

## The Chiasms of Judges

A chiasm is a literary structure where the words or themes of the first section of a passage are repeated in reverse order in the second. The book of Judges is an example of this.

### I Failure to Conquer Canaan (Judges 1:1-2:5)

#### A Optimistic opening assembly (1:1-2)

- Tribal conquests begin
- Obedient Israelites initiate positive communication with God
- Tribes set out to take their land with God's blessing and direction

#### B Failure of the tribes to take their lands (1:3-36)

- Judah: relatively positive
- Benjamin: negative
- Joseph: negative
- Zebulun: negative
- Asher: negative
- Naphtali: negative
- Dan: very negative

#### A' Disheartening closing assembly (2:1-5)

- Conquest ends in failure and divine condemnation
- God initiates negative communication with disobedient Israelites
- God will no longer help tribes take their land

### II Israel's Pattern of Decline (Judges 2:6-3:6)

#### A Positive beginning: Israelites set out to take their inheritances and they serve Yahweh (2:6-9)

#### B Sin of the next generation and judgment (2:10-15)

- 1 And all that generation also were gathered to **their fathers**. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel. (2:10)
- 2 And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and **served** the Baals. ...**They went after other gods**, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, **and bowed down to them**....They abandoned the LORD and **served** the Baals and the Ashtaroth. (2:11-13)
- 3 **So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel**.... (2:14-15)

#### C God's gracious intervention

Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. (2:16)

#### B' Worse sins of each successive generation and worse judgment (2:17-3:4)

- 1 ...They soon turned aside from the way in which **their fathers** had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD, and they did not do so. (2:17)
- 2 But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, **going after other gods, serving** them **and bowing down to them**.... (2:19).
- 3 **So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel**.... (2:20)

#### A' Disheartening conclusion: Israelites fail to take their inheritances and serve other gods (3:5-6)

### III Seven Judges (3:7-16:31)

#### A Othniel (3:7-11)

- Evaluation: Positive
- Procures a good Israelite wife by obeying God
- Drives Canaanites from the land and settles there
- Wife presses him for a good thing
- A good judge unifying Israel
- Blessed by his brave Israelite father-in-law

#### B Ehud (3:12-30)

- Evaluation: Positive
- Transjordanian king oppresses Israel eighteen years in Benjamin
- Ehud has a secret message and a message from God for an enemy king
- Captures the fords of Jordan and with the help of Ephraimites kills thousands of enemies attempting to cross
- Israelites united

#### C Deborah and Barak (4:1-5:31)

- Evaluation: Positive
- Woman crushes Sisera's skull in a careless moment
- Israelites united

#### D Gideon's stand against idolatry at Ophrah (6:1-32)

##### E Gideon's battle against the Midianites (6:33-7:25)

##### E' Gideon's battle against the Israelites (6:33-7:25)

#### D' Gideon's lapse into idolatry at Ophrah (8:22-32)

#### C' Abimelech (8:33-9:57)

- Evaluation: Negative
- Woman crushes Abimelech's skull in a careless moment
- Israelites fragmented in civil war

#### B' Jephthah (10:6-12:7)

- Evaluation: Negative
- Transjordanian king oppresses Israel eighteen years in Benjamin
- Jephthah sends messages twice to an enemy king
- Captures the fords of Jordan and kills thousands of Ephraimites who cross
- Israelites fragmented in civil war

#### A' Samson (13:1-16:31)

- Evaluation: Negative
- Procures bad wives by disobeying God
- Settles among the pagan Canaanites
- Wives press him for bad things
- A bad judge fragmenting Israel
- Betrayed by his cowardly pagan father-in-law

#### IV Idolatry at Dan (17:1-18:31)

##### A Micah sets up an idolatrous shrine for his private use (17:1-6)

- Micah makes an idol and cult objects for his shrine
- Result: peace

##### B Micah secures the services of a Levite (17:7-13)

- Levite arrives at Micah's home
- "Be to me a father and a priest"
- Result: peace

##### C Danite spies visit Micah's house in peace (18:1-6)

- "So the people of Dan sent five able men... from Zorah and from Eshtaol"
- Result: peace

##### D Danite spies complete their mission and return to plan hostility (18:7-10)

##### C' Danite spies visit Micah's house in hostility (18:11-17)

- "So 600 men of the tribe of Dan... set out from Zorah and Eshtaol"
- Result: hostility

##### B' Micah loses the services of a Levite (18:18-26)

- Danites take Levite from Micah's home to serve as their priest
- "Be to us a father and a priest"
- Result: hostility

##### A' Danites set up an idolatrous shrine for their entire tribe (18:27-31)

- Danites use Micah's idol in their shrine
- Result: hostility

#### V Rape of the Levite's concubine (19:1-30)

##### A' Concubine leaves her home in Ephraim and goes to her father's home (19:1-2)

##### B Happy negotiations for the woman (19:3-4)

- Levite comes and speaks kindly to his concubine and her father, and he wins her back
- Tranquil scene of father and husband peaceably conversing (regarding the concubine?)

##### C Hospitality in Bethlehem (19:5-9)

- The Levite is detained extra days by his hospitable host

##### D The Levite begins the journey home (19:10-13)

- Ironically he refuses to spend the night in Jerusalem because it is "city of foreigners"

##### C' Inhospitability in Gibeah (19:14-21)

- Gibeahites will not take in the Levite and his concubine; they are finally taken in by an outsider who fears for their safety

##### B' Terrible negotiations for the woman (19:22-26)

- Evil men of Gibeah come and speak hostilely to the old man who is hosting the Levite and his concubine; they prevail and rape her
- Tense scene of old man and the men conversing regarding the concubine's fate

##### A' Concubine is brought back to her home in Ephraim - dead (19:27-30)

VI War against Benjamin (20:1-21:25)

A First all-Israel assembly (20:1-11)

- Tribes hear about atrocity in which concubine was forcibly taken and raped by Benjaminites
- They vow "none of us will return to his house" until justice is served

B Second all-Israel assembly ( 20:12-17)

- Israelites, enraged at the atrocity, sent men though all the tribe of Benjamin demanding that the culprits be turned over
- Benjaminites refuse to turn over to the Israelites the men who violently took and raped the concubine

C Israel defeated by the Benjaminites (20:18-25)

- Two battles, each concluded with a tally of casualties

D God promises victory (20:26-28)

C' Israel defeats the Benjaminites (20:29-48)

- Two phases of battle, each concluded with a tally of casualties

B' Next to last all-Israel assembly ( 20:12-17)

- Israelites, pitying the surviving Benjaminites, sent word to the Benjaminites proclaiming peace; the Israelites attack Jabesh-gilead and slaughter the inhabitants, saving alive four hundred virgins whom they give to the Benjaminites
- Israelites violently capture and turn over to the Benjaminites four hundred innocent young women

A' Last all-Israel assembly (21:16-25)

- Tribes condone Benjaminites forcibly taking for themselves two hundred women at Shiloh
- Then they return "every man to his tribe and family"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis - Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 106-18.