It is widely recognized that the stories which constitute the core of the book of Judges (chapters ii-xvi) have independent origins, presumably within the individual tribes they describe. In their present form, however, they are held together by an interpretative framework which not only connects but also unifies these tales, suggesting that they are manifestations of the same basic phenomenon recurring cyclically in Israelite history. The framework is thus seen as a secondary stage in the development of the book of Judges. Many scholars proceed further, identifying the framework as Deuteronomistic, thereby linking it with the editorial process which underlies the books of Joshua, Samuel, and Kings. This claim usually rests on the framework’s effort to demonstrate a philosophy of history as well as the pragmatic theology on which it relies: Israelite idolatry angers God who therefore allows his people to be oppressed; when their suffering leads to repentance, God provides a leader to bring deliverance. This view is best known in the formulation of Martin Noth, who pointed out:

Es gehört zu den sichersten und unangefochtensten Ergebnissen der wissenschaftlichen Literarkritik, daß wir in den Büchern Jos., R., Sam. und Kön. in Stücken größeren oder kleineren oder kleinsten Umfangs der literarischen Tätigkeit eines "deuteronomistischen" Autors begegnen, der diese seine Bezeichnung...der Tatsache verdankt, daß er in Sprache und Gedankenwelt eine nahe Verwandtschaft mit dem deuteronomischen Gesetz und den dieses Gesetz umrahmenden paränetischen Rede aufweist.  


Although various elements of this interpretation have been challenged, it continues to represent the general consensus of biblical scholarship.\(^3\) And yet, at least in the case of Judges, careful scrutiny of the biblical text itself suggests that such a view is simplistic. Specifically, a close analysis of the book’s framework and the theology on which it is based will yield three major conclusions:

1. The framework is not internally consistent.
2. Its major sections are not Deuteronomistic.
3. The theology on which it is based is not the simple reward-and-punishment scheme usually claimed, but rather punishment-and-grace, a view of Israelite history found elsewhere in the Bible.

I

The distinction between the stories themselves and a framework rests on both conceptual and stylistic grounds, most notably the framework’s pan-Israelite perspective and its repeated use of formulaic language.\(^4\) Accepting this distinction, one is justified in seeking to identify the framework on the basis of those phrases which are repeated between the stories in chapters ii-xvi with sufficient consistency to be deemed formulaic.\(^5\)

The first component is the assertion wayyā‘āsū bēnē-yišrā‘ēl ‘et-hārāc bēcēnē yhwh (Judg. ii 11, iii 7, 12, iv 1, vi 1, x 6, xiii 1). Despite its linguistic clarity, the phrase’s content is surprisingly vague. The wickedness (ḥāra\(^6\)) is neither identified nor described.\(^6\) The phrase does, however, justify the overall theory of a continuing framework, since it is modified to wayyōṣīpū bēnē yišrā‘ēl la‘āsūt hārāc (‘the Israelites continued to do evil...’) after its first occurrence.\(^7\) These


\(^4\) J. Wellhausen describes it as reflecting ‘‘workman-like regularity’’ in contrast to the ‘‘more copious and richer’’ stories (*Prolegomena to the History of Israel* [Edinburgh, 1885], p. 229 = *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* [2nd edn, Berlin, 1883], p. 239).

\(^5\) A detailed form critical analysis can be found in W. Richter, *Die Bearbeitungen des ‘‘Retterbuches’’ in der deuteronomischen Epoche* (Bonn, 1964), pp. 3-13, to which the following is heavily indebted.

\(^6\) On the further definition in Judg. ii 11-13, iii 7, and x 6 (see also viii 33), see below.

\(^7\) Judg. iii 12, iv 1, x 6, xiii 1. This form does not occur in the story of Gideon (Judg. vi 1). Since the use of wayyōṣīpū begins with the story of Ehud (Judg. iii 12), it is firmly dependent on the preceding statement in v. 7. (The earlier instance in ii