppress Israel	1190–1150
15:20	Samson leads Israel	1150–1130

If we add to the list the dates given in 1 Samuel, the period from the judges to Saul may be charted as follows:

Eli's forty years of leadership (1 Sam 4:18)	1130–1090
Philistines capture and hold ark (1 Sam 4:11; 6:1)	1090
Ark at Kiriath-jearim (1 Sam 7:2)	1090–1070 <sup>11</sup>
Samuel's victory over the Philistines (1 Sam 7:3–12)	1070
Israel enjoys relief from Philistine oppression (1 Sam 7:13–14)	1070–1050
Samuel anoints Saul (1 Samuel 10)	1050

<sup>10</sup> There may be further support for this view from the linguistic evidence. When one examines the verbs used to describe the Lord's response to Israel's sin, the following pattern emerges:

Panel One

3:8	וַיִּמְכְּרֵם, "he sold them," from the root מָכַר
3:13	וַיַּחֲזֶק, "and he strengthened," from the root חָזַק
4:2	וַיִּמְכְּרֵם, "he sold them," from the root מָכַר

Panel Two

6:1	וַיִּתְּנֵם, "and he gave them," from the root נָתַן
10:7	וַיִּמְכְּרֵם, "he sold them," from the root מָכַר
13:1	וַיִּתְּנֵם, "and he gave them," from the root נָתַן

One notes the alternating appearance of מָכַר (in the first, third, and fifth accounts), but there is another structure evident if we think in terms of parallel panels. Panel one uses מָכַר in the first and third accounts and a different verb (חָזַק) in between. This creates a bookend pattern (sold-strengthened-sold). Panel two uses נָתַן as bookends around a different verb (מָכַר) to create a similar pattern (gave-sold-gave) as in panel one.

<sup>11</sup> The Ark was in Philistine territory for seven months (1 Sam 6:1). According to 1 Sam 7:2, it was in Kiriath-jearim for 20 years, but this cannot refer to the entire time period between its arrival

This scheme allows for a period of 63 years between the completion of the conquest (1399) and the first oppression (1336) and satisfies nicely the demands of Josh 23:1, which indicates that “many days” passed between the end of the conquest and Joshua’s death, and of Judg 2:7, which suggests there was a period of peace following Joshua’s death.

This proposal also has the advantage of preserving the pan-Israelite rhetorical strategy of the chronological notations, as well as the cyclical literary structure they reinforce, by allowing one to understand the notations (namely, “Once again the Israelites did evil,” in the narrative framework and the phrase “after him” in the minor judges lists) as indicating successive periods. The lone exception to this is the statement in 6:1, but, as shown above, the absence of  $\eta\text{Q}^{\dagger}$  sets this text apart from the others.

This scheme assumes that references to “the land” and to Israel, though reflecting a pan-Israelite *rhetorical* strategy, *actually* refer in any given case to the geographical region in which the particular judge lived. So panel one focuses on the south for the period 1336–1190 (Othniel lived in Judah, and Ehud in Benjamin), and on the north for the period 1190–1130 (Deborah served in the Ephraimite hill country and Barak was from Naphtali). Panel two reverses the pattern, focusing, for the most part, on the north for the period 1334–1190 (Gideon was from the tribe of Manasseh, and Jephthah was from Gilead), and on the south for the period 1190–1130 (Samson lived in Dan). The so-called minor judges mentioned in panel two operated north of Shiloh, with the exception of Ibzan of Bethlehem (12:8–9), whose seven-year career as a leader (1215–1208) fits nicely into the 80-year period of peace in the south (1270–1190) mentioned in 3:30.<sup>12</sup> The initial period of peace in the south (1328–1288) corresponds to the initial period of peace in the north (1327–1287). While the south experienced a lengthy period of peace from 1270–1190, there was some turmoil in the north during this period (1239–1221). The Canaanite oppression in the north and subsequent peace (1190–1130) coincided with the Philistine oppression and Samson’s career (1190–1130).

#### V. A LINGERING PROBLEM: JEPHTHAH’S STATEMENT

Any discussion of the chronology of Judges must address Jephthah’s statement that Israel had occupied the trans-Jordanian region for 300 years (Judg 11:26). In the chronological scheme proposed above, Jephthah would have delivered his speech to the Ammonite king in 1221 BC, 185 years after the conquest of trans-Jordan (1406 BC), or 115 years shy of the number he

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in Kiriath-jearim and David’s retrieving it, for this period, which included Saul’s reign and the early part of David’s, was longer than twenty years. The chronological notation in 1 Sam 7:2 refers to the time that elapsed between the Ark’s arrival in Kiraith-jearim and the incident recorded in 1 Sam 7:3–12. See Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2002) 106, and Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel* (WBC; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983) 65.

<sup>12</sup> For a helpful map showing the geographical distribution of the various judges, see Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas* (rev. ed.; New York: Macmillan, 1977) 57 (map 82).

gives in his speech. Admittedly, this is a problem for the proposal, one that might be viewed by some as serious enough to invalidate the entire scheme.

Without resorting to Kitchen's overly negative characterization of Jephthah, one should point out that Jephthah was a brigand (cf. Judg 11:3), not a historian.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, his speech does exhibit an impressive degree of historical awareness and subtlety of argument. His argument may be summarized as follows: (1) Since the Lord transferred the region in question from Sihon the Amorite to Israel, the Ammonites had no right to claim it. They should have been content with ancient divine decisions about national boundaries. (2) The Ammonite king should follow the example of Balak of Moab, who, when thwarted in his attempt to bring a curse on Israel, refused to attack Israel and returned to his home (see Numbers 22–24). He claimed no right to the conquered territory. (3) Israel had been occupying the region in question for 300 years, but the Ammonites had not tried to take it. This was odd, especially if Israel had stolen it from them in the first place. Their failure to invade the region for so long a period suggested they had never viewed it as originally theirs prior to this king's bogus claim.

However, there is at least one major inaccuracy in Jephthah's speech. In verse 24 he identifies the Ammonite king's god as Chemosh. Other texts, as well as the extrabiblical Mesha inscription, associate Chemosh with Moab (Num 21:29; 1 Kgs 11:7, 33; 2 Kgs 23:13; Jer 48:7, 13, 46), while Milkom is identified as the god of the Ammonites (1 Kgs 11:5, 7, 33; 2 Kgs 23:13).<sup>14</sup>

It is possible, as Boling suggests, that Ammon had subdued Moab and that the Ammonite king now regarded himself as heir of all lands formerly held by Moab.<sup>15</sup> Originally Moab, not Sihon or Ammon, had owned the disputed territory, meaning that Chemosh could have been viewed as the god of the region.<sup>16</sup> It would make sense to refer to Chemosh as the Ammonite king's god if the latter now ruled Moab under Chemosh's authority. However, the text gives no indication that Ammon had conquered Moab, so Boling's proposal remains speculative and unsubstantiated.

Rather than proposing a historical-cultural explanation for linking the king of Ammon with Moab's god, it may be better to view Jephthah's statement as purely rhetorical. The Ammonite king was claiming land that his people had never controlled, as Jephthah's history lesson makes clear. Moab and then Sihon had controlled it before Israel conquered it. By speaking to the Ammonite king as if he were a Moabite king, Jephthah sarcastically reminds him that he could claim the land only if he were Moabite. But even if this were the case, he could only claim what Chemosh granted and the Moabite god had surrendered this area long ago. If Jephthah could make such

<sup>13</sup> K. A. Kitchen calls Jephthah's statement "the report of a brave but ignorant man's bold bluster in favor of his people, not a mathematically precise chronological datum." He concludes that it "can offer us no practical help." See his *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 209.

<sup>14</sup> Walter Aufrecht argues that El was actually the chief god of the Ammonites, though he acknowledges that Milkom was popular. See his "The Religion of the Ammonites," in *Ancient Ammon* (ed. Burton MacDonald and Randall W. Younker; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 159. For a critique of this view, see Richard S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 272, n. 116.

<sup>15</sup> Robert G. Boling, *Judges* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1975) 203–4.

<sup>16</sup> According to Num 21:26–29, Sihon took the region in question from Moab.

a seemingly inaccurate statement in service of his rhetorical strategy, then it is possible that he could hyperbolically inflate a number for rhetorical effect. In this regard, Block observes: "Since this is a political speech, Jephthah crafts his comments deliberately for propaganda purposes rather than factual reconstruction." After drawing a parallel to the Moabite Mesha Inscription, he adds: "Surely Jephthah knew that the Israelites had lived in this area for generations. A figure like three hundred years was intended to make an impression on the Ammonites."<sup>17</sup>

There is, of course, a simpler solution to this problem. Younger argues that Jephthah was ignorant of the facts and mistakenly thought Chemosh was the Ammonite deity.<sup>18</sup> It may seem unlikely that one who had lived in trans-Jordan in proximity to Ammon and Moab would not know such a basic fact, but he may have indeed been confused on this matter. If he was wrong on such a basic and simple point as this, it is certainly possible that his chronological comment in verse 24 is inaccurate as well. Commenting on Jephthah's reference to 300 years, Block states, "Since Jephthah is either incorrectly or purposefully mistaken in other details (Chemosh for Milkom), one should perhaps not make this speech the final word on the point."<sup>19</sup>

## VI. CONCLUSION

Can the chronological scheme of Judges be harmonized with 1 Kgs 6:1? The author has attempted to show that Hebrew linguistic evidence helps us answer this question positively. The author argues that the omission of  $\eta\zeta\eta$  in 6:1 is a literary signal that the Gideon story is not in chronological succession to the preceding account of Deborah and Barak. Instead, there are two panels (3:7–5:31 and 6:1–16:31) in the book's central section that are chronologically concurrent. The Othniel and Gideon-Abimelech stories are parallel, with Ehud and Deborah-Barak following Othniel in chronological succession, and Jephthah and Samson following Gideon in chronological succession. Furthermore, the minor judges can be placed in chronological sequence after both Gideon-Abimelech (10:1–5) and Jephthah (12:7–15). Both panels cover the period from 1336 (or 1334 in the case of panel two) to 1130 BC. Panel one focuses on the south for the period 1336–1190 and on the north for the period 1190–1130. Panel two reverses this pattern, focusing, for the most part, on the north for the period 1334–1190 and on the south for the period 1190–1130.

Admittedly, Jephthah's reference to 300 years (Judg 11:26) is problematic for the proposal, since in this chronological scheme Jephthah's speech would have occurred only 185 years after the invasion of trans-Jordan. However, while Jephthah demonstrates a good grasp of the history of trans-Jordan and mounts a convincing argument, his reference to 300 years, like his reference to Chemosh as being the Ammonite king's god (11:24), could be rhetorical (in this case hyperbolic) or simply inaccurate, as some recent commentators have suggested.

<sup>17</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth* 363.

<sup>18</sup> K. Lawson Younger, Jr., *Judges and Ruth* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) 256–57.

<sup>19</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth* 363.