CHAPTER THREE

ECHOES OF THE MAJOR JUDGES: LINKS BETWEEN THE EPILOGUE AND CENTRAL SECTION OF JUDGES

To write about links between the epilogue and central section of Judges presents no small challenge. For even a cursory survey of available literature will reveal that significantly more attention has been paid to the lack of continuity between the two sections than to links that tie them together, if such links indeed exist. Obvious disconnections between the two sections include the fact that in the epilogue, no mention is made at all of the judges who seem to dominate the central section. In their place, we find two stories involving Levites who heretofore have not been mentioned at all in the book. The cyclical framework of apostasy, oppression, crying out for deliverance, and the raising up of a deliverer that essentially organises the central section also no longer organises the epilogue. Instead, it is a new refrain: ‘In those days, Israel had no king’ that serves to bind the epilogue together into a unit.\(^1\) Furthermore, if the central section is primarily concerned with deliverance from various external oppressions, the focus of the epilogue seems instead to be on spiritual, social and political chaos that were generated entirely from within. Taking also into consideration the fact that the two stories in the epilogue seem to disrupt the narrative flow of what is known as Deuteronomistic History,\(^2\) and many are convinced that the epilogue

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\(^1\) Amit (1998:337–41), Becker (257–99), and Mayes (2001:253–54) do not even see the epilogue as one unit, but argue that Judges 19–21 (or Judges 20–21 for Mayes) actually represents a later redactional supplement to Judges 17–18. This seems to represent a further development of Noth’s suggestion (1962:79) that the repetition of the refrain in 19–21 is redactional from 17–18 and thus not original to 19–21. In addition, Jüngling (245–84) argues that Judges 20 and 21 represent two later additions to Judges 19 in order to correct what was perceived to be unsatisfactory endings to the original story.

\(^2\) Mayes (1985:14–15) for example, sees the chronological statement of Judg. 13:1 as covering also the period of the Samuel stories. The epilogue is thus seen as disrupting the continuity of Deuteronomistic History.
should be viewed as a redactional appendix\(^3\) composed independently of the central section\(^4\) and tacked on to it at a later date.

Obviously, not all scholars are in agreement with such an assessment. Veijola, for example, thinks that the epilogue in its current form is fully compatible with the literary structure and theological concerns of Deuteronomistic History, and is therefore more closely integrated into the central section than is generally recognised. He argues that Judges 17–21 represents part of a final cycle that commences after Samson, in which the evil Israel did (described in Judges 17–21) led to oppression in the hands of the Philistines (1 Samuel 4) and the subsequent rise of Samuel as the final judge.\(^5\) But while Veijola’s suggestion is indeed novel, it does not fit easily or naturally into the pattern through which the cycles are presented in the central section of Judges.\(^6\) Besides, Veijola’s argument does not proceed from the structure of the book in its current form, but rather, from the overall structure of Deuteronomistic History. Therefore as such, it presupposes full acceptance of Noth’s hypothesis concerning the relevant books.

Others have taken a different approach to argue for a closer relationship between the major sections of Judges. Gooding, for exam-

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\(^3\) So referred to by J. Gray (239, 243). Moore (365) calls them “Two additional stories of the times of the Judges”. Soggin labels them “Appendix on Various Themes” (1987:261), and thinks they have been put at the end of the book because they are concerned with the period before the monarchy (1987:163). Tollington (196) also agrees that the stories were later “appended as the conclusion of the book”.

\(^4\) Burney (xxxvi) and Moore (xxix–xxxii) date the stories back to very old sources resembling the most ancient parts of the Hexateuch. J. Gray (243) and Tollington (196) seem to agree, and think that these stories have been united and reinterpreted as they were appended by a post-exilic editor as a conclusion to the book. But Noth (1962:81–82) sees the polemics of Judges 17–18 as arising out of the royal Israelite sanctuary of Dan established by Jeroboam I, while Yee (152–55) sees Judges 17–18 as part of the propaganda to justify the reforms of Josiah. In any case, all these scholars seem to see a Sitz im Leben for all or part of the epilogue that differs significantly from that which gave rise to the central section of the book.

\(^5\) Veijola, 24–29. A similar view is apparently held by Jobling (47–51), who also sees Judges 17–21 as representing one of the many gaps that are found between judges.

\(^6\) In the cyclical pattern found in the central section, the evil committed by the people is usually reported briefly (3:7,12, 4:1, 6:1, 10:6, 13:1) rather than described in detail. Furthermore, this brief report is usually followed immediately by an unambiguous statement attributing the rise of the foreign oppressors directly to YHWH (3:8,12, 4:2, 6:1, 10:6–7, 13:1). But such a statement is lacking in Veijola’s conception of the last cycle. These are but two of the problems Veijola’s proposal faces.

\(^7\) Gooding, 75–78. Granted, one of the ‘double introduction’ is found in 2:6–3:6, which technically, is counted as belonging to the central section of the book.