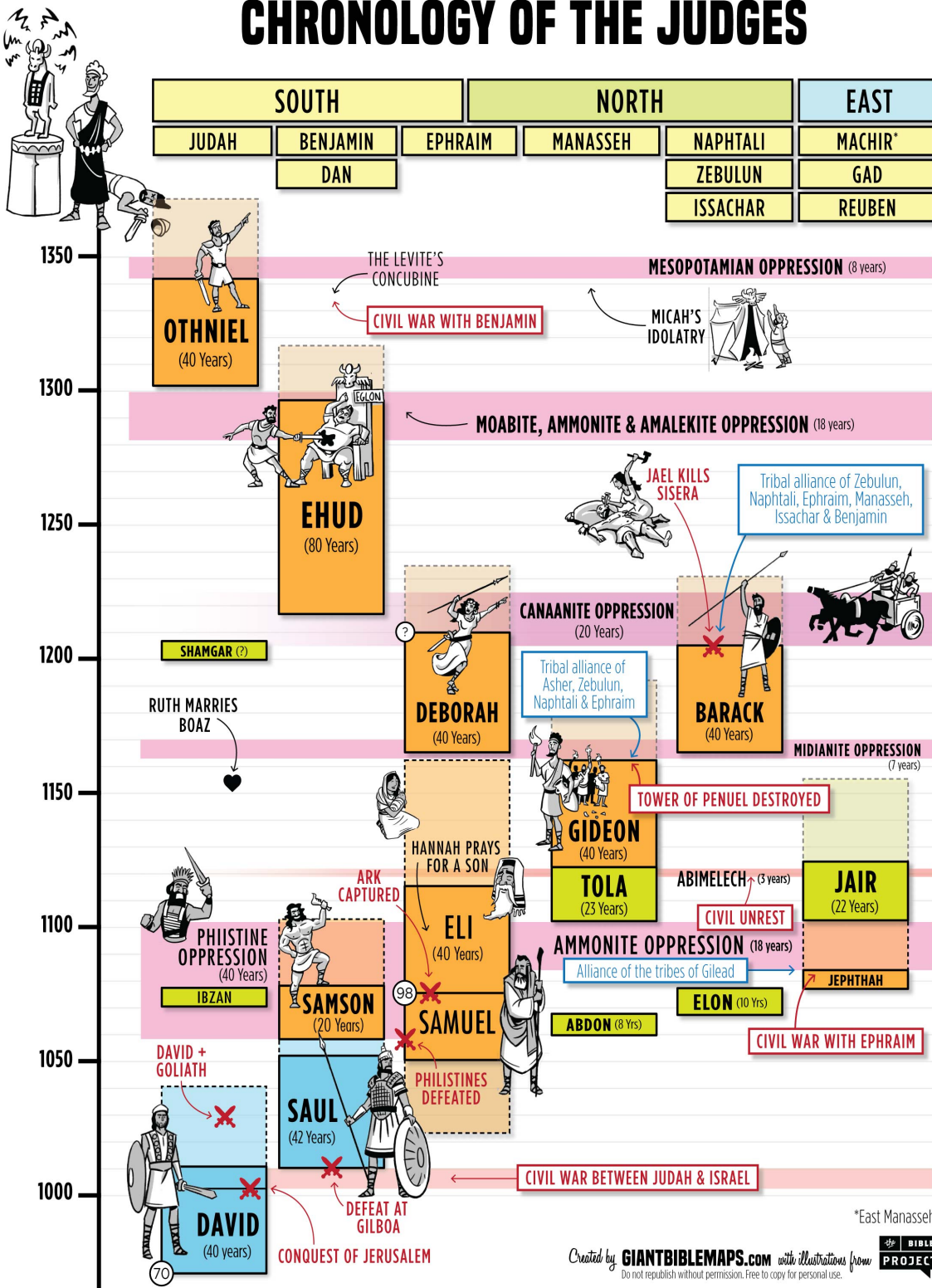
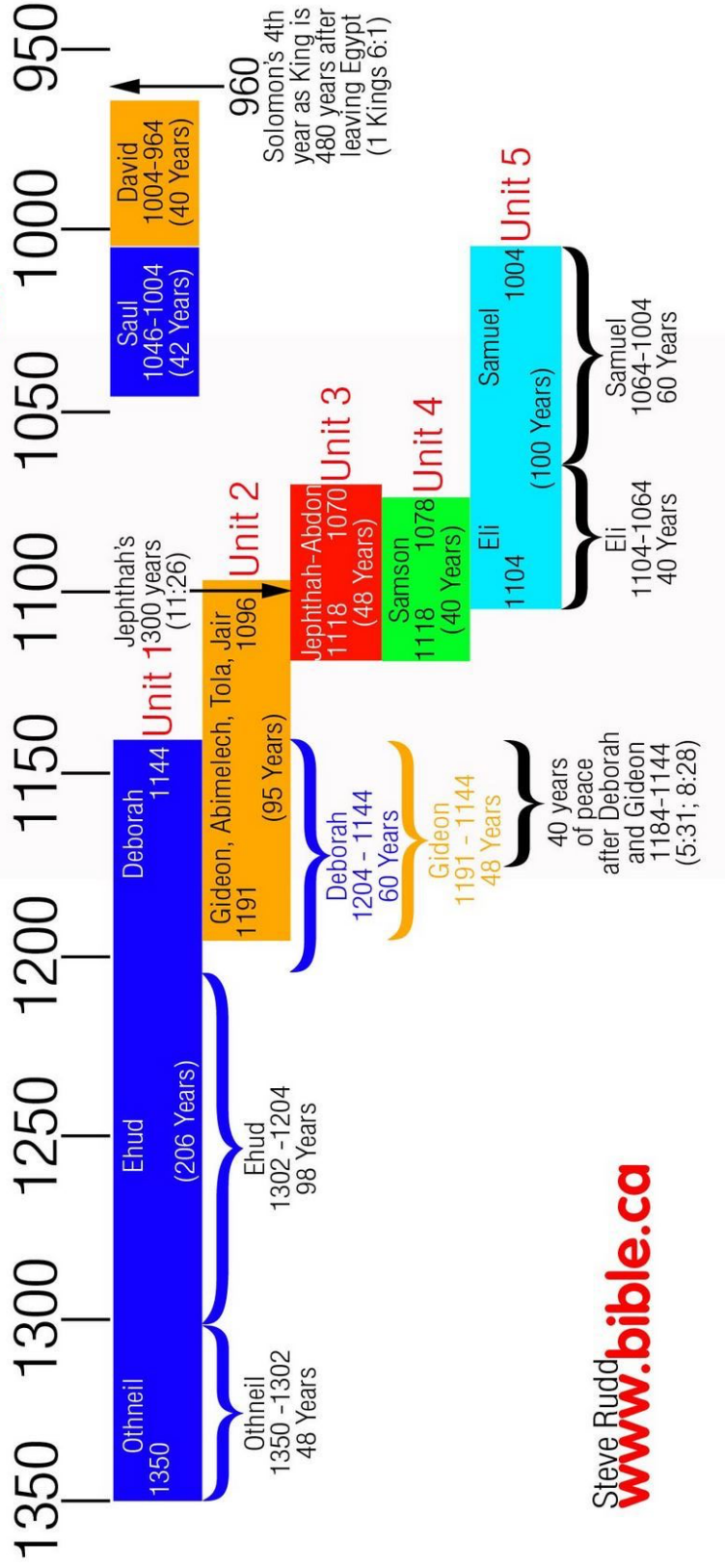


CHRONOLOGY OF THE JUDGES

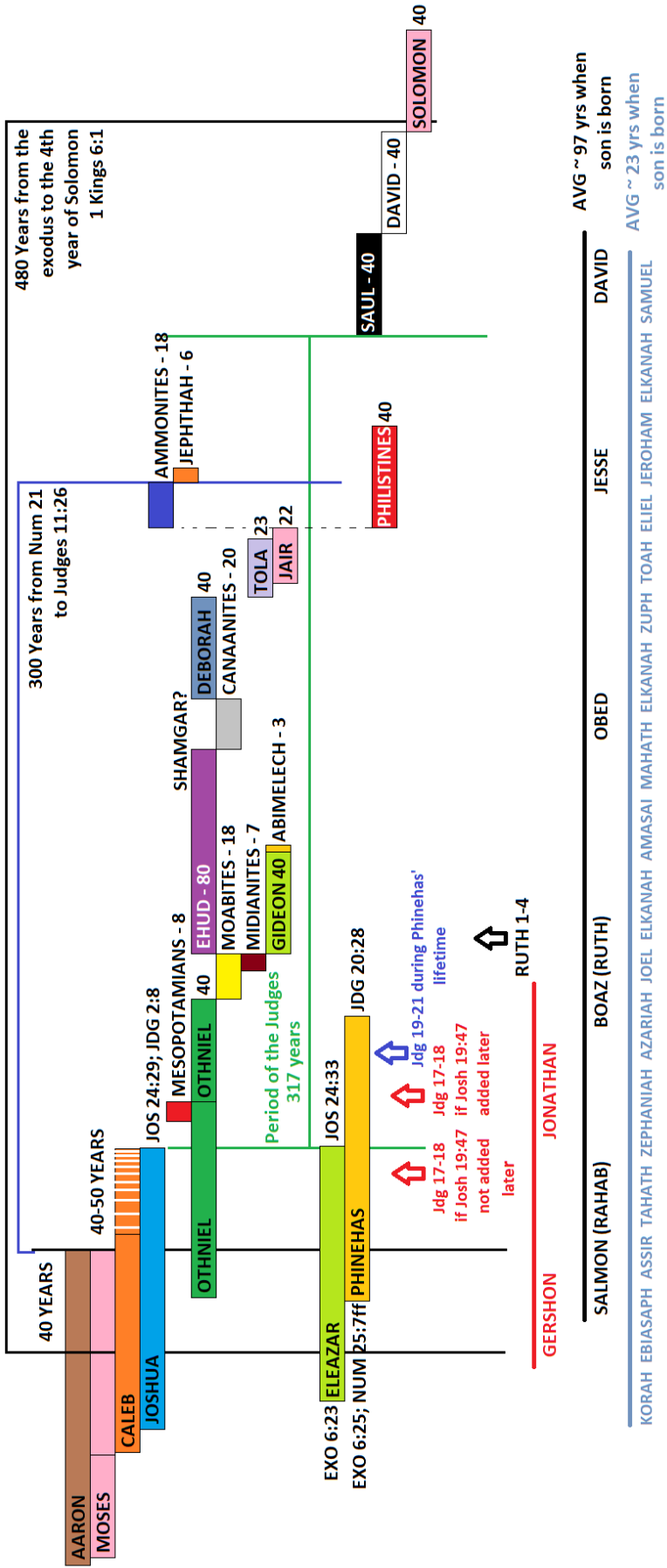


Chronology of Judges Timeline

The five Indivisible Units of Chronology



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After Joshua's death, the tribes of Israel continue their conquest of the southern regions of Canaan, but they are unable to cleanse the land thoroughly of its native inhabitants. God declares that these remaining people will be an impediment to Israel's enjoyment of the promised land. Generations pass, and the younger Israelites turn away from God, intermarrying with the Canaanites and worshipping the local deities. God threatens to abandon Israel because of the disobedience of the youth, but he selects a series of judges, or rulers, to act as temporary leaders for the people.

Throughout the lives of these judges, the narrator tells us, Israel's behavior follows a consistent pattern: the people of Israel fall into evil, God sends a leader to save them, and, once the judge dies, the people commit even greater evil. When the Israelites' continued worship of the Canaanite gods leads to an invasion by the nation of Moab, God sends Israel a left-handed man named **Ehud** to be its deliverer. Ehud visits the Moabite king and offers to give the king a secret message from God. When the king dismisses his attendants, Ehud draws a sword strapped to his right thigh and plunges it into the obese king, killing him. Ehud escapes and leads the Israelites in regaining control of the Jordan River valley.

A prophet named **Deborah** emerges as Israel's new judge after Israel returns to evil and is invaded by a mighty army from the north. Counseling Israel's tribes under a great tree, she calls for an insurrection, and, together with God's help, the Israelites defeat the king's 900 chariots, sending the Canaanite general, Sisera, into retreat. When Sisera seeks refuge in a local woman's tent, the owner, Jael, lures Sisera to sleep and kills him, hammering a peg into his skull. Deborah recounts the victory in a lengthy song, extolling God as a warrior and herself as the "mother in Israel" (5:7).

God commissions a humble man, **Gideon**, to save Israel from its next invaders, the Midianites, who impoverish and scatter the people. Gideon tears down his father's altar to the god Baal, and the Israelites respond in droves to his call to fight. God demands fewer men for the battle, and, in a test, Gideon leads the men to a river to drink. Those who cup their hands to drink are sent home, and the remaining three hundred men who lap the water with their tongues are chosen for God's army. Spying on the enemy troops at night, Gideon overhears a Midianite soldier tell his friend about a dream in which a small loaf of bread was able to knock down a large Midianite tent. The friend interprets the dream as a sign that Midian will be defeated by Israel. Gideon and his few men surround the camps, and—with the sound of trumpets and broken jars—the Israelites emit such a clamorous war cry that the Midianites turn and slay each other. Israel attempts to make Gideon its king, but Gideon refuses, proclaiming that God alone is ruler of Israel.

Widespread worship of the god Baal plagues Israel, and Gideon's son **Abimelech** serves a violent three-year reign as Israel's king. His tyrannical reign ends when a woman throws a millstone on Abimelech's head. Pressured by the Philistines from the east and the Ammonites from the west, Israel turns from its idol worship and God selects a new judge, **Jephthah**, the son of a prostitute, to challenge the Ammonites. Jephthah promises God that, if he is victorious, he will sacrifice to God the first thing that comes out of his house the day he returns from battle. Upon devastating the Ammonites, Jephthah returns home to see his daughter emerge from his house, dancing, to greet him. Jephthah laments his promise, but his daughter encourages him to remain faithful to God, and Jephthah kills the virgin girl.

The Philistines continue to oppress Israel, and the angel of God appears to a childless Israelite couple, promising them a son who will become Israel's next deliverer. The couple raises their son, **Samson**, as a Nazirite—a person who symbolizes his devotion to God by never cutting his hair. God blesses Samson with exceptional abilities, and one day Samson kills a lion with his bare hands. Contrary to his parents' urging, Samson chooses a Philistine woman to be his wife. During the wedding ceremony, he baffles the Philistines with a riddle, the answer to which they discover only when Samson's wife reveals the answer to them. Samson burns with anger and goes home without his wife, but when he returns to retrieve her, the Philistines have given her to another man. Samson captures three hundred foxes and ties torches to each of their tails, setting the Philistine crops ablaze. When the Philistines pursue Samson, the Israelites hand him over to his enemies, bound at the wrist. With God's power, Samson breaks his bindings and uses the jaw-bone of a donkey to kill a thousand Philistine men.

Again, Samson falls in love with a Philistine woman, **Delilah**. The Philistine officials urge Delilah to discover the secret of Samson's strength. Three times, Delilah asks Samson the source of his power, and Samson lies to her each time, duping the officials in their attempts to subdue him. After a while, Samson tells her the truth, informing her that his long hair is the source of his strength. While Samson is asleep, Delilah has his hair cut and alerts the officials, who capture him and gouge out his eyes. In prison, Samson's hair begins to grow again, and, during a Philistine religious festival, the blind Samson is brought out to entertain the crowds. Samson asks his servant to guide him to the pillars of the arena, and—crying out to God—Samson knocks down the pillars of the temple, killing the Philistine rulers.

Without a judge, Israel becomes even more corrupt. One day, a man and his concubine are accosted while spending the night in the Israelite tribe of Benjamin. When a gang of Benjamite men demand to have sex with the man, he offers them his concubine instead, and the men rape her repeatedly throughout the night until she dies. Enraged, the man brings the concubine home and cuts her into twelve pieces, sending a piece to each of the twelve tribes of Israel as a symbol of Israel's corruption. The rest of Israel rallies together in opposition to the tribe of Benjamin, and, with God's help, the united tribes kill more than 25,000 Benjamites. Israel grieves for its lost tribe and helps the remaining Benjamites repopulate their land.

Analysis

Biblical scholars typically group the books of Joshua and Judges together, noting how well the two works complement each other. On the one hand, Joshua purports to tell a chronological history of the Hebrew conquest of Canaan, but the account and the conquest itself seem too perfect to be accurate. In contrast, Judges is a compilation of myths about the early years of the Israelite settlement. While the stories are indeed fanciful, they suggest a gradual and disjointed occupation of the promised land that is probably more true to history than the Book of Joshua. While Joshua provides a methodical description of the various battles and an explanation of the distribution of land, Judges reveals the stories that the Israelite conquerors told as they gradually took over.

These individual accounts of Israel's judges are myths in the true sense of the word—not because they are false but because they are important to early Hebrew culture. The central theme of these myths is heroic struggle, chiefly of marginalized or oppressed people. The Israelites in the Book of Judges are strangers in a land they have recently conquered, and they are pressured from all sides by powerful regimes. Israel's judges manifest the virtues of this marginalized status. Jephthah is the son of a prostitute. The narrator takes pains to note that Ehud is left-handed, and it is this characteristic that enables Ehud to draw his sword and kill the Moabite king by surprise. Even more important than Deborah as a female hero is Jael, who uses the pretense of feminine warmth to draw a great commander into her tent, comforting him before she kills him.

The myth of Samson may be more appropriately described as an epic, because it is a relatively long story concerning the development of a single, extraordinary hero who, it might be said, is a metaphor for ancient Israel itself. Samson epitomizes some interesting dualities—brute nature versus civilized culture, strength versus weakness, Hebrew versus Philistine. What is unique to this story and to Judges as a whole, is that, unlike earlier books, the struggle between these opposing forces does not serve to develop irony or reversal.

For Samson, the line between these distinctions is blurred. Samson—defined more by his identity as a Nazirite—is a displaced man, roaming back and forth between his home and Philistine, falling in love with Philistine women yet terrorizing the Philistines, and eventually suffering betrayal by the Israelites in return. It is only when Samson destroys the temple, crying out, “Let me die with the Philistines!” that Israel is saved through Samson’s service (16:30). The epic of Samson shows that Israel’s struggle—and its salvation—consists less of cleansing foreign influences from the land than of grappling with those influences while remaining faithful to God.

The stories in Judges are filled with extreme violence. This violence may cause us to question how God can be good if the greater part of the tribe of Benjamin is killed to make a religious point, or if Jephthah must keep his promise to God by killing his daughter. One answer is that the abundant violence in Israel is not due to God’s wrath but to Israel’s wickedness. Israel promiscuously worships other gods and insists on returning to evil despite God’s help. Another, more subtle answer, is that death in Judges is not always an absolute evil but is, at times, a thing of beauty. The tales in Judges begin to develop the notion of sacrifice—the idea that one person’s death can be meaningful to another person, for religious or ethical reasons. Samson’s death saves Israel from Philistine persecution, and Sisera’s death at Jael’s hands is a poignant symbol of Israel’s victory to be celebrated in song (5:24–30). The writer tells us that the sacrifice of Jephthah’s virgin daughter becomes a tradition among the Israelites, an annual celebration of the story by adolescent girls to symbolize passage from innocence into womanhood (11:39–40).

Books of the Old Testament

- Genesis (50 Chapters)
- Exodus (40 Chapters)
- Leviticus (27 Chapters)
- Numbers (36 Chapters)
- Deuteronomy (34 Chapters)
- Joshua (24 Chapters)
- Judges (21 Chapters)
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- Ruth (4 Chapters)
- -----
- 1 Samuel (31 Chapters)
- 2 Samuel (24 Chapters)
- 1 Kings (22 Chapters)
- 2 Kings (25 Chapters)
- 1 Chronicles (29 Chapters)
- 2 Chronicles (36 Chapters)
- Ezra (10 Chapters)
- Nehemiah (13 Chapters)
- Esther (10 Chapters)
- Job (42 Chapters)
- Psalms (150 Chapters)
- Malachi (4 Chapters)
- Proverbs (31 Chapters)
- Ecclesiastes (12 Chapters)
- The Song of Solomon (8 Chapters) Song of Songs
- Isaiah (66 Chapters)
- Jeremiah (52 Chapters)
- Lamentations (5 Chapters)
- Ezekiel (48 Chapters)
- Daniel (12 Chapters)
- Hosea (14 Chapters)
- Joel (3 Chapters)
- Amos (9 Chapters)
- Obadiah (1 Chapter)
- Jonah (4 Chapters)
- Micah (7 Chapters)
- Nahum (3 Chapters)
- Habakkuk (3 Chapters)
- Zephaniah (3 Chapters)
- Haggai (2 Chapters)
- Zechariah (14 Chapters)