Chiasmus as a Literary Device for Understanding Judges

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Abstract

Since all Scripture is inspired by God and focused on the history of redemption, this essay will establish that the final editor of the Book of Judges convincingly contributes to the discipline of biblical theology by using two stylistic figures that undeniably contribute to the understanding of the book. First, we will demonstrate that the almost permanent use of chiasmus goes beyond its usual function as a stylistic figure and is akin to a literary genre, thus allowing a more relevant interpretation of the text. Then, but to a lesser extent, we will indicate how irony permeates almost all of the stories in Judges, giving them not only a secondary level of meaning but frequently a humorous touch.

1. Introduction

The book of Judges is probably one of the most difficult books of the Bible to read. Historically, it is the continuation of the book of Joshua; one ends where the other begins, with the death of Joshua (Josh 24:29–31, Judg 2:6–9). When one leaves the account at the end of the book of Joshua (ch.

24), military success has been achieved through four major battles and all the tribes of Israel are gathered in Shechem to renew their attachment to God by making a covenant with him through their leader, Joshua. This is a reminder of the covenant established in Sinai (Exod 19–24) and renewed in Moab (Deut 29). Quite understandably, the success of Joshua's conquest fostered hope for an equally successful period of consolidation when the individual tribes took possession of their respective territories, but the book of Judges is both surprising and perplexing, for we see Israel's flagrant failure to clean out the pockets of resistance and thus obey the commandments of the Lord. The contrast between the two books could not be more stark and many questions arise, notably: Why this failure? What are the theological themes that the final editor wished to emphasize? Is the literary style important and does it contribute to the understanding of the book?

2. Methodology

First of all, I will demonstrate how we arrived at the final, "canonical" version of the text, starting with the oral transmission of the major heroic exploits and ending with the addition of introductions and conclusions by the final editor. This will include a review of the Deuteronomist theses of Noth and his successors regarding the development of the text. We will also take into account both the contribution of various disciplines of biblical criticism and more recent studies in order to arrive at a synthesis that corresponds to the data available to date.

Secondly, I will establish the validity of the particular use of chiasmus as a literary genre in the book of Judges by tracing the phenomenon from its use in ancient literature to its use in biblical literature.

Thirdly, I will indicate how the use of chiasmus contributes to a relevant interpretation of Judges by identifying the main theological themes that could otherwise remain opaque.

Finally, I will comment briefly and illustrate the function of irony in Judges.

3. Scholarship on the Composition Of Judges

Most commentators and scholars believe that the book of Judges is the result of several different sources in its final form. But that is where the convergence of ideas ends. It would be normal to encounter some minor variations in the theories about the composition of any book, but in the case of Judges there is an astonishing polarization with irreconcilable differences. Even among evangelical commentators the differences are substantial, forcing us to evaluate and choose.

3.1 The influence of Martin Noth

Is Deuteronomy the last book of the Pentateuch or the first of the historical books? Here, in simple terms, is the question that caused a major theological tsunami in the early twentieth century when Noth (1943) wrote his book *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (Deuteronomist History). Here is a resumé of Noth's essential ideas, particularly in relation to Judges:

3.1.1 A uniform literary work

By emphasizing the impressive "Deuteronomic" content from Joshua to 2 Kings, Noth detached Deuteronomy from the Pentateuch (the remaining four books becoming the Tetrateuch) and affirmed that all the books from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings are part of the same work written by the same anonymous sixth century writer to whom he gave the title "Deuteronomist."

Noth affirmed that the term "author" is accurate, as it is not an editor who has made minor additions or clarifications to existing texts.

Although he conceded that the author used different sources, he claimed that these sources are integrated into a new, unique and uniform literary work. In addition, he also claimed that this work was written during or after the Babylonian exile, but, in any case, in the sixth century BC after the fall of the two kingdoms.

3.1.2 A theological explanation of the exile

He likewise claimed that the oldest traditions found in the Pentateuch cannot for the most part be verified. He contended moreover, that the author or Deuternonomist did not intend to reconstruct the history of the people of Israel but rather to give a theological explanation of the exile. Noth was not as preoccupied with the historical accuracy of the period of the Judges as he was about the historical situation of the sixth century—that of the exile. Consequently, this vast writing project would have been the result of the philosophy of the Deuteronomist who integrated into his final work several more or less fictionalized heroic narratives from the past, including those of the Judges.

3.1.3 Structure of Israel during the period of Judges

He also put forward the idea that before the establishment of the monarchy, Israel functioned as an amphictyony, that is to say as a close confederation of tribes gathered around the same sanctuary.

3.1.4 Literary structure of Judges

Noth's approach to Judges is illuminating especially as we consider what he has eliminated from the book. First, he considered that the period of

Judges begins at Judges 2:6 (the second introduction), which he juxtaposes with Joshua 23, and ends with the farewell speech of Samuel, the last judge, in 1 Samuel 12. From this observation, he concluded that since the story of Jephthah is common to both texts (Judg10 and 1 Sam 12) it must constitute the turning point or pivot of the book. This is both a curious, even hasty conclusion, because how to explain that both Gideon and Baraq (Bedân) are also found in these same two texts? He also juxtaposed Judges 13:1 and 1 Samuel 1:1, thus eliminating the account of Samson and the two conclusions or epilogues affirming that they were not included in the original manuscript as not fitting in with the philosophy of the Deuteronomist.

Not everything should be rejected in the ideas put forward by Noth, because few historians or scholars contest that the Deuteronomist History was the product or compilation of several manuscripts from different sources, and therefore of various editors, over a fairly long period.

3.2 Noth's successors

Noth's successors, while following his basic thesis of the Deuteronomist History, moved away from the idea of a single author, advocating the idea of several editors and multiple additions or layers to the book over a fairly long period of time. Wenham (2000, 46), a convinced Deuteronomist, succinctly summarized the ideas of these scholars when he wrote:

> Within the so-called deuteronomistic history of Deuteronomy to 2 Kings there are sufficient differences between different books to make it likely that they were not all out of the same literary mould. Though there is a theological outlook common to them all, which may be broadly termed deuteronomic/istic, the books have their own distinctive features which suggest that they are of diverse origin. As far as Judges is concerned we

> shall be following the trend in modern studies to read the book
> as a work in its own right, not just as one volume in a unified
> history of pre-exilic Israel.

Over the past decades, Noth's ideas have been studied and reinvented *ad infinitum.*[1]

3.3 The influence of biblical criticism

Beginning with source criticism we can see a progression, albeit with a dotted line, to the compositional approach, through the observation of the complementarity between canonical and literary criticism.

At the risk of oversimplifying the history of biblical criticism of the last two centuries, it nevertheless seems fair to point out that Crossan, Boling, Auld, Childs, Alter, Clines, and Klein, the last two from the Sheffield School, are among the scholars who embody an innovative approach to narrative texts. Unfortunately, whether intentional or not, these authors create an artificial divide between a historical approach to the texts, in other words, a study of the texts to reconstruct the history of the time, and a literary approach that seeks to extract theological themes from the text. This division is regrettable because narrative texts should contribute to our knowledge of history on an epistemological level, but also inform us theologically. Reducing the narratives of the judges to more or less romanticized legends only widens the gap between the two camps. This short excerpt from Krentz (1975, 64–66) is very timely:

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[1] I highly recommend reading the detailed evaluation of Noth by Jeremy Hutton. 2009. *The Transjordanian Palimpsest: The Overwritten Texts of Personal Exile and Transformation in the Deuteronomistic History*. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Critical methods used with common sense and operating within a framework that does not exclude the supernatural are an important and necessary aid to biblical interpretation. The result is a better understanding of the grammatical and historical meaning of the Bible. The course of biblical history is clarified and it is possible to see more clearly the gaps in our knowledge. The historical character of the Bible is emphasized, the great differences in culture and society between the biblical and modern worlds are highlighted, as well as the purpose of a passage. All this leads to a better theological understanding.

As we move from source criticism through to literary criticism, it would be incongruous not to mention the compositional approach, which seeks to establish links between the macro-propositions of a text. According to one of the secular protagonists of this discipline, Jean-Michel Adam (2009), any text of a certain length is composed of a number, sometimes quite large, of interdependent sections that are part of a predefined plan or text and lead to the final text.

One of the main Biblical protagonists of this approach is John Sailhamer. He postulates that the message of the text depends as much on "how it is written" as on "what it means" (1987, 308). He writes:

The task of a compositional analysis … is to propose the method and techniques employed by an author to produce a final text. What major units of text did the author use to construct the final text? What functions do the different units of the final text play in the light of the whole? What are the final touches given to the text by the author that determine how the text will be read and received? What is the religious and theological perspective of the final text? (Sailhamer 1987, 308)

According to Sailhamer, the way an author has assembled the macro-propositions to create his text reflects the theological perspective of the text. The compositional approach focuses on the connection between the different sections (macro-propositions) in order to create a theologically meaningful text.

> The model proposed here takes seriously the idea that biblical texts have authors and that the meanings intended by them can be discovered by reading their texts. The notion of authorship is the recognition of a decisive moment in the history of a text when it becomes an entity in itself and is therefore capable of being read in its entirety and in its parts. Editorial authorship implies intentionality, purpose and meaning. It is a recognition of the intelligent design of a text. (Sailhamer 2009, 162)

This approach has the following advantages. First of all, it makes it possible to take the final form of a text or a book of the Bible seriously. Secondly, it allows us to understand how different sections are put together to form a coherent whole.

4. Scholarship on Chiasmus

The word chiasmus is the Latin term from Greek χίασμα (crossing), from the Greek χιάζω, *chiázō*, (to shape like the letter X).

A chiasmus is an inversion of parallelism that tends towards a central idea or moves away from it, and that highlights the interpretation of a text, either by comparisons which are reinforced by exact repetitions or synonyms, or by contrasts indicated by antitheses.

4.1 History of chiasmus in antiquity

Before being recognized and defined as a figure of style, chiasmus was already identified as a literary genre in writings dating from the third millennium BC, some say from the eleventh millennium BC in Chinese texts. But it was elevated to the status of a rhetorical art by the Greeks in the fourth century BC, which gave rise to speeches of great beauty and proverbs that have survived through time, such as: It is not the oath that makes us believe the man, but the man the oath (Aeschylus, Fragment 385). Since then, chiasmus has been regarded more as a style of rhetoric than as a literary genre.

Evolved forms of chiasmus in Sumerian, Akkadian, Ugaritic and Greek texts have been amply demonstrated. Douglas (2007) states that anthropological studies have discovered chiasmus in Austronesian, Indonesian, Hawaiian and Vietnamese texts, as well as in the languages of Papua, Thailand and Myanmar.

Even more astonishingly, she points out that chiastic inversions in Chinese literature have been discovered from the eleventh millennium BC. According to Douglas, this was linked to a form of divination that interpreted the marks on turtle shells. The turtle represents the cosmos and its upper rounded shell symbolizes the sky while the lower flat shell evokes the earth. On the upper part, five horizontal lines are divided by a line running from head to tail. These lines represent the five elements: water, iron, earth, fire and wood and communicate a primitive form of reading by inversion. Over the centuries, this form of divination has been absorbed into the cosmological model of Yin and Yang (Vandermeersch, 1989).

4.2 History of chiasmus in Bible literature

The importance of chiasmus in the exegesis of biblical texts was recognized in the eighteenth century through the work of John Bengel (1742) and by an Anglican bishop, Robert Lowth, who gave a series of lectures on biblical poetry at Oxford in 1753. Despite this, the following decades were marked by skepticism and even disdain. Fortunately, chiasmus has enjoyed a revival of interest and gained prominence thanks to the remarkable works of Lund (1942) and Welch (2007).

It was Nils Lund who popularized the importance of chiasmus in the approach to biblical texts. He made it possible to go beyond the question of the simple existence of chiasmus and to address the question of its usefulness or *raison d'être*. It was a major step forward.

Since then, the question that has arisen concerns the limits of the chiastic structure in Scripture. Is it reserved only for poems and proverbs? Can it be present in narrative texts? Another question that needs to be asked concerns the length of chiastic texts. Here again, we see that chiasmus exists in more complicated structures encompassing whole sections or even entire books.

4.3 Objectives of chiasmus

According to Miesner (1974, 36), chiasmus has four functions: (1) to clarify the meaning of the whole (macro), (2) to understand the use of words (micro), (3) to help remember and memorize, and (4) literary aesthetics.

Meynet (1997) agrees with Miesner in many respects, but he goes much further by asserting that the human authors of the Bible used these common literary structures of the time in order to arouse curiosity and increase emotional impact.

Douglas (2007) perceptively points out that writing without the body language and intonation of the voice can seem flat, and that this diminishes the emotional impact. The chiastic structure fills this "physical" void with symmetries, analogies, ambiguities, and double entendres.

McCoy, together with Meynet, Blomberg, Welch, and Webb insist that this structure is indispensable for the exegesis of a text.

> Although the majority of biblical scholars today recognize the use of chiasmus in Old and New Testament literature, some still tend to see it primarily as a literary curiosity. Therefore, although the use of chiasmus in biblical texts may be openly acknowledged as a manifestation of the author's literary art, it is often considered of little importance in interpreting the meaning of a text. Such an attitude ignores the fact that the structural organization of any communication, whether written or oral, contributes integrally to its overall message. (McCoy 2003, 30)

In line with this, Welch (1977, 172) writes, "The meaning of a literary work is communicated as much by the structure of the work as by its content."

It is important to emphasize that writers were previously faced with two difficulties concerning markers in the text that no longer exist today. The first is the division into chapters, paragraphs and verses, which was only added in the thirteenth century. The second is the existence of markers that we have become accustomed to recognizing thanks to the invention of printing. These markers alert us to the importance of certain ideas through techniques underlining, bold or italic characters, indentations, changing font size, and alphanumeric additions (e.g., I, II; A, B, C).

In the absence of these markers, an author had to structure his text to make it easier for the reader. Repetitions of words, but especially

of sentences, as well as the organization of the material were therefore essential as memo techniques.

4.4 Criteria for determining the presence of chiasmus

It is of paramount importance to consider the objective criteria that the student must use to detect chiasmus. Some texts are very short and the possibility of error is minimal, but for longer texts caution should be exercised. The longer the text, especially if it is the size of a whole book, the more concordant criteria are needed to affirm the existence of a chiasmus. Space does not allow me to examine the criteria but I especially recommend *Thinking in Circles* by Mary Douglas listed in the references.

5. Chiasmus as a Literary Device in Judges

When studying any biblical text, some fundamental questions must be asked in order to make a correct exegesis: What does the text say? What does the text mean? Why does the text say what it says?

It is important to answer all these questions when studying a text. However, it should also be recognized that the answers are not always clearly stated or easy to detect in the text. Before these questions can be answered, therefore, the structure of the text must also be examined.

5.1 Overview of the chiastic structure of Judges

5.1.1 Preliminary overview

Virtually all commentators, whatever their opinion on chiastic structure, recognize that the book is divided into three main sections and do not hesitate to affirm that an intentional structure is already apparent in the phenomenon of two introductions and two conclusions.

1. Two prologues or introductions (1:1–3:6)
2. Major heroic stories (3:7¬–16:31)
3. Two epilogues or conclusions (chs. 17–21)

5.1.2 Traditional menu of Judges

They also recognize that there is an intentional "menu" for all of the heroic stories of Judges which is observable in the following table.

Table 1: The chiastic "menu" of the major heroic stories in Judges

"MENU" OF THE HEROIC TEXTS							
FORMULA	OTHNIEL	EHUD	DEBORAH	GIDEON	ABIMELECH	JEPHTHAH	SAMSON
The Israelites did evil in the sight of the Lord (3:7)	•	•	•	•		•	•
Yahweh sold them into the hands of their enemies (3:8)	•	•	•	•		•	•
Israel cried out to Yahweh (3:9)	•	•	•	•		•	
Yahweh raised up a savior (3:9)	•	•	•	•		•	•
The land had peace for … (3:11)	•	•	•	•			

5.1.3 Detailed chiastic structure of Judges

Judges demonstrates the progressive decline of the people and their leaders towards apostasy and idolatry. The following table and commentary illustrate this trend.

Table 2: The arrows show the direction of the text

	CHIASMUS BY INVERTED PARALLELISM IN JUDGES		
↗	**4th Judge: Gideon** Begins well by opposing idolatry Ends poorly by promoting idolatry		↘
↑	**3rd Judge: Deborah/Barak** Hymn of Deborah Sisera killed Head smashed by a woman The glory goes to a woman	**The tyrant Abimelech** Fable of Jotham Abimelech killed Head smashed by a woman Kill me lest people say: A woman killed him	↓
↑	**2nd Judge: Ehud** Enemy for 18 years: Moab, son of Lot Victory at the fords of the Jordan Ehud **WITH** Ephraim	**5th Judge: Jephthah** Enemy for18 years: Ammon, son of Lot Calamity at the fords of the Jordan Jephthah **AGAINST** Ephraim	↓
↑	**1st Judge: Othniel** Good marriage Total victory	**6th Judge: Samson** Catastrophic marriages Partial victory	↓

⬆	**2nd Introduction** Idolatry introduced Solution: Seek God Culpable **absence** of Levites	**1st Conclusion** Idolatry institutionalized Solution: Seek a king Culpable **presence** of Levites	⬇
⬆	**1st Introduction** General Assembly of Israel Who will go? Judah! God with Judah … but failure Against Canaan: their enemy Hērem	**2nd Conclusion** General Assembly of Israel Who will go? Judah! God with Judah … but failure Against Benjamin: their brothers Hērem	⬇

5.1.4 Commentary on the table: main theological theses developed by the final editor

1. Two all-tribal general assemblies are convened at the beginning and at the end of the book to determine which tribe should lead the military interventions against the Canaanites and against the Benjaminites. Note the following:

- In both cases, Judah is chosen, which is certainly an indication of its pre-eminence in God's sovereign plan since the monarchy will come out of this tribe and lead to the coming of the Messiah.
- The people begin well by conquering the Canaanite *enemy*, but end badly in virtually eliminating their Benjaminite *brethren*. This trend is frequently observed in church history.
- God's miraculous interventions and the human means he uses must never be set against each other. Not everything is done by miracles, for the time factor is a vital component of his pedagogy to teach his

people perseverance, walking by faith and dependence. Evangelical triumphalism tends to blind us to the lessons that God wishes to teach his people through defeat and/or time.

2. Marriage proves to be an important factor in the unfolding of the book.

- Marriage is part of the common grace that applies to all men, whatever their beliefs. Therefore, as this book demonstrates, prostitution, rape and adultery are condemned.
- Marriage for the believer is within God's people and not with foreigners. The consequences in the lives of Otniel, Gideon, and Samson reveal the importance of such a choice and explain in part the success or failure of their period of leadership.

3. Israel's backsliding is explained at the beginning of the book as being the consequence of her abandoning of the Lord, and therefore as a spiritual problem. At the end of the book, the backsliding and chaos are seen as the result of the absence of a king and, therefore, as a structural problem. This principle is also verified in the history of the church. The systemic backsliding signals the failure of the theocracy.

4. The role of the Levites is very ambiguous in the book:

- Their culpable absence partly explains why we read: "and there arose after them another generation that did not know Yahweh or the work that he had done for Israel" (2:10). Obviously, the Levites had neglected their teaching role.
- Their culpable presence in the two conclusions: (1) a third-generation priest, Jonathan, the grandson of Moses, who prostitutes his priesthood for prestige and financial gain, and (2) the lack of moral courage of the Levite faced with the lust of the inhabitants of Gibeah. These incidents signal the failure of the priesthood.

5. The fratricide that we have already indicated in the second conclusion is developed progressively in the heroic narratives starting from that of Gideon:

- Gideon is cruel and vengeful against the Israelites of Sukkoth and Penuel.
- Abimelech condones the massacre of his seventy half-brothers as well as his compatriots of Shechem.
- Jephthah, angry with the Ephraimites, slaughters 42,000 at the fords of the Jordan.

6. The judges are not perfect, but some seem to resist being transformed by the Lord and the Holy Spirit:

- Gideon begins well and ends badly, because of his unbelief, fear, pride and idolatry.
- Jephthah does not handle the rejection by his family well.
- Samson frequently acts impulsively by following his sexual passions.

7. According to Douglas (2007), one of the main criteria for determining the presence of a chiasmus is that there must be a correspondence between the introductions and conclusions, in other words, there must be a turning point in the text. Although several commentators recognize the chiastic structure of Judges, they do not all agree on the turning point of the narrative. Noth, Boling, and Crossan believe that the story of Jephthah is the turning point at the center of the book. However, there is a greater consensus from Block, Younger, Gooding, Webb, Dorsey, and Way that shows Gideon to be the pivotal character in the book for several reasons:

- Before Gideon, the judges fulfilled their mission without Scripture indicating that they had any character or moral flaw. Starting with Gideon, and followed by the tyrant Abimelech, Jephthah, and Samson,

Scripture highlights their evident failings.

- Gideon himself began well by opposing idolatry, even in his father's house, but he ended up creating an idol that turned his own family and all Israel away from God. It is Gideon's account that marks the turning point from triumph to tragedy.
- In the beginning, Ophrah is the scene of clan idolatry (6:25¬–32); in the end, Ophrah is the focus of national idolatry (8:27; Block 1999, 250).
- Although the usual cyclical formula is used, the story becomes more complex, because this time the Lord sends a prophet (6:7¬–10) who reproaches the people for their apostasy before raising up the judge.
- This is the only story where there is a dialogue between the Lord and a judge. None of the other judges receive as much assurance from the Lord as Gideon.
- The central point of Gideon's story is not the victory over the Midianites, but his paralyzing fear that prevented him from believing in God's promises. His biblical illiteracy was a major problem in the development of the editor's theses.

In the flow of biblical theology, Judges teaches us that theocracy via God's chosen deliverers (judges) has failed; the priesthood has failed; and the choosing of a king is seen as the solution to their problems. However, a mere four centuries later the monarchy fails.

This is a major development in the history of redemption as it points us to the coming of: the perfect deliverer; the ultimate high priest; and the King of kings.

6. Irony as a Literary Device in Judges

The discovery of a more systematic use of irony in the Bible is one of the fruits of the new literary criticism.

Irony is a way of provoking a reader, or of making a reader or listener react. It is often used to denounce, criticize or gently make fun of something or someone. It is most often revealed through the use of hyperbole, innuendo or sudden and unexpected breaks in a text. Irony, therefore, invites the reader or listener to be attentive, as it can contain several layers of meaning.

Klein (1988, 191) proposes that irony in the book of Judges essentially revolves around the characterizations of the judges and that this irony gradually amplifies as the text progresses. Both epilogues, she argues, abound in irony:

> Building on the rather non-ironic basis of the book's introduction, the sequence of stories increases in ironic intensity until the resolution from which the knowledge of the ironist par excellence, Yahweh, springs … Through irony, the reader is invited to share Yahweh's judgment of Israel during the period of the wars for territorial conquest. The ironic structure dramatizes the interaction between the free but naive human will and the omniscient will of Yahweh. (Klein 1988, 191)

There are many instances of irony in the book of Judges, but for this essay we will concentrate on just one.

6.1 The unlikely choice of Judges

Throughout the book we see that the individuals chosen by God to deliver his people do not meet the cultural norms of the time or the criteria we would have established.

Othniel: The Lord raised up the youngest member of this noble clan as judge, ignoring all the primogeniture conventions of the time. This same

principle is illustrated in other OT accounts, notably those of Jacob, Joseph and David.

Ehud: The text tells us that Ehud is from the tribe of Benjamin and that his name means "son of my right hand," although he did not use his right hand because he was left-handed. Later in the book we meet seven hundred elite Benjaminite soldiers who were also left-handed (Judg 20:16).

Deborah: One of the most remarkable characters in the book is a woman. Deborah implicitly recognizes that she was not called to lead the assault on the enemy and, therefore, summons Barak to lead in battle. Faced with his refusal, she agreed to go with him, all the while recognizing the anomalous situation. The fact that the glory was given to a woman for a military victory was not only unusual but highly ironic.

Gideon: Following God's call, Gideon reveals himself to be the most hesitant of the judges. He has no desire to respond to God's call and he gives his excuses for not doing so. He describes his family as being the poorest in Manasseh, even though the family estate is large and his father is one of the nobles who maintains a major shrine to Baal. Moreover, Gideon can easily call upon a dozen servants (Judg 6:27) to help him destroy the altar of Baal.

Jephthah: He is capable of being diplomatic with the Ammonites in inviting them to reflect on the true history of the conquest of the land but reacts impetuously and angrily to the provocation of Ephraim. Also, immediately after being endowed by the Holy Spirit, probably in the euphoria of the moment, he makes an excessive vow to sacrifice whatever comes out of his house if he wins the battle against the Ammonites. It is often in moments of exaltation that men are most vulnerable and capable of committing their worst mistakes.

Samson: This is the man who captures the imagination of children in Sunday school with his strength. Yet this strong man is the weakest man

in the book and the story devoted to him only underlines his paradoxes. In his case, the irony of God's choice reaches its peak:

- He is the only judge to be the object of divine intervention before his conception.
- He is the only judge who is the object of a Nazarite vow.
- He is empowered with the Holy Spirit four times; more than for any other judge.

7. Conclusion

Without knowing or being able to affirm the identity of the final editor of the Book of Judges, it must be said that, in its final form, this book has survived for centuries and has stimulated and fed the imagination of the people of God in both the old and new covenant eras. The intentions of the various authors of the different parts of the text—heroic tales, prologues and epilogues—are difficult to pin down, but the intentions of the final editor seem more accessible. It is the chiastic form which, as we have shown, governs the text and makes it possible to discern the theological themes and tendencies of the period.

The editor has assembled and ordered the material, albeit not chronologically, in such a way that the moral and spiritual decline of the people and of the judges can be easily perceived. Gradually, he demonstrates that the judges embody the characteristics of the people they govern:

- The people compromise and adopt the beliefs, values and practices of the Canaanites.
- The judges, in turn, embody the characteristics of the enemy.
- The abusive treatment of women increases throughout the book.
- The systematic tendency towards fratricide.
- The priesthood becomes corrupt.

- The theocracy, with the Lord as sovereign, gives way to the aspiration for a monarchy.

However, there is one constant throughout this period: the surprising and inexhaustible grace of the Lord.

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