

## Preface

I want to apologize publicly to Samson. I was going to credit the writer of Hebrews for loaning me the title for this book (see Heb. 2:3). Imagine my surprise to discover that – perhaps – even the writer of Hebrews had borrowed it from Samson (Judg. 15:18)! Hence, both my apologies and gratitude to Samson.

The church (in general) has a problem with the Book of Judges. It is so earthy, so puzzling, so primitive, so violent – in a word, so strange, that the church can scarcely stomach it. As with many Old Testament materials, the sentiment seems to be, ‘If we just study the epistles long enough, maybe it will go away.’ The church has her way of dealing with embarrassing Scripture; ignore it. Yet that is difficult to do with Judges. It’s so interesting. Only people who take tranquilizers before sitting down can doze off while they read it.

Yet there is danger in that. When a book and its human characters are so colorful and dramatic, we may miss the book’s intention – to be a revelation from God about God (Alec Motyer). That’s why I try to give the *theo-centric* exposition of this chunk of Old Testament narrative. We must see the beauty of Yahweh our God here; if we do, we can be sure we have begun to handle Scripture rightly.

I remember seeing a cartoon in which a young, hip, guitar-plucking, Christian singer announced to his audience, ‘I wrote this song last year, but I think it still has relevance.’ And this volume was originally finished in 1989, a fact attentive readers will divine from the footnotes. Because of ongoing writing

commitments I have not revised the book or updated the documentation. But I believe it still has relevance, especially since the exposition is not tied to the fads of research but to the text of Judges as we have it. I am delighted that Christian Focus has consented to make it available.

I allude to a number of English translations, but otherwise the translations are my own.

I want to dedicate the book to the memory of Dad and Mom Herron whose quiet steadfastness through many troubles testifies that Yahweh does not let go of us.



## Non-Introduction

This introduction is an apology for omitting an introduction. Not that it couldn't be done. We could wade through it all: the question of the Deuteronomic History, the matters of *Überlieferungsgeschichte*, the definition of a *shōphēt*, moral 'problems' in the stories, chronology, archaeology, date, authorship – all those exciting things readers are just dying to know.

But the idea of omitting an introduction came to me in part from reading I. Howard Marshall's explanation for not writing an introduction to Luke in his magnum opus on the third Gospel: 'in so far as an introduction to the Gospel can be written, an excellent piece of work has been done by E. E. Ellis in his important commentary, and I am not capable of writing a better one.'<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein, I can only confess that as for an introduction to Judges, an excellent piece of work has already been done by the author of the book, and I am not capable of writing a better one. Indeed, I have a growing conviction that we would find far more fun and profit in Bible study if we gave more heed to the introductions the biblical writers themselves prefaced to their works than to the welter of opinions (helpful as they may sometimes be) about a biblical book, drearily culled from the last 200 years of biblical scholarship.

We do better, I think, to jump straight into the biblical text and get dirty with *its* ink.

One word of anticlimax. Does this mean we begin without any idea of the overall development or content of Judges?

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<sup>1</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 29.



Perish the thought! The book can be summarized in this outline:

- I. The Failure of a Second Generation, 1:1–3:6
- II. The Salvation of a Long-suffering God, 3:7–16:31
- III. The Confusion of a Depraved People, 17–21

Hope to meet you in the text.