

SUPPLEMENTAL ANALOGY to TRUE BIBLE CHRONOLOGY CONFIRMED

THE 450-YEAR PERIOD OF THE JUDGES

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3 Dec 1948

Here is a problem in Bible chronology which, in some measure, should exercise the minds of all students. The Apostle Paul declares that God gave judges to Israel:

“...He gave unto them judges about (during) the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet ... and afterward they desired a king: and God gave them Saul...forty years” (Acts 13:20,21).

Did the Apostle speak solely by inspiration when he gave us this important chronological information? Or could he also have been guided by the records of the Old Testament? In other words, is it possible to find in the ancient Hebrew Scriptures the chronological records which prove that judges ruled Israel during 450 years?

It is possible. And this fact shows that the inspired Apostle Paul spoke according to the Scriptures in this matter of the period of the judges, and of the reign of Saul, as he did in his preaching the doctrine of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). But we shall not find in the Old Testament, a statement such as that of the Apostle, that the judges ruled during 450 years. Close study is necessary, also attention to the original Hebrew text in some important passages.

We have been much helped in this study by our dear Brother in the Lord, Hugo Karlén, whom we mention in our booklet, “The Great Pyramid, Its Scientific Features,”—page 37, second paragraph. What follows is largely the result of his investigations, made some years ago.

In connection with this period of the judges, Brother Russell wrote in Volume II, page 49, “The records given in the books of Judges and 1 Samuel mention 19 periods, approximating a total of 450.” He adds, however, “that they are disconnected, broken, lapped and tangled so much that we could arrive at no definite conclusion from them, and should be obliged to conclude as others have done, that nothing positive could be known on the subject, were it not that the New Testament supplies the deficiency...” (Acts 13:19-21).

Brother Russell did not attempt to define the 19 periods to which he calls attention. But other students of the Word have made the attempt. We recently presented a list of 19 periods, with scriptural texts for reference which add up to 450 years. This list appeared to be conclusive, but we invited examination and comments. Most of those who received the list expressed themselves as satisfied. But a few were critical and pointed out certain scriptural statements which seemed to be irreconcilable with the list, even though the nineteen periods summed up to the desired 450 years.

Let us repeat the list as given, and then we can consider the irreconcilable Scriptures referred to:

Period	Years	Period Identity	Scripture Reference
1	8	Servitude to Mesopotamia	Judges 3:8
2	40	Judgeship of Othniel	" 3:9-11
3	18	Servitude to Moab	" 3:14
4	80	Rest under Ehud	" 3:15-30
5	20	Servitude to Jabin	" 4:1-3
6	40	Rest under Deborah	" 5:31
7	7	Bondage under Midian	" 6:1
8	40	Rest under Gideon	" 8:28
9	3	Reign of Abimelech	" 9:1-22
10	23	Judgeship of Tola	" 10:1,2
11	22	Judgeship of Jair	" 10:3
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	301	(sub-total) Judges 11:26	
12	18	Oppression of Ammon	" 10:8
13	6	Judgeship of Jephthah	" 12:7
14	7	Judgeship of Ibzan	" 12:8,9
15	10	Judgeship of Elon	" 12:10,11
16	8	Judgeship of Abdon	" 12:12-15
17*	40	Oppression of Philistines	" 13:1
18	40	Judgeship of Eli	1Sam. 4:12-18
19**	20	Judgeship of Samuel	" 8:5
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	450	TOTAL	Acts 13:20,21

NOTES:

* During the last 20 of this 40 years Samson judges Israel ... Judges 15:20; 16:30-31.

** Until Israel asked for a king. It was during Samuel's judgeship that the ark remained in Kirjath-jearim...1 Sam 7:2

The above nineteen periods appear to be the identical list which Brother Russell had in mind when he wrote page 49 of his 2nd volume of "Studies in the Scriptures." Nevertheless, we can quote Scriptures which prove that the list cannot be accepted as it stands.

For instance the 8 years of servitude to Mesopotamia is the first period of the list. But a punishment of servitude could not follow immediately after the end of the wilderness journey when Joshua led the people into the land of promise. For the Scripture declares:

"And the people served the LORD (not the king of Mesopotamia) all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel!" (Judges 2:7).

Before the punishment of servitude because of unfaithfulness could be due, that faithful generation which served the Lord under the elders that outlived Joshua must have died out, and an unbelieving generation have taken its place. On this evil generation would come the punishment of servitude. This is what we read:

“And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being an hundred and ten years old... and also all that (faithful) generation were gathered unto their fathers: And there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel” (Judges 2:8-10).

To allow for the passing away of a generation which served the Lord, and the rising of another, evil generation which merited the punishment of servitude to the king of Mesopotamia, an interval of many years was required. (We shall speak of this interval presently).

Jephthah, a prominent judge in Israel, speaks of a period of 300 years (see Judges 11:26). The Scriptures show that this period of 300 years began to count from the end of the wilderness journey, and terminated when Jephthah began his judgeship. Jephthah was that judge who vowed a vow unto the Lord and said:

“If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD’S, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering” (Judges 11:30-40)

And it was his only daughter who came out to meet him. Note: It is pointed out in the Emphatic Diaglott that the Authorized Version gives a faulty translation of the original Hebrew – see the Alphabetical Appendix under the heading of Jephthah, page 22 [1864 edition], for the correct understanding of the text.

It was during his contention with the king of the children of Ammon, that Jephthah made mention of the period 300 years. When Judge Jair died and Jephthah took over the judgeship of Israel, the Ammonites determined to “crush” into complete subjection the children of Israel. (See marginal reading of Judges 10:8).

Jephthah tried to reason with the Ammonite king, and asked him why he fought against Israel. The king replied:

“Because Israel took away my land, when they came up out of Egypt” (Judges 11:12-13).

Jephthah then reminded the king that for 300 years the children of Ammon had made no attempt to regain their lost land, saying:

“While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns and in Aeoer, and her towns, and in all the cities that be along the coasts of Arnon, three hundred years? Why therefore did ye not recover them within that time?” (Judges 11:26)

The terminal of the 300 years spoken of by Jephthah, which coincides with the death of Judge Jair and the beginning of the judgeship of Jephthah, is a definite “time point” in the history of Israel. From this time point, we can then reckon backward to the days of Joshua, and forward to the time when Samuel the prophet anointed Saul as king over Israel.

First, let us reckon backward: From the list on page 2, we note that Jair judged Israel for 22 years, and Tola before him for 23 years. Abimelech had a brief reign of 3 years, after Israel had enjoyed a rest of 40 years under Gideon. Before Gideon's deliverance, Israel had suffered bondage to Midian for a period of 7 years. These five periods total 95 years, and all are easily to be followed in the scriptural record.

But the preceding times of Deborah, Jabin, and Ehud call for careful consideration. For it was a mistake to assume that 80 years referred to in Judges 3:30 were entirely under the deliverer Ehud. Ehud delivered Israel after their 18 years servitude to Moab (Judges 3:14-29). But the Scriptures neither say nor imply that the 80 years rest which the land then enjoyed were all under the deliverer Ehud. The judgeship of Shamgar who followed on the death of Ehud, and of Deborah the prophetess who judged after Shamgar, are included in this 80 year period. Also, the oppressor Jabin, with his captain Sisera, were conquered within this time period.

The Philistines tried to break the rest which Ehud had won for the land, but they were immediately overthrown by Shamgar (Judges 3:31).

The "20 years" spoken of in Judges 4:3 can also be read "twentieth" year, according to the Hebrew original, for there are no ordinals in the Hebrew above 10, and the context and the sense of the passage must determine which is correct in any particular text. (Ordinals are: first, second, third, etc. Cardinals are: one, two, three).

After the death of Ehud, during the time of Shamgar, the children of Israel again did evil in the Lord's sight (Judges 4:1), and in punishment "the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor. The captain of his host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles. And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD for he had nine hundred chariots of iron, and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel" (Judges 4:1-3).

But as we pointed out, we can read: "and in the twentieth year he (Jabin) mightily oppressed the children of Israel." (Judges 4:1-3).

It was in the twentieth, and the last, year of Shamgar that Jabin oppressed Israel. The Hebrew of the word translated "oppressed" in this text does not necessarily imply that Jabin subjected Israel, but rather, that he troubled them, and this in the northern part of the country only. (See marginal note of Judges 4:2).

Shamgar, as a judge, appeared not to have exercised complete control of the land, and thus we read: "In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways (or 'crooked ways')." (Judges 5:6, marginal reading). Although the land had rest during this time (no active wars), yet, owing to the weakness of Judge Shamgar, there was a feeling of insecurity – the people were afraid to walk openly along the highways.

In the last (the twentieth year) of Shamgar, Jabin determined to subject Israel wholly to his yoke, and his oppression was at that time so great, that the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, with the result that Deborah, with Barak, put an end to Jabin and Sisera. (See Song of Deborah and Barak, Judges chapter 5).

From the Hebrew text it is clear that the times of Ehud, Shamgar (Jabin) and Deborah are included in the 80 years spoken of in Judges 3:30.

Immediately preceding the eighty years, Israel had been in servitude to Moab for 18 years (Judges 3:14). Previous to this 18 years, Othniel had judged Israel for 40 years (Judges 3:9-11). Othniel had delivered Israel from their 8 years of servitude to Cushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia (Judges 3:8-10).

This trouble of servitude had come upon the erring children of Israel when all that faithful generation which served the Lord during the days of Joshua, and of the elders that had outlived him, had died out. How many years in the interval between the end of the wilderness journey and the beginning of the 8 years of servitude to Mesopotamia? We can ascertain this by first summing up the periods backward from the death of Jair, and then deducting this total from the overall period of 300 years spoken of by Jephthah (Judges 11:26):

Jair	22 years
Tola	23 years
Abimelech	3 years
Gideon	40 years
Midian (Judges 6:1)	7 years
Ehud, Shamgar (Jabin) and Deborah (Judges 3:30)	80 years
Moab	18 years
Othniel	40 years
Mesopotamia	<u>8 years</u>
Total	241 years

This total of 241 deducted from the 300 equals 59 years. The Lord had caused Israel to wander for 40 years in the wilderness, until all men from 20 years old and upward, who had come out of Egypt, had been consumed in the wilderness. (Numbers 32:11-13).

Therefore, the oldest of the “elders that outlived Joshua” would be 60 when he entered Canaan; and even if he had lived to the extreme age of Joshua, 110 years, his death would still be 9 years short of the beginning of the Mesopotamian servitude.

Turning again to the list of 19 periods referred to by Brother Russell [see page 2 of these notes], we find that the twelfth period, the oppression of Ammon, requires our attention. Let us read Judges 10:8 which speaks of this oppression from the text of the Authorized Version.

“The anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon. And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel: eighteen years, all the children of Israel that were on the other side Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. Moreover the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore distressed.” (Judges 10:7-9)

It is pointed out that the above English translation does not convey the meaning of the Hebrew original. One can see that, as it stands, the English text requires some explanation: “that year ... eighteen years...”. The word “eighteen” should properly be rendered “eighteenth,” to get the true sense of the passage. This is determined by the context. The correct translation is:

“And that year they (the Ammonites) vexed and crushed the children of Israel in this, the 18th year.”

Note also that the word “oppressed” is, in the marginal reading, “crushed,” which is a truer translation of the Hebrew word, and suggests a different thought.

The Ammonites did not succeed in dominating Israel as a whole. They troubled and vexed part of Israel for 17 years, during the time of Jair’s judgeship. But that year, when Jair died, which was the eighteenth year of their hostility to Israel, they thought now that Judge Jair was removed in death, they would easily have success in dominating the whole of Israel. And accordingly they attacked Israel dreadfully, crushingly. But they were stopped and defeated by Jephthah, “a mighty man of valour” (Judges 11:1).

And in the 11th chapter of Judges we read how Jephthah was made the leader of Israel, and how the Lord delivered the children of Ammon into his hands:

“He smote them from Aroer, ... with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.” (Judges 11:32-33).

Therefore we are not to reckon on a period of 18 years oppression from the time of Jair’s death. The Ammonites did not crush Israel for 18 years, but rather it was in the 18th year of their trouble-making that they crushed Israel, thus calling forth that special effort of Israel under Jephthah which defeated and subdued them.

The 6 years of Jephthah’s judgeship began at the death of Jair, the end of the 300 years spoken of by Jephthah (Judges 11:26). From this time point we now count forward in Israel’s history to the time of Samuel’s judgeship, and his anointing of Saul as king.

Ibzan followed Jephthah and judged Israel 7 years. Then Elon judged for 10 years, and Abdon for 8. The 40 years oppression of the Philistines followed on the last 20 of which Samson judged Israel (Judges 13:1; 15:20; 16:30-31). Eli followed with a judgeship of 40 years (1 Samuel 4:12-18). Finally, the prophet Samuel acted as judge until the people asked for a king, and God gave them Saul.

In the list of 19 periods (see page 2), Samuel is entered as having judged Israel for 20 years, on the assumption that the 20 years spoken of in 1 Samuel 7:2 had reference to the duration of Samuel's judgeship. But 1 Samuel 7:2 does not state that Samuel judged Israel for 20 years. The Scriptures show that up to the time when Saul was anointed to be king of Israel, Samuel must have acted as judge much longer than 20 years.

Ferrar Fenton says 45 years, while other chronologers, reckon Samuel's judgeship to have been between 40 and 50 years. The Scriptures show that Samuel was a child at the time when Eli's eyes began to wax dim for age (1 Samuel 3:1-2). But Samuel is said to be old and gray headed when he anointed Saul as king (1 Samuel 12:1-2). This implies a considerable number of years between the death of Eli when Samuel replaced him as judge and his anointing of Saul (see also 1 Samuel 8:1-5; 12:2).

When we take the literal translation of the Hebrew of 1 Samuel 7:2, we read:

"And it came to pass from the time the ark remained in Kirjath-jearim, that the days were multiplied, and it was the 20th year and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD," or "assembled before the LORD."

In the Latin Vulgate [the] translation reads: "...it was now the 20th year."

Most translators and commentators consider that the Philistines, after the death of Eli, continued to have a certain power over Israel during 20 years. In the meantime, however, Samuel was judge in Israel.

But in the 20 years from the arrival of the ark in Kirjath-jearim, Israel had enough of the Philistines oppressive power and had turned to the Lord for help. We read that Samuel prayed to the Lord on behalf of the children of Israel in their distress, after admonishing them to

"...put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." (1 Samuel 7:3).

When the Philistines sought to do battle against the now repentant children of Israel, the Lord "...thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel... So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more unto the coast of Israel..." (1 Samuel 7:4-15).

After these 20 years, in the last of which the Philistines were finally subdued, Samuel judged Israel for 25 years until he anointed Saul to be king, making, therefore 45 years in all for the judgeship of Samuel. The number of years for Samuel as judge...is in agreement with the Scriptures.

Commencing with the end of the wilderness journey, our amended list now reads:

Judgeship of Joshua and the elders that outlived him, etc . . .	59 years
Mesopotamian servitude	8 years
Othniel	40 years
Moab	18 years
Ehud, Shamgar (Jabin in 20 th year) & Deborah with Barak . .	80 years
Midian	7 years
Gideon	40 years
Abimelech	3 years
Tola	23 years
Jair	<u>22 years</u>
Total (Judges 11:26)	300 years
Jephthah	6 years
Ibzan	7 years
Elon	10 years
Abdon	8 years
Philistines (last 20 Samson)	40 years
Eli	40 years
Samuel	<u>45 years</u>
<u>Total from end of wilderness journey.</u>	456 years

As the final total of 456 years dates from the end of the wilderness journey, whereas the Apostle dates his 450 years from the division of the land among the tribes of Israel, we require to deduct 6 years from the 456 year total. The remainder of 450 years being that period spoken of by the Apostle in Acts 13:20.

That it took 6 years to divide the land is pointed out, and fully discussed by Brother Russell in the Second Volume of Studies in the Scriptures, pages 47-48.

Although the above amended list appears to be comprised of 17 periods, it must be remembered that the 80 years is the sum of three periods, namely: 20 years for Ehud, 20 for Shamgar, and 40 for Deborah. Thus we still have 19 periods in all for the time the judges ruled in Israel— 456 years from the end of the wilderness journey and 450 years from the dividing of the land.

