

IN DEFENSE OF PANELING AS A CLUE
TO THE CHRONOLOGY OF JUDGES:
A CRITIQUE OF ANDREW STEINMANN'S REPLY

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In my article “The Chronology of the Book of Judges: A Linguistic Clue to Solving a Pesky Problem” (*JETS* 52 [2009] 247–55), I suggested that the absence of $\eta\sigma$ in Judg 6:1 is a clue that the accounts in the central section of the book are not arranged in strict chronological sequence, but rather in a two-paneled structure in which the panels overlap chronologically (3:7–5:31 and 6:1–16:31). Both panels cover the period from 1336 (or 1334 in the case of panel two) to 1130 BC. This allows one to place the chronological markers in Judges into a scheme that fits nicely within the framework established by 1 Kgs 6:1.

I intended the article to be provisional, so I welcome Andrew Steinmann's reply. I thank the editor of *JETS* for inviting me to offer a critique of Steinmann's reply and to amplify and clarify my position. To make it easier for readers to coordinate my comments with Steinmann's remarks, I address his arguments in the order that he presents them, using his heading titles in either exact or abbreviated form.

In the introduction to his reply, Steinmann asks: “Is the pattern Chisholm identified a clue to the chronology of Judges or is it a clue to some other feature developed by the author of Judges?” He suggests that one must choose between two alternatives. But literary structures may have concurrent functions. Nowhere in my article do I state or imply that the structure is *only* a chronological indicator. In fact, I am quite open to suggestions of additional functions.

I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PATTERN

1. *The pattern.* Commenting on my thesis that the paneled structure has chronological implications, Steinmann makes this statement: “While this may be a theoretical possibility, Chisholm offers no supporting evidence for this suggestion.” My proposal is based on the observation that $\eta\sigma$ is omitted in 6:1 from the otherwise recurring statement “the Israelites again did evil” (cf. 3:12; 4:1; 10:6; 13:1). Whether $\eta\sigma$ indicates renewed or continued action, it consistently indicates or implies temporal sequence when it is collocated

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with an infinitive construct in the Former Prophets (see Josh 7:12; 23:13; Judg 2:21; 8:28; 9:37; 10:13; 13:21; 20:22–23, 28; 1 Sam 3:6, 8, 21; 7:13; 9:8; 15:35; 18:29; 19:8; 20:17; 23:4; 27:4; 2 Sam 2:22, 28; 3:34–35; 5:22; 7:10, 20; 14:10; 24:1; 1 Kgs 16:33; 2 Kgs 6:23; 21:8; 24:7—excluding the passages in Judges that are in question). In light of the linguistic data, one can assume that it has this same nuance in the Judges framework, especially when the statement follows a chronological notation that concludes the preceding pericope (see 3:11–12; 3:30–4:1; 10:3–6; 12:14–13:1). In other words, $\eta\sigma$ is inherently chronological when collocated as it is in the Judges framework. Consequently, its omission in a sequence where it otherwise appears suggests that the omission has chronological implications. On the basis of semantics, this must be the starting point in searching for a reason for the omission.

2. *Problems.* Steinmann argues that my proposal is problematic because the periods in which the land had rest overlap with periods of foreign oppression. In my scheme, the periods of rest occur in 1328–1288, 1270–1190, and 1170–1130. Since I date the Philistine-Ammonite oppression of 10:7–8 to 1239–1221 and the Philistine oppression of 13:1 to 1190–1150, it would seem impossible to characterize the periods 1270–1190 and 1170–1130 as periods of rest, at least in their entirety. However, I argue that the pan-Israelite language of the text is rhetorical: “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.”¹ In light of Steinmann’s reply, this point apparently needs elaboration.

Judges uses pan-Israelite language throughout. The encounter at Bokim is presented as encompassing the entire nation (2:4), while the prologue’s theological interpretation of the period takes a national perspective (2:6–3:6). This perspective also marks the Othniel account (3:7–11), it appears in the framework of the central section, and is also present in the epilogue, where all Israel congregates to handle the Benjaminite problem.²

This pan-Israelite perspective appears to collide with the stories of the central section, where the narrated events were restricted to specific locations. The Canaanite oppression under Sisera included only the northern tribes. Gideon’s forces came from the northern and central regions (6:35), not the south, and Abimelech, though called a ruler over Israel (9:22), seems to have ruled strictly in the Shechem area. Jephthah operated primarily in the central region, while Samson’s activities were localized in the south. Despite the statement that he ruled Israel for twenty years, the people of Judah opposed him (15:12–13).³

In light of this evidence, the pan-Israelite perspective looks artificial, for the united Israel depicted in Joshua reemerges only after the Judges period

¹ Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., “The Chronology of the Book of Judges: A Linguistic Clue to Solving a Pesky Problem,” *JETS* 52 (2009) 253.

² Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Interpreting the Historical Books* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006) 75.

³ *Ibid.* 76.

and then only for a relatively brief time. But by treating regional developments as national in scope, the pan-Israelite perspective militantly counters the spirit of national disunity and disintegration portrayed in the stories, keeps alive the ideal presented in Joshua, and paves the way for the realization of the ideal under the monarchy.⁴

However, even if it is legitimate for the narrator to use a pan-Israelite perspective for rhetorical purposes, certain historical realities must be recognized. Since the incidents in the central section are localized, one may not assume that foreign rule extended over the entire land. This means that "Israel" or "the land" in any given case actually refers to only the region of the particular judge who is in view, not the entire nation. If, in any given case, it is a particular tribe or group of tribes that experiences conquest and oppression, then the deliverance and subsequent rest pertains in actuality to that localized tribe or tribal group. In this regard, Satterthwaite observes that the book's references to "Israel" and even 'the Israelites' are not the same as 'all Israel.' He adds, "Most likely, Judges aims to represent Israel as a political or covenantal unity, so that what happens to a part affects the whole: the frequent references to 'Israel' and 'the Israelites' are not meant to imply that all Israel was directly involved in all the events narrated but rather to emphasize that these tribes are part of a larger but increasingly fragmented whole."⁵

Furthermore, the book's use of "the land" (אֶרֶץ) is instructive. The term refers to the entire land in 1:32–33; 2:1–2, 6; 11:21; 18:2, 17. However, in several cases "the land" actually refers to a smaller region within the larger geographical area: 1:2 (Judah's territory is called "the land"); 6:4 ("the land" refers specifically to the region invaded by the Midianites); 9:37 ("the land" is the area of Shechem); 18:9–10 ("the land" refers to the northern region targeted by the Danites), 30 ("the land" may refer here to the northern kingdom).⁶ The evidence shows that "the land," like "Israel," can be used rhetorically (in a whole for part style). This may very well be the case in 3:11, 30; 5:31; and 8:28.

Surely Steinmann does not want to claim that Israel, in its entirety, experienced absolute peace during the periods of rest. In such a troubled period of Israelite history, invasions would have occurred periodically, if not regularly. Even if one wants to push the pan-Israelite language to its limits and take "the land had rest" statements as referring to the entire land, one must make allowances for hyperbole.

One can see this from an examination of similar descriptions in 1–2 Samuel. According to 1 Sam 7:13, "the Philistines were subdued and did not invade Israelite territory again. Throughout Samuel's lifetime, the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines." The expression "the hand was against"

⁴ Ibid. 76–77.

⁵ P. E. Satterthwaite, "Judges," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Historical Books* (ed. B. T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005) 583.

⁶ I exclude cases where there is a qualifying genitive or some other type of qualifying marker, and instances where the referent is the ground or earth.

does not refer simply to opposition, but implies domination (Deut 2:15; Judg 2:15; 1 Sam 5:9; 12:15). However, after this, well within Samuel's lifetime, we read how the Philistines oppressed Israel to such an extent that the Lord chose a king to deliver his people (1 Sam 9:16; 10:5; 13:19). First Samuel 7:13 cannot be read in isolation, but should be viewed as a generalized, hyperbolic characterization of the time of Samuel. We find a similar kind of hyperbolic statement in 2 Sam 7:1, where the narrator states that the Lord "had given him [David] rest from all his enemies around him." Yet the following chapters describe David's wars against the surrounding nations, while 1 Kgs 5:3–4 suggests that David never enjoyed peace. Furthermore, in the Lord's response to David (2 Sam 7:11) he promised to give David rest from all his enemies, as if this had not yet been achieved.

Regarding this issue, one final point is in order. If the narrator had wanted to suggest that the land had rest from all military conflict, he could have stated this more clearly. When the narrator of the Former Prophets wants to convey this idea elsewhere, the idiom of choice appears to be the *hiphil* of נָתַן collocated with מִכָּל־אֹיְבָבָיו and/or an all-inclusive reference to enemies (Josh 21:44; 23:1; 2 Sam 7:1, 11; 1 Kgs 5:4 [18 in Hebrew]), or שָׁקַט collocated with "from battle/war" (Josh 11:23; 14:15).

Steinmann also objects that the period of Jabin's oppression in my scheme (1190–1170) is problematic if Hazor was destroyed in 1230, as he assumes, and remained unsettled until the time of Solomon.⁷ Steinmann makes the faulty assumption that a thirteenth-century destruction of Hazor means that no ruling power could have operated in the region after that. Kitchen, who dates the Jabin of Judges 4 to 1180 (admittedly for different reasons than I do!), acknowledges the problem, but provides a plausible explanation. Based on the description of Jabin as "king of Canaan," Kitchen proposes that he was a regional ruler who retained the traditional title "king of Hazor." He offers ancient near Eastern parallels as support.⁸ By appealing to Kitchen for support, I am not endorsing his date for the Exodus. However, he has made a case that the events recorded in Judges 4 could have occurred in the early twelfth century. Steinmann fails to interact with his arguments.

Steinmann criticizes my dating of Jephthah because it fails to take at face value Jephthah's statement that Israel had occupied trans-Jordan for 300 years (Judg 11:26). I suggested that Jephthah may have been speaking rhetorically (hyperbolically) or even have been in error. Support for such a

⁷ Steinmann's use of Yadin's date of 1230 is misleading, for the latest excavators of the site acknowledge that the date of the destruction of the Late Bronze city is uncertain. See Amnon Ben-Tor, "The Fall of Canaanite Hazor—The 'Who' and 'When' Questions," in *Mediterranean Peoples in Transition: Thirteenth to Early Tenth Centuries BCE* (ed. Seymour Gitin, Amihai Mazar, and Ephraim Stern; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1998) 456. The pottery evidence favors a date sometime in the fourteenth-thirteenth centuries, but beyond that we simply do not know exactly when the city was destroyed. See Ben-Tor, "The Fall of Canaanite Hazor—The 'Who' and 'When' Questions" 462–65.

⁸ K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 213. For a response to Kitchen, see Bryant G. Wood, "The Rise and Fall of the 13th-Century Exodus-Conquest Theory," *JETS* 48 (2005) 487–88.

proposal comes from the fact that Jephthah rhetorically or erroneously referred to Chemosh as the Ammonite king's god. I readily admit in my article that Jephthah's use of the figure 300 is problematic for my proposal. But Steinmann's attempts to make my position appear even weaker lack vitality: (1) Despite the fact that the biblical evidence consistently identifies Milcom with Ammon, and Chemosh with Moab, he argues that further archaeological evidence may show that Ammon worshiped Chemosh in an earlier period. One can always engage in such speculation when hard data are not forthcoming, but I prefer to work with the evidence as it stands. (2) Steinmann asks, "If Jephthah was simply engaging in political propaganda, why did he choose the figure of 300 years?" He then asks why the figure of 200 years would not suffice or a phrase such as "hundreds of years" or "many years." For starters, the figure 200 would hardly qualify as hyperbolic! It would be nothing more than a rounded figure, if the actual number of years were 185, as I suggest. But one could see how Jephthah, if wanting to exaggerate for emphasis, might round a figure up and then add a hundred for good effect. As for the suggested alternatives, biblical Hebrew never uses the expression "hundreds of years" in a general way. When "hundred(s)" and "year" are collocated, there is always a precise number in view. The expression "many years" occurs only twice, both in later texts (Neh 9:30; Eccl 6:3); one would not expect to see it in the Former Prophets.⁹

3. *The two panels as thematic markers.* Steinmann acknowledges the presence of two panels in the book's structure, but he suggests that the reason for this is thematic, not chronological. In his view the first panel focuses on the nation's idolatry. The second adds the theme of kingship, which is a concern of the book's epilogue. I find this proposal unconvincing. As Steinmann admits, the theme of idolatry is not distinctive to the first panel. The theme of kingship is introduced in the second panel in the Gideon-Abimelech narrative, but it is not present in the Jephthah and Samson accounts, which Steinmann skips over in his proposal.

A better approach is to focus on the framework of the central section, for this is where יסר appears (or, in the case of 6:1, is omitted). There are other variations within the framework in the second panel, one of which is particularly striking. At the end of the Gideon account, we read again (as in the first panel) that the land had rest (8:28). But in the Jephthah and Samson accounts no such statement appears. This signals a key thematic difference between the panels. Panel one characterizes the period as one where conflict was followed by rest. But panel two breaks that pattern and refuses, after the Gideon account or its sequel involving Abimelech, to characterize the period as one where there was rest. In other words, differing perspectives are at work: Panel one presents a more optimistic perspective of the period as one where there was rest, but panel two qualifies this with a more pessimistic

⁹ In Lev 25:51 the collocation רבות בשנים is translated "many years," but it refers to many years within the Jubilee period (up to fifty), not enough to be hyperbolic.

view that paves the way for the epilogue, which describes events chronologically prior to the central section and characterizes the period as one of moral chaos and civil strife from the very beginning.

II. OTHER LITERARY FEATURES

1. *The Ammonite and Philistine oppressions.* Regarding the Jephthah account, Steinmann argues that the absence of a reference to the Philistines after 10:7 is a signal that the Jephthah and Samson accounts are concurrent, not in chronological succession. He contends that רַי in 13:1 need not indicate chronological succession to what immediately precedes. In his scheme, 13:1 is in chronological succession to 10:5 (the death of Jair), not 12:13 (the death of Abdon), as in my proposal. However, I have argued on the basis of linguistic data that this is not the most natural way to understand the use of רַי , and I will stand by that conclusion.¹⁰

Steinmann draws an unwarranted conclusion from the text's silence. In the Jephthah account there is no direct statement that the Philistine oppression ended or continued. He assumes that 13:1 must be concurrent because the narrator did not say in the Jephthah account that the Philistine oppression ended. On the contrary, given the most natural understanding of רַי , it is reasonable to conclude that the oppression of 10:7 must have stopped at some point and was then renewed.

2. *Lack of rest for the land.* Steinmann argues that the absence of the "land had rest" formula in the Jephthah account indicates that Jephthah's victory did not end the Ammonite oppression; it simply brought temporary relief. This is a meaningless distinction to make, since the periods of rest described earlier were temporary. Furthermore, he admits that the use of כָּנַע in 11:33 is "reminiscent" of victories that did bring rest (cf. 3:30; 4:23; 8:28; see 1 Sam 7:13 as well). But he infers that the absence of the rest formula signals temporary relief, not complete deliverance. This is difficult to accept, for Jephthah devastated (literally, "struck down [with] a very great striking down") twenty Ammonite towns (v. 33). In fact, the only time this emphatic construction is used in the Former Prophets prior to this is in Joshua 10:20 (see also v. 10, though מָאֵד is omitted there) to describe Israel's annihilation of the Canaanite coalition at Gibeon. The narrator may allude to this event to emphasize the extent of Jephthah's victory. Twice the text states that the Lord gave the Ammonites into Jephthah's hand (11:32; 12:3), an expression that is used earlier of victories that brought deliverance from oppression (3:10; 4:7, 14; 7:7, 14–15).

As outlined above, I prefer to explain the absence of the rest formula as reflecting the author's rhetorical design in the second panel. The first panel speaks of subduing (or overpowering, in the case of Othniel) an oppressor, followed by rest for the land (3:10–11, 30; 4:23/5:31). The second panel continues this pattern initially (8:28), but then drops the rest formula, while

¹⁰ Chisholm, "Chronology of the Book of Judges" 249.

retaining a reference to subduing an enemy (11:32). Finally, it omits both in the Samson account. This step-by-step removal of key elements from the first panel contributes to the alternative portrait of the period painted by the second panel.¹¹ In short, the text stresses that Jephthah did end the Ammonite oppression, even if the narrator, for rhetorical reasons, did not describe it with the optimistic idiom of panel one.

As for Samson, he arrived on the scene as an adult after forty years of Philistine oppression and led Israel for twenty years. I do not say or imply that Samson ended the Philistine oppression. I am simply suggesting that the twenty-year period of Samson's judgeship was subsequent to a forty-year period of oppression, without implying that his rule brought an end to oppression.

3. *The sequence of events in 10:6—11:11.* The syntax of 10:8 is problematic, as well as its relationship to verse 7. The Hebrew text reads literally, "They shattered and crushed the Israelites in that year, eighteen years all the Israelites who were beyond the Jordan in the land of the Amorites who are in Gilead." As it stands, the text separates "in that year" from "eighteen years." (Note the disjunctive *athnaq.*) The phrase "in that year" most naturally refers back to the action(s) described in verse 7. The rhetorical point of "in that year" would then be that foreign oppression was the immediate consequence of the Lord's anger.¹² In this case the text would seem to make a distinction between (a) a Philistine-Ammonite invasion in the year the Lord was angry and handed the Israelites over to these enemies; and (b) an eighteen-year period of oppression (presumably Ammonite) centered in Transjordan. If so, one could assume that the Philistine oppression was relatively short lived and not sustained, since the Ammonites receive the narrator's focus from verse 8b onward.

As one can see, I agree with Steinmann that verse 8b is simply parenthetical and that verses 8a and 9 describe events that occurred in the very first year of the oppression. However, he assumes that the events of 10:10—11:11 (with the exception of the parenthetical 11:1–3) took place in that first year as well. But 11:32–33 demands that by 10:17 the scene has shifted to the end of the eighteen-year period mentioned in 10:8b, for Jephthah's devastating victory over Ammon (11:32–33) brought an end to the oppression. Of course, as noted above, the aftermath of his victory is not described in the optimistic style of panel one.¹³

¹¹ The narrator of Judges employs this literary device of stylistic variation (more specifically, truncation), elsewhere in the book for rhetorical purposes. See Robert B. Chisholm, "What's Wrong with this Picture? Stylistic Variation as a Rhetorical Technique in Judges," *JSTOT* 34 (2009) 171–82.

¹² Steinmann identifies "that year" in 10:8 as the year of Jair's death (10:5). This may be the case, but *grammatically* speaking, Jair's death is not in view when the phrase "in that year" is used in verse 8. When "in that year" appears elsewhere, it always refers to the time period of an event described immediately before (Gen 26:12; 47:17–18; Deut 14:28; Josh 5:12; Jer 28:1, 17; 2 Chr 27:5).

¹³ We are not told what prompted the Ammonite military action described in 10:17. They already exercised control over the Israelites (10:8b). Judges 6:1–6 may provide an analogy. There we are told that Midian exercised control over Israel for seven years, yet they conducted annual military actions.

III. CONCLUSION

Steinmann makes this statement: "Chisholm, unfortunately, discounts or overlooks other literary features that relate to chronology because they conflict with his chronological understanding of the literary feature he brings to our attention." In the face of this charge that I have handled the textual evidence carelessly or tendentiously, I hope that my response shows that I am very much aware of the pertinent evidence, have examined it carefully, and am able to accommodate it to my proposal in a way that is neither strained nor tendentious. Furthermore, I contend that Steinmann's critique overlooks the rhetorical intention of the narrator's use of pan-Israelite idiom and of the two-paneled structure. He also misinterprets linguistic evidence that is fundamental to understanding the chronology of the period.